Dialogue and Comedy: On the Pragmatics of Humour in Quattrocento Humanism. Satirical Intents and Irony in Lorenzo Valla's Dispute with Poggio Bracciolini, Countering the Latter's Virulent Criticism

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Abstract. This is a study on the role of irony and humour in 15th-century humanistic controversies in Italy, the case studied being how Lorenzo Valla[1] responded to virulent attacks by Poggio Bracciolini.[2] This article raises some fundamental issues such as the relationships between literary genres. The choice was made of analysing the materiality of the manuscripts and their being thought of as mainly cultural and social objects, but the task of this study is theoretical rather than codicological, even though considerable codicological research went into it. The theoretical approach is complex and resorts to a wide range of different methodologies. The humour in the essay is rather abstract; if readers are expecting to be amused, they may be disappointed. The present study tracks and follows several examples that might suggest the establishment of significant links between concomitant works, and invokes for them a relation of kinship in terms of the Greek notion of *syngeneia* or *philia*. This is a particular reward in the study of 'smaller' literary forms and is an unusual point of access into a textual handling of comedy in the Quattrocento. As an interpretative strategy, the biting rhetoric and the stitches in the manuscripts need to be held together, in order to establish the pragmatics of Valla's humour. All in this article is constructed around this assumption.

Keywords: Lorenzo Valla; Poggio Bracciolini; Dispute; Satirical intent in controversy, Humanism, Quattrocento; Relationship between literary genres.

1. Introduction

The standard accounts of Lorenzo Valla's dispute with Poggio Bracciolini have all one thing in common: they leap over the protracted satirical intents of both writers, and concentrate instead on the irreconcilable options enacted by their mutual attacks. The result is that modern commentators are often embroiled in the violence of the overall exchange.[3] As Salvatore Camporeale observed, however, the peculiar virulence of Poggio's criticism managed to

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[1] [Editorial note: The humanist Lorenzo Valla (Rome, 1407–1457) worked away from Rome as early as his teaching in Pavia in 1430–1433, and as late as his secretarial office at the royal court in Naples from 1435, with his returning in 1448 to Rome, where he was an apostolic secretary, and a teacher of eloquence. Animated by a combative spirit, he argued for a return of written Latin to the elegance of the classics. In a pamphlet of 1440, he refuted the claim that the Emperor Constantine had donated Rome to Pope Sylvester.]

[2] [Editorial note: The humanist Poggio Bracciolini (Terranova in Valdarno, 1380 – Florence, 1459) was apostolic secretary in Rome from 1403. He travelled considerably, and in 1418–1422 he lived in England. He rediscovered Quintilian's *Institutiones oratoriae,* two speeches by Cicero, Statius' *Silvae,* Silius Italicus' *Punicae,* and more. Especially in the part of his Latin *oeuvre* that was intended for entertainment, his Latin mimicked Florentine.]

[3] The key study is still L. Cesarini Martinelli, "Note sulla polemica Poggio-Valla e sulla fortuna delle *Elegantiae,*" *Interpres* 3 (1980): 29-79. It is not without irony that L. Nauta, *In Defense of Common Sense: Lorenzo Valla's Critique of Scholastic Philosophy* (Boston, 2009), p. 371, observes how "fittingly" the contemporary debate has adapted itself to the heated discussions of the Italian humanists; in the same page, Nauta also reviews the most recent scholarship on this particular subject.

tamper down Valla's position, forcing him to speak more cautiously in the second version of his *Repastinatio*.[4] On the other hand, an older biographical account tried to single out the power of irony to Valla's sole advantage.[5] The bare facts in the quarrel may be conveniently stated as a prologue to this study.

In the third part of his *Historia convivialis*, of 1450, Bracciolini addressed the relationship between literate and vernacular Latin in classical Rome, concluding that they were the same language; as a corollary to his inquiry, he also stated in no uncertain terms his beliefs about ancient pedagogy, that a Roman child would require no formal education in grammar. Valla's point was exactly the opposite: teaching and instruction were indeed essential, for the object of such learning was not at all the same as one's mother tongue. In his replies to Bracciolini, the so-called "antidotes" to Poggio, Valla insisted on the notion that the erudite and the vernacular were two "Latin" varieties of *sermo*, both subject to increasing corruption — and of a highly degenerate type at that. Valla's main concern seems to have been the preservation of a cultural-linguistic continuum. One may judge negatively the philosopher's ability to settle the issue on firmer footing. Or one might embrace as a more confident conclusion Lodi Nauta's interpretation. Nauta persuasively notes (resting his case, among many other examples, on Valla's inclusive definition of *popularis sermo atque eruditorum*, at *Repastinatio* 61:9) that it was Valla's achieved unity, however depraved, which allowed him to to effectively contrast the "natural" characteristics of Latin against the technical distortion of the scholastics.[6]

Certainly, though, what is apparent here is that Valla, after nearly ten years since the first composition of the *Elegantiae*, has come to distance himself from the specific presentation of Latin as an invented *ars*. His most remarkable preoccupation is now the formation and transmission of textual communities. Or, perhaps more to the point, this was precisely the side of Valla's speculation that greatly appealed to Erasmus, who saluted the author of the *Adnotationes* to the New Testament and championed him as the scholar who could apply the weapons of philology — often retrofitted with Quintilian's triad of reason (*ratio*), linguistic convention (*usus*) and authority (*auctoritas*) — to the sacred text.

Yet, it would be wrong to describe as purely intellectual the terms in which the Poggio-Valla debate was couched. Even to the contemporaries, including Francesco Filelfo, all their heavy and spectacular theatrics amounted to a thin foil covering the petty politics of the Roman curia. Valla had finally returned to Rome in 1448 to work as apostolic *scriptor*, and while accusations of heresy continued to fly around him, Bracciolini did everything to harm his rival's reputation. Nor was Valla the only enemy Poggio had at the curia. Valla himself, in the *Antidotus*, milked for comedic and 'pugilistic' results the semi-fictional episode of a boxing match between Poggio and the Greek scholar George of Trebizond in Pompey's theater.

In fact, these networks of practical concerns could effortlessly sustain a more serious commitment, to the effect that even the most vicious humour was not simply applied to add luster or to help destroying an opponent's argument, but was part of a comprehensive and ambitious agenda intended to shape the directions of humanistic discourse, map out new priorities, and especially co-opt different literary genres to the purpose at hand. From the point of view of intellectual history, I submit, the long Poggio-Valla dispute is similar to another influential controversy, which was set in motion by Eduard Norden's *Die antike Kunstprosa* in 1898. Norden's pioneering essay brought to international attention the passage (*Confessions* 6:3) in which Augustine declares his "inconceivable" disbelief that his bishop

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[4] S.I. Camporeale, *Lorenzo Valla, Umanesimo e Teologia* (Florence, 1972), p. 340, on Valla's interpretation of the Trinity.
[5] W. Shepherd, *Life of Poggio Bracciolini*, 1837, pp. 440-442.
[6] Nauta, *In Defense of Common Sense*, pp. 278-279.

and teacher Ambrose could read silently to himself.[7] Arguably, the detonation of this important question was very delayed, for it was only in 1997 that it reached its climax. In that year, the medievalist Paul Saenger was able to use "science" and "physiology of reading" to demonstrate that, given the widely-practiced habit of *scriptio continua*, a system of writing with no marks or spaces, Greeks and Romans could not have read in any other way than aloud.[8] Interestingly enough, the Russian classicist A. K. Gavrilov independently reached contrasting solutions in 1997 by using, as did Saenger, the framework of cognitive psychology and "neurophysiological" terms.[9]

The point of this brief comparison is that in the fury of battle the terms of the dispute have crystallized in an unfortunate way — unfortunate, that is, for those who seek to improve the evidential base by refining interpretation through a look at the generic performance or by focusing on neglected but important areas of textual transmission. This is particularly true in the case of the humanistic debate of Valla against Poggio, where the presence and reuse of different genres is underlined in such a theatrical and dramatic fashion. As a preliminary, I will retain in what follows two main aspects of the Saenger vs. Gavrilov controversy in so far as they are useful to illuminate the Poggio-Valla exchanges: (1) the very weight of the materials does not win the day, and (2) a technical explanation in itself, be it from a branch of neuroscience or philosophy of language, is only partially satisfactory if it does not open, at least by accretion, to a broader case in the sociology of reading. Are 'reading silently' or 'teaching Latin' the right questions to be asking? Or, conversely, is it fair to discard a potentially useful polemic because it shows Italian humanism at its worse? My task here is to reconsider this nadir of pettiness in the 1450s as a juncture furthering, as I see them, other goals: namely, the challenges posed by the ambivalence of oral and written literacy, the self-identity of a cultural elite, or the social meaning of a specific scene in which the audience is crucial.[10]

In addition to these considerations, I will also reaffirm Saenger's faith in the importance of 'spaces between words', while engaging with them in a completely different cultural dimension. I am not interested in *space* as a technology of writing, which I take to be dependent on scribal training or appreciation for certain aesthetic characteristics, but rather as a technology of assembling — more specifically, as a building block in the construction of fifteenth-century miscellanies. This way, space is not only an instrument for decoding the readership of a 'text', but also a crucial negotiation of meaning within a particular sociocultural context. I chose the Poggio-Valla debate and its philological aftermath as a helpful, illustrative example toward a larger pragmatics of comedy in the Quattrocento, where by "pragmatics" I simply understand a cycle of mutual information or the systematic ways by which we deal with indeterminacy: in other words, how context shapes and determines what others have said.[11] At the risk of avoiding entering in the dispute per se, I ultimately wish to redirect scholarly attention to what is, I think, a much less investigated set of problems: how exactly the humanists went about reading, how such reading cultures differ from the printed-book model familiar to us today,[12] and what were the structural and organizational devices

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[7] The best discussion is W.A. Johnson, *Readers and Reading Culture in the High Roman Empire: A Study of Elite Communities* (Oxford 2012), pp. 3-16.

[8] P. Saenger, *Spaces Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading* (Stanford 2000).

[9] A.K. Gavrilov, "Techniques of Reading in Classical Antiquity," *Classical Quarterly* 47 (1997): 56-73.

[10] Gavrilov, "Techniques," p. 63, interprets Augustine's puzzlement at Ambrose's silent reading as something related to the presence of the parishioners.

[11] See P. Grundy, *Doing Pragmatics* (New York 1995), and S.C. Levinson, *Pragmatics* (Cambridge 1983), pp. 1-47.

[12] A case in point: the *Elegantiae* were printed only posthumously, in 1471, and even though they went on to become a European bestseller, printing in itself has little to do with their first reception or success.

that offered a framework, as it were, to Valla's increase (and request) of mockery and ridicule.

Of the two heavyweights battling in the Roman curia, Valla was the quicker and more inventive, I believe, in fusing disparate insights deriving from separate genres of the moral discourse into his seemingly meticulous, point-by-point refutation. Valla's apologies respect earlier conventions of the philosophical disputations,[13] but they also breach into the territory of Aesopic discourse, whether the author himself understood it as something carrying an explicitly didactic allegory or not.[14]

Of the greatest interest, in this respect, are Lorenzo Valla's letters from 1453. These letters show Valla "reveling in an orgy of self-discovery." This is a serendipitous expression which Gary Ianziti once used to characterize the moral and ethical world of Leonardo Bruni, once he had himself secured a position within the papal curia in the first decade of the fifteenth century;[15] I adapt Ianziti's description of Bruni to Valla because I consider a parallel between the two eminently worthy of cultivation, and I will return to it below.[16] For now, with his Roman residency still fresh, nobody better than Valla himself could sum up the dynamics of his involvement with Poggio. In a letter to Pope Nicholas V, Valla excuses himself for not being able to finish a Greek translation as promised, since he had to protect himself from the afflictions of a relentless slanderer (*atrocissima. . . insectatione*), and announces two 'booklets' in dialogic form (*per dialogum*) in which he chastizes Poggio's work as barbaric, absurd, and wholly unfit for any pedagogical ambition.[17] Another letter of 1453, this time to Francesco Barbaro, strikes a similar chord. Somewhat more soberly, Valla introduces to his correspondent a response to Poggio's second invective, which is the third "antidote" and which, in his view, became much easier to write after the enemy's accusations started to fall well beyond dignity.[18] Valla's contextualization is not what we might like it to be. The title *antidotum* fits squarely within the traditional preconditions of a philosophical dispute. By design, texts like this are deeply reflective of one another, and even though the personal connection, emphasized by the epistolary communication, is still of paramount importance, there are some Graeco-Roman models that could be profitably compared to Valla's own experiments. One of these, for instance, is a small corpus of harsh invectives against Cicero, which was uncertainly attributed to Sallust and copied into a late fourteenth-century manuscript that shows an interesting and fluid relationship between its philological parts and materials.[19]

It is, perhaps, in the decision to imagine that his latest achievements in the beleaguered 'Poggiana' would be best understood by the Pope as something of an intermission between more serious pursuits where Valla is at his most original. Interrupting a translation is, of course, a humanistic topos. But in this context it carries a profound validation of versatility, as it is suggested by its inner dialogic nature. By sheer accumulation of historical details, and stripped by insults, Valla's enterprise is remarkable in its seeming ability to *jump* from one

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[13] H. Maconi, "Nova Non Philosophandi Philosophia," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 6 (1988): 231-247.

[14] C.A. Zafiropoulos, *Ethics in Aesop's Fables: The Augustana Collection* (Leiden 2001), pp. 1-44.

[15] G. Ianziti, "The Plutarchan Option: Leonardo Bruni's Early Career in History, 1405-1414," *I Tatti Studies* 8 (1999): 13.

[16] See below: at the end of Section II.

[17] The text reads as follows: "Me tibi excuso summe pontifex, quod opus quod mihi e graeco transferendum delegasti intermitto, dum me ab atrocissima protego insectatione. [...] duos libellos addamus, quibus per dialogum, totidem opera Podii ut barbara, ut absurda, ut omnibus vitiis plena reprehendi et ut ea vitia iuvenes studiosi devitare possent" (L. Valla, *Opera*, ed. E. Garin, Turin 1962, vol. I, p. 326).

[18] "De quibus libris meis si non male senties aggrediar tertium *Antidotum* adversus alteram Pogii invectivam, multo, quam prior fuit, impudentiorem eoque confutatu faciliorem;" the text is in L. Valle *Epistole*, ed. O. Besomi and M. Regoliosi (Padua, 1984), p. 381.

[19] See below: Section III:1.

genre to another — and therefore to map out the social ambitions and cultural traditions of the curia at the time.

These observations introduce another text which, in turn, is remarkable by way of its almost extraordinary literary concentration: the preface to the *Apologus in Poggium*, also known as *Apologus I*.[20] "In order to increase the reader's fun," Valla writes, "I have conceived this as a similar school scene at the time of Guarino; and in fact my text will be essentially in between an apologue and a fully-fledged theatrical sketch (*erit autem vel apologus vel scaenicus quidam actus*)." And he continues by declaring how fitting it will be for him to celebrate a full "Roman triumph over a drunken and surpassed enemy."[21] Once one is able to deflect or dispel the dazzling iconography evoked by Valla in rapid brushes, the only possible conclusion — though the question, strictly speaking, is unanswerable — is that Poggio has been rightly punished with his own weapons: convivial excess, misplaced pride, and overall stupidity. Obviously, this virtuoso display of genres that Valla is able to co-opt in a few lines should give us pause: (a) the apologue as Aesopic form, (b) the comedy, (c) the Roman triumph, (d) the invective, and (e) the sympotic discourse are all sampled. But really striking is how closely the manuscript tradition of these materials has responded to the straight alternative set up by Valla between 'tale' and 'play' (*vel apologus. . . vel actus*).

2. The Arsenal of Wit

We may begin to perceive how large a task is at hand. We take Valla's endorsement of *apologus* and *actus*, in spite of their literal similarity, as the ideal alpha and omega in a wide spectrum of Quattrocento comedy. Then understanding and its manifold circumstances, needs by necessity to inform not only the reading and reception of a humanistic text — the details of which, as for those sectors of classical antiquity that we so dimly apprehended, must remain asymptotic — but also our strategy of attack in the study of its textual transmission.

What this means, among other things, is that we do not have the luxury of treating Valla's pleasure in intertwining different planes and facets of the philosophical discourse as a mere flight of fancy, or, worse, as a refraction of his 'authorial intention'. The truth is, as it would be easy to prove, this type of communication was a necessary skill, as well as a concrete experience of work, for many professional scribes and copyists of his time. But what this also means, though, is that only rarely even the most eccentric artefact is left alone. A false impression of 'uniqueness' is a typical and misleading danger in this field of studies: at the height of a literary movement that so greatly valued imitation and reflexivity, the first order of business should be to keep in mind effects of genealogy, training and digestion — to say nothing of forgery and other disruptive strategies. So one aspect of my argument has to run alongside the notion of layout, while another implicit goal is to clarify a bit more the importance of fifteenth-century miscellanies in the study of Quattrocento humanism. Manuscript anthologies are not limited as a traditional landing point for these materials (it is our sole evidence in the case of the Poggio-Valla controversy); they also exhibit a surprising capacity for aesthetic values and even conspicuous consumption. By tackling these two points in quick succession, I will begin with a sketch of the book-as-object, and then work toward an evaluation of how the pragmatics of humour and the social institutions of the Italian

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[20] Camporeale, *Umanesimo e teologia*, p. 475, notes the curiously restricted diffusion of this work in the context of Valla's polemics; the *Apologus II* remained unfinished.

[21] I cut the text in order to emphasize the models of *festivitas* at play: "sed quo res sit iocundior legentibus, sub apologo tanquam Guarinus cum schola sua atque domo assit. Erit autem vel apologus vel scaenicus quidam actus. . . Sic nos quasi edentes atque potantes, aut certe ridentes, triumphemus, postea alio modo de invectiva triumphaturi. Decet enim de vinoso hebriosoque hoste superato, talem nos agere triumphum" (I quote from Camporeale, *Umanesimo e teologia*, pp. 480-81).

humanists are embedded in our miscellanies as a reading system. Here, once again, as for the relation between spaces and silent reading, what was meant to signify only internal conditions of legibility can be pressed harder to reveal the larger canvas of educational traditions and the sociology of a cultural elite.

First, the issue of the layout. The physical *handling* of genre, for a hand-produced item, was not a prerogative of elite humanists, but more often than not an effect of artisan apprentice trade. By itself, each defined genre carried an expectation of performance that was remarkably exact and uniform: a precise measurement from the margins or a disposition in columns. In short, through alignment, justification, or expert pen strokes, the design of a genre amounted to a *feel*, and was roughly analogous to a modern matrix of sound and memory.[22] This is where our evidence lies — scribal details and tiny visual cues of all kinds — and every conclusion, minor or major, should be heavily informed by it. And indeed, the general picture is consistent with what we knew about Italian humanism. It comes as no surprise that an elite for whom revival and anachronism were deeply in vogue, would have been fascinated by certain epigraphical aspects of the bookroll culture in the early Roman empire, for instance. And, perhaps more importantly, a writer with a strong sense of the cultural demands of his own intellectual arena, like Valla, was never as aloof as to lose touch with these mechanics of reading. Which is to say, when he leaned forward to inspect the disparate genres that he needed to better fuel his renewed quarreling with Bracciolini, his choices were not only formal, abstract, and stylish; it was also a matter of ink, glue, and knife. Layout and iconography could sustain writers and copyists alike in a very practical way, and practicality is an important yet generally downplayed component in the life of even the most sophisticated humanist. Naturally, there were exceptions to this rule: an isolated teacher, an exiled figure, or a writer who simply suffered a belated diffusion of his works; but these exceptions were rare, and it is fair to assume that influential humanists such as Bracciolini or Valla enjoyed the possibility to control many aspects of textual manufacturing, including layout, even without attributing to them an anachronistic desire or 'will-for-the-book'.

Second, the use of paper miscellanies as run-of-the-mill manuscripts in the dissemination of Quattrocento comedy at mid-century. This is a subject of vast consequence, which for reasons of space can only be touched upon here. The bulk of fifteenth-century *festivitas*, or humour, is given some shape by a number of structural devices. The first and almost certainly foremost of these is the adoption of dialogic techniques: materials are introduced through sets of speakers, and often as a report of conversations during a meal. Not only did Leon Battista Alberti present himself as a symposiarch in his *Intercenales*, but also the inception of the Poggio-Valla controversy itself was dressed in sympotic terms and, in fact, continued to unfold as such — part symposium of greater philosophical concern and part *deipnon*, with an endless and ruthless succession of comic abuses.[23] Poggio the ignorant belly-man is a type of mask used by Valla as a pastime and for comic relief,[24] but he is also a far sharper figure: a distancing device or a foil useful to measure current usage against an earlier, 'golden' standard.

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[22] Without venturing into a difficult and tangential discourse here, one of Valla's opinion from the Repastinatio echoes with these preoccupations: "relique orationis partes per se tantum soni sunt, sed multiplicem habent ex institutione hominum significantiam: ut in coloribus pictorum videmus que nihil per se adumbrant picturarum" (I quote from S.I. Camporeale, "Lorenzo Valla, *Repastinatio, liber primus*: retorica e linguaggio," in *Lorenzo Valla e l'Umanesimo italiano. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di studi umanistici (Parma, 18-19 ottobre 1984)*, ed. O. Besomi and M. Regoliosi (Padua 1986), pp. 217-239: 236.

[23] See J. Paulas, "How to Read Athenaeus' *Deipnosophists*," *American Journal of Philology* 133 (2012): 403-439.

[24] Following an already existing template: S.U. Baldassarri, "Niccolò Niccoli nella satira del Filelfo: la tipizzazione di una maschera," *Interpres* 15 (1995-96): 7-36.

Taken as a system, a matter of *langue* more than *parole*, the pragmatics of Quattrocento humour document an almost excessive taste for quotations and additional programmatic elements whose purpose is, in all likelihood, to achieve an approximation of the Hellenistic ideal of *poikilia*, or variety, and its Latin counterpart, *varietas*. Yet there is another structural level, which sustains the first and has to do with the ability of scribal anthologies to convey these same desires materially. For the miscellanist himself, scribe or author, is engaged in a validating testing of antiquity and physically putting the present against the past. In this sense, as I see it, the study of early modern miscellanies is a story of how Italian humanists tell stories in writing (and assembling). It is a story as yet untold, whether because the documents have been considered only narrowly, in service of a textual reconstruction, or discarded altogether as irrelevant and chaotic. And because many prominent humanists educated themselves through collections of stories and tales in many languages, from Boccaccio's *Decameron* to the *Disciplina clericalis*, for example, it makes sense to adapt a narrative about frametales as a lens through which to consider a complex philosophical and cultural history of Quattrocento humour. Moreover, as David Wacks's excellent analysis of Andalusī literary culture suggests, the weight of tradition brought a sense of increasing blur and high performativity along with the previously encoded distinctions.[25]

In addition, I also argue that a most valuable asset in such a reconstruction is the *libellus*. Technically speaking, the *libellus* is simply a booklet. Its smaller dimensions made it essential for miscellaneous anthologies, and especially to those that were bound at different stages. Yet it also doubles up as a 'unit of discourse'. As we have seen, Valla's letter to Pope Nicholas V clarifies his use of *libellus* as the equivalent of a presentation copy, an intermediary process in the overall scheme of things, but still fundamental as far as a first process of reading and distribution was concerned. Valla, I would even say, seems to put in eloquent alignment humour and booklet, so that, in his parlance at least, *ludus* and *libellus* become virtually interchangeable. Nor was Valla the only humanist to reflect on these material matters in epistemological terms: the splendid letters of the Camaldulese theologian Ambrogio Traversari are highly rewarding in their intriguing efforts and observations on the location of cognitive processes in the making and trading of manuscripts.[26]

In this essay, there is no better explanation of this point than the following few considerations regarding the *Apologus in Poggium*. Within the humanistic textual cultures of comedy, Valla's comedic run is not an isolated episode; it finds a counterpart in the Latin version of Aristophanes's *Wealth* attempted by Leonardo Bruni between 1433 and 1434.[27] As it is indirectly documented by Giovanni Tortelli's *De orthographia*,[28] the Florentine chancellor applied himself to the first 269 lines of the classical comedy, deciding to translate only the first Act. This theatrical fragment is thus similar to Valla's *Apologus both* as a text *and* as a document:[29] these works want to be understood and read as 'scenic acts', they are

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[25] D.A. Wacks, *Framing Iberia. Maqāmāt and Frametales Narratives in Medieval Spain* (Leiden 2007), espec. pp. 41-51.

[26] As S. Rizzo, *Il lessico filologico degli umanisti* (Rome 1984), pp. 297-303, notes, Traversari not only supervised various stage of the 'publication' process, but also took great care of annotating Greek passages along with their Latin translation.

[27] *Plutus* was a Renaissance favorite, part of a Byzantine triad with *Nubes* and *Ranae*: N.G. Wilson, "The Triclinian Edition of Aristophanes," *The Classical Quarterly* 12 (1962): 32-47. Another Latin rielaboration is the *Penia fabula*, from vv. 400-626 of *Plutus*, by Rinuccio Aretino: D.P. Lockwood, "Aristophanes in the XVth Century," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 40 (1909): lvi. See also F. Schreiber, "Unpublished Renaissance Emendations of Aristophanes," *Transactions of the American Philological Associations*, 105 (1975): 313-332 and S.D. Olson, "Studies in the Later Manuscripts Tradition of Aristophanes' *Peace*," *The Classical Quarterly*, 47 (1997): 62-74, an essay based in large part on Florentine documents.

[28] L. Bruni, *Versione del Pluto di Aristofane* (Florence 1965), pp. viii-x.

[29] For another example within this terminology see D. Del Puppo, "Where 'High' and 'Low' Meet: Text and Document in a Humanistic Manuscript of Burchiello's Poetry (Pluteo XL. 48), *Text*, 11 (1998): 207-223.

unfinished (though differently so) and engaged in a violent rhetoric of comedy, and finally they circulate re-assembled with other pieces that emphasize their purpose or at times deflect it into different areas of the humanistic discourse. If the traditional interpretation of Bruni's translation would have remarked on his desire to achieve a revival of ancient comedy in Florence,[30] the historical circumstances of its reception point instead to antiquarian, lexical, and metrical research,[31] as if to say that his *ludus/libellus* was closer to Valla's *Elegantiae* than to the Aristophanic stage.

3. "Shrewd Pairings"

In this section, I will concentrate on the role of translation and miscellaneous anthologies as evidence for sociocultural contextualization of reading events within specific humanist communities during the fifteenth century. The first focus, and the earliest in my series, will be the political and philosophical education of the urban elite in the world of the Italian city-states (example 1: Cicero, Ps.-Apuleius, Ps.-Sallust); then two miscellanies that are perhaps best understood within the tradition of the "mirrors for princes" (examples 2 and 3: Bracciolini, Bruni, Basil of Caesarea, the letters of Phalaris, Lucian), with a brief look at a very interesting specimen in which the *Apologus in Poggium* is transcribed as a continuation of the most authoritative corpus of Roman comedies (example 4: Terence, Valla); then another miscellany that makes a sustained effort to combine and update interests in historical grammar and onomatology up to the present time (example 5: Guarino, Pontano, Valla); and finally two last examples of organic anthologies of Lorenzo Valla, which can be traced to a single key-figure and seem to defend different sides of the author's intentions (examples 6 and 7: Valla).

For the most part, what interests me in these documents is their ability to describe or to circumscribe textual communities, apart from any other specific philological interest, which of course brings along its own set of challenges and is very much a variable of each individual tradition. In other words, each manuscript is chosen and treated as an improvement in the pragmatics of Quattrocento humour; I make no attempt at exhaustive treatment or annotation. In the range between the centrifugal and centripetal forces that are at play in every miscellaneous enterprise, however, my argument makes a stronger case for unity in variety,[32] and at times takes care to situate the available knowledge as a workshop product: like a painting, say, for which different masters were working but whose final appearance is that of a canvas *painted with the same brush*. I am aware that the overall result achieved here in this brief inquiry is a series of case studies, at best, or the miniaturization of a case study. But I also think that we can come to see, however hazily, the larger landscape through each individual vignette, and that the occasional complexity of the topic or the unevenness of the evidence should be no excuse for not trying. There would be more to say about the omology between architectural spaces and textual surfaces, and about the innervation (if you pass the

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[30] According to the terms of Bruni's preface: "Ego igitur volens Latinis nostris ostendere quale genus erat illarum comoediarum, primum actum huius comoediae Aristophanis in Latinum contuli. Fuit autem Aristophanes per tempora Socratis philosophi, in quem etiam scripsit comoediam ridiculis notationibus plenam" (*Versione del Pluto*, p. 3).

[31] Bruni proposed a hexapody as a solution for the iambic trimeters of the original, as in this line: "quo magis doleas. CA. Nugae! Equidem non desinam" (*Versione del Pluto*, p. 6). See A. Perosa, "Metrica umanistica," *Rinascimento* 3 (1952): 186.

[32] As J. König, "Fragmentation and Coherence in Plutarch's *Sympotic Questions*," in *Ordering Knowledge in the Roman Empire*, ed. J. König and T. Whitmarsh (Cambridge 2011), pp. 43-68, observes, the unity-in-variety is inherently an 'imperial' pattern, first developed in the service of a political hierarchy in the Graeco-Roman world.

anatomical metaphor) of philosophical genres within the fascicles that compose a manuscript.[33] But it is important to remark at least that a reconsideration of 'scribal knowledge' in its material culture is perfectly aligned with Valla's understanding of the mundane *sermo*, which is both a physical object and an object of deep experimentation.

Rather than address all the distinctive characteristics of Vat. Palat. lat. 1520 (**example 1**),[34] I will concentrate on two interrelated features, which I consider very helpful for the remainder of this section as a whole: (a) a work's coming-into-being depends not only upon a writer's expressive intention, however evolving that might be said to be, but also on its relations with other pieces and texts with which it has been disseminated as a collection; and (b) the markers of successive, humanist readings (as with Petrarch's idea of "correction" in his poetics)[35] often capture a shift in a work's conceptualization and are very useful to locate precisely the moment of such redirection. For lack of better choices, I propose to call the former phenomenon as generic interference or simply *interference*, and the latter generic performance or just *performance*; together, these two concepts offer a historical window into the pragmatics of Quattrocento humour. Issues of interference come to the foreground in Vat. Palat. Lat. 1520 because of a problem of attribution. The codex, in parchment, begins with a fourteenth-century treatise, *De Monarchia*, which is treated as genuinely "Apuleian" and assigned to a fictional Lucius Apuleius on grounds of the various similarities between its beginning and *The Golden Ass*. This political pamphlet, briefly mentioned by Kristeller,[36] was studied by Benjamin Kohl and Nancy Siraisi, who persuasively demonstrated that it was the product of an anonymous notary public from northern Italy and that, despite its clear desire to imitate the typical philosophical setting of a Ciceronian dialogue, it also hosted "a scattering of alleged citations of Plato with a good deal of astrological and natural philosophical material."[37]

Kohl and Siraisi also argued that the *Invectives*, which come right after in the manuscript, have been copied by a fifteenth-century hand.[38] If this is true, at the time in which the famous "itinerant" humanist Giovanni Conversini da Ravenna bought it in 1393, according to his note of possession (on f. 1*r*), they were not yet part of the collection. This suggests that while we should emphasize, with Kohl and Siraisi, how Vat. Palat. Lat. 1520 offers a sustained "exercise in medieval rhetoric" and is best understood in a "context of urban autonomy,"[39] its engagement with the contemporary cultural climate and its political achievements proceed in stages, and refer to two distinct periods. There are two cultural elites and two urban histories involved in the making of the codex, and whoever decided to complete it with authoritative forgeries dealing with the late republican history of Rome explicitly acknowledged the importance of this 'vernacular' reordering. Moreover, the final compendium of Cicero's life

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[33] In his treatise on ars designativa, P.P. Vergerio insists on the "preparation of a pool of copyists trained in the new canons of handwriting:" J.M. McManamon, *Pierpaolo Vergerio the Elder. The Humanist as Orator* (Tempe 1996, p. 99.

[34] It measures mm. 242 × 179, ff. 84, and contains the following works: Cicero, *De natura deorum* (ff. 1*r* – 66*v*), *De principatu quem Romani monarchiam appellant* (ff. 67*r* – 79*r*), Pseudo-Sallust, *Invectivae* (ff. 79*v* – 84*r*), *Ciceronis vitae compendium* (ff. 84*r* – *v*). It does not feature in the list of manuscripts used by A.S. Pease's Loeb edition of Cicero's *De Natura Deorum* (Cambridge 1955), I pp. 62-82, nor in Ps.-Sallust, *Invectivae*, ed. A. Ernout (Paris 1962), pp. 24-25.

[35] See. M. Eisner, "Petrarch Reading Boccaccio: Revisiting the Genesis of the *Triumphi*," in *Petrarch and the Textual Origins of Interpretation*, ed. T. Barolini and H.W. Storey (Leiden 2007), pp. 131-146.

[36] P.O. Kristeller, *Iter Italicum* (Leiden 1967), II p. 590; P. Lehmann, *Eine Geschichte der alten Függerbibliotheken* (Tübingen 1960), II p. 514, also mentions it.

[37] B.G. Kohl – N.G. Siraisi, "The *De Monarchia* Attributed to Apuleius", *Mediaevalia* 7 (1981): 1-39 (now reprinted in *Culture and Politics in Early Renaissance Padua*, Aldershot 2001), p. 1.

[38] Kohl – Siraisi, "The *De Monarchia*," p. 2.

[39] Kohl – Siraisi, "The *De Monarchia*," p. 5.

which ends the collection should also be seen as a document of continuous labor on the manuscript production, and perhaps a gesture toward an ideal of architectural closure.

Who was responsible for the pseudo-Sallustian addition? And was such supplement borne out by the perceived connections between the treatises themselves? To treat the sampling of a miscellany as a model is a difficult philological terrain, and open to speculation; however, the relation between Conversini and his humanist student Sicco Polenton provides a significant hypothesis. Polenton was an Italian jurist who enjoyed, for a brief spell, the honor of being a Paduan chancellor. In the first few decades of the fifteenth century, he successfully finished a neo-Latin comedy, the *Catinia*, worked on a pioneering history of Latin literature, and, more importantly, completed his *Arguments on Some Orations and Invectives of Cicero* in 1413.[40] That Polenton's interests, or direct solicitation, justified the complex internal relationship of Vat. Palat. Lat. 1520 may be an idealized vision of its unity. In any case, at some point the scribal production of the codex either thematized or reflected the literary and philosophical preoccupations of the works contained within. The dedication to Scipio Africanus in *De Monarchia*'s preface openly discloses a fascination with the Roman elite and the atmospheres of such Ciceronian dialogues as *De amicitia* or *De oratore*, as well as the Macrobian commentary to the *Somnum Scipionis*;[41] if indeed there was a binding generic performance in the manuscript, it had to do with this comprehensive antiquarian outlook, variously evoked throughout. Polenton's reading of ancient humour is in fact an exercise in that "boxing technique," or *pugilis scientia*, which is explained in a chapter of *De Monarchia*,[42] or a tribute to Catilina's personality, in itself a bridge between Cicero's orations and Sallust, given that the same pamphlet insists, in what one may call 'self-fashioning', on the idea of a *novus Catilina*.[43] It is an unexpected event: a fifteenth-century miscellany gives a new form to an acrimonious, late republican vision that can be seen as evolving from the communal public sphere to a civic rehearsal of the Poggio-Valla dispute .

It is easy to recognize three distinct hands in the transcription of Lat. 6714, at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (**example 2**), a miscellany, on paper, which can be dated to the second half of the fifteenth century.[44] These three writing blocks are further recognizable because of their internal unity.[45] First, we read an anthology of Poggio Bracciolini's works: *Contra hypocritas*, which belongs to the sub-genre of 'invective', *De infelicitate principum*, *In avaritiam*, another dispute dedicated to Francesco Barbaro, and finally *De vera nobilitate*.[46] Following these opuscules is the Brunian *Plutus* (cc. 69*r* – 71*r*),[47] along with another of his

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[40] The proximity of themes treated in this article, it seems to me, is reinforced by the tenth chapter of *De Monarchia*, dedicated to a survey of animal monarchies, followin, perhaps, the political allegories associated with Virgil's treatment of the bees in the *Georgics*.

[41] H. Wierusowski, *Politics and Culture in Medieval Spain and Italy* (Rome 1971), espec. pp. 616-618, points out the important mediation of Brunetto Latini in this respect.

[42] Kohl – Siraisi, "The *De Monarchia*," p. 16: "Sed parvum lumen non confunditur, sed augetur in speculo. Ego loquar inter sapientes et non confundar. Nam illustris inquit Homerus: crescit in animabus sapientum pugilis scientia proferentis, sicut multiplicatur paucum semen in fertili terra proiectum." The expression *pugilis scientia* is also used in a Latin translation of Plato's *Republic*: "An non putas divites pugilis facultatis scientia et peritia participes esse magis quam bellicae?" (J. Lefèvre d'Étaples, *Les Hécatonomies*, Paris 1979, p. 68).

[43] Kohl – Siraisi, "The *De Monarchia*," p. 17: "Et ne testes oblitus es antiquum Scevolam, Adrianum an diatonchium novum numeratumque novosque Catilinam."

[44] The codex, of mm. 230 × 165, arived in Paris as a gift from Mabillon in 1686.

[45] The first copyist writes between cc. 1*r* – 68*v* (Poggio), the second at cc. 69*r* – 77*v* (Bruni), and the third between cc. 80*r* – 84*v* (again on Poggio).

[46] This text is published by D. Canfora, in P. Bracciolini, *La vera nobiltà* (Rome 1999), who uses as his philological criterion the so-called *codex optimus*, which is identified in the ff. 27*v* – 44*v* of Plut. 47. 19 in the Laurentian Library of Florence.

[47] There is a rubric for *Leonardi Aretini super comoediam Aristophanis prefatio*.

translations, a moral treaty by Basil of Caesarea.[48] In the end, the manuscript returns to Bracciolini and concludes its selection with his preface to the *Facezie*, which is copied after two blank leaves — a circumstance of potentially greater concern, here and elsewhere, especially in so far as it forces us to reconsider the significance of 'genre' in the histories attached to manuscripts such as these. It is well-known, for instance, that in his holograph of Dante's poetry, Boccaccio's hesitation facing the first bucolic exercises of his predecessor betrayed an ambivalence of pastoral exchanges as such, and motivated his decision to insert a blank in his projected writing space.[49]

If, as I have been arguing so far, book formats and materials features of manuscripts contribute greatly to our understanding of humanist readership, the implications of Lat. 6714 are manifold. The miscellany is assembled quite clearly around three independent *libelli*, the last of which returns to the same author of the first, in what could be a studied or inchoate ring composition. In addition, since Poggio's chosen collection displays a particular vitriolic satire,[50] it would be hard to think that the inclusion of Bruni's *Plutus* had been simply mechanical, fortuitous or inconsequential. In terms of generic interference, there is an exchange on the material and literary level between the templates of 'version', 'comedy', 'dialogue' or something in between the last two; the overall effect is a mutual reinforcement of the theatrical aspects of Poggio's repository of jokes and of the Aristophanic sketch. Finally, by comparing the philological data of another miscellany, Lat. 578 (α V 9,16) at the Biblioteca Estense of Modena, it is possible to see how, in that context, Poggio's *De infelicitate principum* is accompanied by Bruni's translation of Xenophon's *Hiero* — a dialogue which, not incidentally, is heavily cited by Bracciolini himself.

A similar case, and miscellany, is offered by V. F. 15, at the Biblioteca Nazionale in Naples (**example 3**).[51] Here, the Brunian *Plutus* is found inside a fascinating collection. It is the second work, preceded by the so-called *Letters of Phalaris* in a Latin version and the *Bruti Epistolae ex Ranutii traductione e graeco*, and followed by the *Dionysii Periegesis in latinum sermonem metrice versa* and finally an anthology of the *Dialogi mortuorum* by Lucian. (Of this last, are unknown both the choice of the works and the paternity of the operation.) There could be little doubt that the interests of the manuscript lie with the translation; within this genre, a special place is occupied by epistolography. In particular, the fictitious letters attributed to Phalaris, a legendary Sicilian tyrant of archaic times, epitomizes the burgeoning production and circulation of similar texts. From different cycles of doxographical material a real 'epistolary novel' around the historical figure of Phalaris was formed;[52] it was in the Renaissance, and especially through the work of the Latin translator Francesco Griffolini, that an effort was made "to establish the *Letters* as a minor classic."[53] The presence of this mysterious text in a manuscript that already contains Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead* goes

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[48] Basil's text is first introduced at c. 72*r* and then transcribed (cc. 72*v* – 77*v*) with the title *Magni Basilii Cesarie Archyepiscopi Capadocie ad adolescentes qui sequi debeant ad capessendam virtutem libellus*.

[49] See D.J. Dutschke, "Il libro miscellaneo: problemi di metodo tra Boccaccio e Petrarca," in *Gli zibaldoni di Boccaccio: memoria, scrittura, riscrittura (Atti del seminario internazionale di Firenze-Certaldo, 26-28 aprile 1996)*, ed. M. Picone and C. Cazalé Bérard (Florence 1998), pp. 95-112.

[50] The Laurentian Plut. 47, 19, used by D. Canfora in P. Bracciolini, *De infelicitate principum* (Rome 1998), has the same anthology of Poggio, plus the *An seni sit uxor ducenda*, and it was also copied in distinct phases, with an additional booklet added to the original binding.

[51] The manuscript, of mm. 210 × 140 and cc. 91 (blank the cc. 58, 63-66, 89-91), was once part of the private library of Cardinal Seripando: R. Weiss, "Notes on Petrarch and Homer," *Rinascimento*, 4 (1953): 275.

[52] V. Hinz, *Nunc Phalaris doctum protulit ecce caput. Antike Phalarislegende und Nachleben der Phalarisbriefe* (München – Leipzig 2001). On Renaissance letter-collecting, C.H. Clough, "The Cult of Antiquity: Letters and Letter Collections," in *Cultural Aspects of the Italian Renaissance: Essays in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller* (Manchester 1976), pp. 33-67.

[53] D.A. Russell, "The Ass in the Lion's Skin: Thoughts on the Letters of Phalaris," *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 108 (1988): 94.

beyond the necessity of a philologically reliable copy: those who perused this miscellany, like the eloquent Augustinian Seripando, had at their disposal a strong structural link across the Greek genres cultivated during the sophistic movement.[54] The translations of Bruni and Rinuccio Aretino, in this light, are not a simple discrepancy or misstep in the logic of assembling; as for the Latin version of Dionysius of Alexandria's description of the known world, a reader passing from the Aristophanic fragment to the geographical text in hexameters would have probably been more interested in metrical or lexical details than in ancient geography. This, in any case, was a process already at play in the Byzantine scholia to Dionysius.[55]

In sum, behind the composition of V. F. 15 one could see personalities able to fully comprehend the novelty of Bruni's fragmentary exercise in humour, and to attend to his Latin rendering of iambic trimeters. Another possible conclusion deriving from the accumulated observations made so far is that the phenomena of interference and performativity I meant to empirically describe were significantly helped by the use of works of 'weak' paternity or confused tradition. Ancient and medieval literature was full of treatises of uncertain origin: the process of miscellaneous assembly can furnish us with certain clues, but the textual situation is anything but certain. This is why it remains difficult to tell forgery and creation apart, as it is difficult to assess in which way a fifteenth-century reader or collector could comfortably swing between 'novel', 'theater' or 'dialogue'. In each cases, though, an effort is still necessary, and we should learn how to look at a particular textual situation beyond the search for a date of composition or the study of variants. The last two miscellanies considered (examples 2 and 3), for instance, fit neatly within the tradition of the "mirrors for princes"[56] because of the interests displayed. And if one moves from Bruni's *Plutus* to Valla's *Apologus in Poggium*, it is evident that its testimonies operate a similar process of de-composition in terms of genre:[57] these manuscripts might take very seriously Valla's own hyperbolic presentation of his work as theatrical in nature,[58] or treat the work itself as an essay of historical grammar, or emphasize the aspects of polemics and philosophical disputation present in it — but in all cases, they accentuate their understanding by locating Valla's fragment with the pieces felt to have the highest degree of connection and similarity. It is to the performance of such choices that our next four examples now turn.

Among the manuscripts which exploit Valla's theatrical exploits, the most notable is Riccardiano 613 (**example 4**). Unlike many others studied in this article, this codex is wonderfully calligraphic; of Florentine writing and in parchment, it can de dated to the second half of the Quattrocento. It pairs the six known *Comedies* by Terence (ff. 1*r* – 136*r*) with Valla's *Apologus I* (ff. 137*r* – 150*v*). And while the fasciculation indicates that Riccardiano 613 was put together in successive stages,[59] both the presence of a single copyist (who doubles up as *rubricator*) and the regularity of the writing space — there are 25 lines of mm. 138 × 76 out of the general measurements of mm. 228 × 146 — strongly suggest that we considers its main pairing of Terence and Valla as an artistic process of conceptualization, or,

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[54] C. Celenza, "Late Antiquity and the Florentine Renaissance: Historiographical Parallels," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 62 (2001): 17-35.

[55] See J.P. Pritchard, "Fragments of the Geography of Strabo in the Commentaries of Eustathius," *Classical Philology* 29 (1934): 63-65.

[56] L.T. Darling, "*Mirrors for Princes* in Europe and the Middle East: A Case of Historiographical Incommensurability," in *East Meets West in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times*, ed. A. Classen (Berlin 2013), pp. 223-242.

[57] Obviously, such 'decomposition' was only part and parcel of a general process of re-membering: see the stimulating remarks of G. Villani, "Processi di composizione e 'decomposizione' nell'*Arcadia* di Sannazaro," *Nuova Rivista di Letteratura Italiana* XII, 1-2 (2009): 49-77.

[58] In a letter to Marino Tomacello of 1454, this is how he presents his *Antidota*: "Germanus tuus petasatus nunc ad me venit ac penulatus chlamydatusque" (Valle, *Epistole*, p. 386).

[59] Its structure, in strict codicological terms, is as follows: 13 V, 1 III + 1 V, 1 II.

in short, as a genuine example of fifteenth-century reading of humour. Camporeale's original intuition that the Vallian work had been inserted into the Terentian collection for basic reasons of "similarity in the literary genre"[60] can truly be tested against a variety of scribal materials. Conversely, the Marucelliano 376 in Florence (**example 5**) is equally strong in proving how Valla's *Apologus* was understood as well as re-assembled as a study of historical grammar.[61] This miscellany is dated 1468 and was written in its entirety by Pietro Cennini (b. 1445). Pietro, a goldsmith and important fifteenth-century figure, worked as manuscript illuminator for various products sent to Matthias Corvinus, king of Hungary, and was the son of Bernardo Cennini, who introduced the art of printing in Florence.[62] Not only does Marucelliano 376 contain a coherent anthology of grammatical writings, late antique and humanistic, until Guarino, Valla and Pontano, it also has an analytical index based on onomatology, therefore demonstrating its historical intents in no uncertain terms.

With Cennini, we have seen the example of a miscellaneous manuscript in which the criteria for assembling appear to be dependent on a single reader or patron. This is by no means an isolated situation, especially considering Valla's leading position in humanist learning. Another case in point is A VII 3 at the Queriniana library in Brescia (**example 6.a**). The key-figure here is one of Valla's pupils, Francesco Diana,[63] who because of these very ties with his teacher had good reasons to reconstruct the controversy with Poggio in an openly partial way, in contrast, for example, with the cautious behaviour of a Filelfo.[64] The *Apologus* actually opens A VII 3 (ff. 1*r* – 15*r*); orthographic reasons suggested Camporeale to see this transcription of the text, to which a letter by Diana himself is appended, as dependent upon Valla's holograph.[65] And while Diana's birth in Veneto and the diffusion of Valla's writings in the region would warrant a consideration of ms. 16 in the Guarneriana library in San Daniele del Friuli as a perfect companion to the other miscellany now at the Queriniana (**example 6.b**), the scribal *auctoritas* of Valla emerging in these last samples also forces us to question the importance of presentation copies and 'authorial' products directly supervised by the humanist writer. The best document in this direction is Lat. 8691 of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (**example 6.c**), prepared by Lorenzo Valla and intended to offer in one place all of his writings against Poggio. The nature of the manuscript is clarified by its numerous glosses and interlinear corrections, whereas it is interesting to note that in the succession of different works, from *Antidotum I* to *Apologus*, and then to *Antidotum II*, Valla inserted two blank leaves (ff. 65*r* – 67*v*) as if to better divide the two "acts" of the dispute.

In the same vein of miscellaneous manuscripts that emphasize *Apologus* as a polemic text, it is finally useful to consider Marston 81 of the Yale Beinecke Library (**example 7**).[66] A single copyist transcribes, in order, the *Antidotum in Pogium I* and *II* (ff. 1*r*–147*v*), the *Dialogus in Pogium*, which is Valla's *Apologus* with a different title and without the second 'act' (ff. 148*r*–159*v*) and finally a *Confutatio in Benedictum Morandum* (ff. 159*v*–174*v*). In all likelihood, Marston 81 is assembled to exhibit Valla's exquisite mastery in matters of

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[60] Camporeale, *Umanesimo e teologia*, p. 476. Valla takes from Terence, among other things, the two characters of Parmeno and Dromo.

[61] It is copied at ff. 121*r* – 133*r*.

[62] For Cennini's activity in bookmaking, cf. D.E. Rhodes, Gli annali tipografici fiorentini del XV secolo (Florenze 1988), and L.F. Casson, "A Manuscript of Landino's *Xandra* in South Africa," *Studies in the Renaissance* 10 (1963): 44-59.

[63] On Diana, see the *Catalogus Translationum et Commentariorum*, ed. V. Brown, J. Hankins, and R. Kaster (Washington 2003), p. 227.

[64] A fundamental reconstruction of the facts and people involved is in Valle *Epistole*, pp. 356-377. See also R. Cessi, "Tra N. Perrotti e P. Bracciolini," *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 59 (1912): 312-346 and 60 (1912): 73-111.

[65] Camporeale, *Umanesimo e teologia*, p. 476.

[66] The ms. measures mm. 211 × 140, is of ff. 174 and Italian origin, although it was in Zaragoza before arriving — partially cut off — in New Haven.

disputation. At some juncture, in the manuscript one could read a letter by Gian Pietro da Luca to Valla, which is currently cut off; this conveys a layer of familiarity or intimacy, as the original private destination of the treatises composing the collection makes itself felt. But even within a tight, organic context such as in Marston 81, whose style is designed for caustic adversarial exchange, there is a hesitation in title and transmission, significant enough for the *apologus* to be written down as a *dialogus* and for providing a different rhetorical pedigree.

4. Conclusion

Valla's *Apologus* is a work of apologetics, written in response to attacks against the author. The work answers two types of accusations concerning the education of the Roman elite and the right way to conduct philosophical research. If the first accusation originated as a defined historical problem — which was presented, by itself, in the context of a sympotic discourse — the two issues, taken together, put considerable pressure on the notion of genre: this might explain why Valla attemps to counter the forceful scorn levelled at him by Bracciolini by enlisting and mobilizing the comedic resources of theater. But while the two humanists tried to put as much distance as possible between themselves, and despite the disgraceful shadow of their bitter clash, the Poggio-Valla controversy remains a powerful case-study in terms of the intellectual impact it had on communities of humanist readers.

These communities, aristocratic in nature, were bound by adjacent spheres of interests and favours, by an economy of gift with immediate political consequences, and by personal ties such as those established between a teacher and his pupils. Valla's strategy in the *Apologus* was evidently easily detectable: its strange inclusion in the Terentian corpus was not sufficient to awaken the suspicion of corruption. Similar to Bruni's Aristophanic exercise and trapped in its *xenia* relationship with other contemporary treatises, Valla's *libellus* offers great intellectual leverage to study the practical setting and the overall 'transparency' of fifteenth-century miscellanies.

This essay has tracked and followed several examples that might suggest the establishment of significant links between concomitant works, and has invoked for them a relation of kinship in terms of the Greek notion of *syngeneia* or *philia*. This is a particular reward in the study of 'smaller' literary forms and is an unusual point of access into a textual handling of comedy in the Quattrocento. As an interpretative strategy, the biting rhetoric and the stitches in the manuscripts need to be held together, in order to establish the pragmatics of Valla's humour. All in this article was constructed around this assumption.

Some more words are necessary to fully appreciate the paradigmatic nature of familiarity, or 'being at home', in fifteenth-century anthologies. Miscellanism sets up a paradigm for readers of all kinds of texts; and readers, in turn, rely on their pre-understanding to enable meaning. As I argued in the case of the scribal layout, such expectation of meaning is based on material culture.[67] The Poggio–Valla controversy, for instance, is grounded on a style designed for adversarial exchange; and given the humanist fashion for collecting, almost any graphic style would speak to the particular concerns of readers and writers. In other words, disseminating works alongside one another is at the same time a question of rhetorical appropriateness and "close relatedness," to the effect that a Quattrocento miscellany becomes

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[67] The argument that one better accesses methods through textual analysis has been made many times, as one can easily observe in the philological development from the so-called "genetic" criticism to our current practice of studying manuscripts as unique worksites; in so far as this approach is text-based, however, the derivation is ultimately from Gadamerian hermeneutics. On the distance between reader and writer as supportive of cultural continuity, see H.G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York 1989), p. 297.

in many respects a family or a household.[68] And, in a way, as in the older Latin *familia*, we see two main rules at play: some piece of Greek intellectual life is transplanted to Roman soil, and the use of private relationship is made public. Laying down these few conclusions is greatly enforced by Valla's deep engagement with the graphic world of speech and its agonistic use. Just like he insisted to keep the literate and the vernacular Roman education on the same spectrum, however distant from each other, so too it is plausible that he understood debating or speaking publicly and sharing privately or assembling as two sides of the identical *sermo*.

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[68] With my emphasis on this aspect of the miscellany as an *oikos*, I do not mean to detract from the importance of the web of information built upon such 'containers', especially when one of their goals was indeed 'containment', or safeguard and information management: see A. Blair, *Too Much To Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age* (New Haven 2010), pp. 136-142. On the ethics and pragmatics of 'familiarity' see N.S. Struever, *Theory as Practice: Ethical Inquiry in the Renaissance* (Chicago 1992), and K. Eden, *Friends Hold All Things in Common: Tradition, Intellectual Property, and the "Adages" of Erasmus* (New Haven 2001).