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Hypnerotomachia Poliphili: Thoughts on the Earliest Reception¹

When asked whether the reception of literary works can be something worth studying for its own sake, most people would probably agree that it is. But would reception studies also help determine, or at least approximate, the intimate nature of the works under examination, as well as their intended meaning according to their authors' will? Answers to the latter question are likely to be more guarded, and rightly so; they might even be accompanied with the raising of an eyebrow or a condescending smile, especially by those who uphold the rigid dogmas of literary theory. Yet this sort of abstract scepticism can have a trivializing effect on the factual intricacies and nuanced distinctions required of historical-philological research, so often and so strangely misconstrued for reasons that are difficult to fathom.

Given the problems posed by the study of such a complex work as Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, one would be tempted to claim that help in whatever shape or form should in principle be regarded as a god-

¹ Transcriptions from *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* and other coeval sources are occasionally adapted for the sake of greater clarity: the customary distinction is thus made between *v* and *u*, and accents may be introduced to avoid ambiguity. Within the customary mutual exchange of ideas and the general revision that characterize joint authorships, James Russell drafted parts I, II and most of part III, Carlo Caruso the remainder of part III and part IV.

send – to be greeted with due caution and circumspection, to be sure, yet without dogmatic preclusions. Combining alertness to clues foreshadowing authorial intention with the study of the work's early reception may, as a matter of fact, earn us some unexpected rewards. No matter how extravagant or disconcertingly labyrinthine the earliest responses to that extraordinary book may seem, the lines of enquiry they suggest deserve to be properly tested before being discarded as something not worth pursuing in respect of authorial intention, as the advantage of chronological and cultural proximity to the source is something scholars underestimate at their own peril. One is reminded of A. E. Housman's impatience before certain crass interpretations offered by Lucan's late antique commentators but also, simultaneously, of his frank and fair acknowledgment: "They understood him with the marrow of their bones, which was the same stuff as his".²

In this paper two issues will be addressed from the angle of the work's earliest reception. Firstly, how far can an annotated copy of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* improve our understanding of an admittedly difficult text? And second, in what respect is the satirical and parodic notion of 'poliphile-sque' a helpful tool for the purpose of answering what appears to be a most cogent question – why *that* language?

I

The *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* is frequently considered as an anomaly that defies easy categorization, a metonym for the exaggerated in language and illustration. Since much attention has been drawn to its woodcuts, it is not surprising if critics approach the book as one more to be gazed upon than read. "The beauties of the illustrations in the book are easy to see, those of the text much harder. The woodcuts have had their due of scholarly appreciation, the text not yet".³

² M. Annaei Lucani Belli Civiles libri decem, editorum in usum edidit A.E. HOUSMAN, Oxford, Blackwell, 1926, p. VI.

³ P. DRONKE, Francesco Colonna's "Hypnerotomachia Poliphili" and its Sources of Inspiration, in: IDEM, *Sources of Inspiration. Studies in Literary Transformations, 400-1500*, Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1997, pp. 161-240, citation p. 164; the same point had been made in 1968 by

Thus, it can be salutary to reframe the book as a *used* text, one enmeshed in the fabric of humanistic reading communities. Several Aldine publications were texts of utility, such as grammars and other academic texts. One should therefore consider whether this book might also be a text for study and application, not solely for display. Thankfully, a small but significant number of those early readers left records of their reading in their marginalia, in some cases abundantly.

Previous scholars have examined copies bearing annotation. As early as 1723 Apostolo Zeno recorded a copy, no longer extant, held by the Dominicans of the Zattere in Venice.⁴ Edoardo Fumagalli and Dorothea Stichel have studied copies annotated extensively by erudite readers.⁵ These case studies raise the question of whether the practice of annotating the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* was idiosyncratic to these readers or whether other copies bearing extensive marginalia may be extant. Among the owners of the book who have made explicit their response to the text in copious notes on the margins are notable figures such as: Benedetto Giovio, Ben Jonson, and Pope Alexander VII.⁶ While exceptional, such annotators provide valuable evidence for which category of text readers imagined the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* to be.

As part of James Russell's doctoral project, a census was attempted of extant copies of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* bearing an annotation as a model for early reception.⁷ It took a cue from Owen Gingerich's survey of anno-

C. DIONISOTTI, *Gli umanisti e il volgare fra Quattro e Cinquecento*, Milano, 5 Continents, 2003 (1st ed. 1968), pp. 5-11.

⁴ Quoted in M.T. CASELLA-G. POZZI, *Francesco Colonna. Biografia e opere*, vol. I: *Biografia* (M.T. CASELLA), vol. II: *Opere* (G. POZZI), Padua, Antenore, 1959, pp. 63-64.

⁵ E. FUMAGALLI, *Due esemplari dell'«Hypnerotomachia Poliphili» di Francesco Colonna*, "Aevum", n. 66, 1992, pp. 419-432, on the Siena copy and another with similar notes, currently in Sydney, The State Library of New South Wales, "SAFE/RB/LQ0002/C"; D. STICHEL, *Reading the "Hypnerotomachia Poliphili" in the Cinquecento. Marginal Notes in a Copy at Modena*, in: *Aldus Manutius and Renaissance Culture. Essays in Memory of Franklin D. Murphy*, ed. D.S. ZEIDBERG, Florence, Olschki, 1994, pp. 217-236 (on the Modena copy owned by the Panini family). See also J. RUSSELL, "Many Other Things Worthy of Knowledge and Memory". *The "Hypnerotomachia Poliphili" and its Annotators, 1499-1700*, PhD Thesis, Durham University, 2014, pp. 66-122, 204-228.

⁶ J. RUSSELL, "Many Other Things...", cit.

⁷ Neil Harris has also undertaken a census of the work's copies for their typographical features, and noted that of eighty copies thus far surveyed, annotated copies are "the exception to

tated copies of Copernicus' *De Revolutionibus*, whose results were instrumental to reframe the argument about the book's reception. Prior to the survey, Gingerich's assumption was that readers would have concentrated most of their attention on Copernicus' ground-breaking heliocentrism. To his surprise, an extensive annotation was often found throughout the entire work, including its most dense technical passages.⁸ Likewise, a census of annotated copies of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* was thought to be likely to provide a larger set of data for comparison, possibly offering new insights into how readers approached the text. The census was thus aimed at identifying traces of annotation in the 277 copies listed in the British Library's Incunabula Short Title Catalogue.⁹ This approach has its limitations, among which, as R.C. Alston has noted, is a lack of appreciation for the utility of marginalia resulting in their under-reportage in catalogues.¹⁰ 267 of these copies could be confirmed as extant, and more detailed information was gathered about 150 of these copies: 30 by personal examination (8 in person, 22 through scanned images) and 120 through reports from librarians.¹¹

Of these 150, 91 bear annotation in the most general sense, including *ex libris* and interventions instigated by the corrections listed in the *errata corrigé* printed at the end of the volume; 34 bear marginalia demonstrating sustained reader engagement, with 13 of these presenting annotations on a quarter of the leaves or more. Thus, while a minority, prolifically annotated copies are not extreme outliers and constitute a meaningful corpus of information. Given these results, it is not unlikely that further extensively annotated cop-

the rule". (Personal Correspondence with James Russell, 26/04/2012). His well-known studies on the subject comprise N. HARRIS, *L'«Hypnerotomachia Poliphili» e le contrastampe*, "La bibliofilia", n. 100, 1998, pp. 203-251; *Rising Quadrats in the Woodcuts of the Aldine "Hypnerotomachia Poliphili"* (1499), "Gutenberg-Jahrbuch", n. 77, 2002, pp. 158-167; *The Blind Impressions in the Aldine "Hypnerotomachia Poliphili"*, "Gutenberg-Jahrbuch", n. 79, 2004, pp. 93-146; *Nine Reset Sheets in the Aldine "Hypnerotomachia Poliphili"* (1499), "Gutenberg-Jahrbuch", n. 81, 2006, pp. 245-275.

⁸ O. GINGERICH, *The Book Nobody Read. Chasing the Revolutions of Nicolaus Copernicus*, New York, Penguin, 2004.

⁹ For the methodology of this census, see J. RUSSELL, "Many Other Things...", cit., pp. 47-58.

¹⁰ R.C. ALSTON, *Books with Manuscript. A Short Title Catalogue of Books with Manuscript Notes in the British Library*, London, The British Library, 1994.

¹¹ For a list of librarians who answered this survey through an immense generosity of time, see J. RUSSELL, "Many Other Things...", cit., pp. VI-VII.

ies are extant among the 117 copies on which information could not yet be obtained.

This body of annotation provides a means to test proposed early frameworks for the reception of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* against the practices of a small but highly engaged group of its readers. For example, one might assume, as with Gingerich's first presumption, that readers would be most interested in linguistic and architectural themes, and many were. Yet the notes of a reader like Benedetto Giovio – of someone, that is, mainly interested in historical, antiquarian and literary erudition – show that in annotating his copy of the work his interest was primarily directed to botanical references in the text.¹²

II

It seems appropriate to take our cue from one of the earliest and most revealing contributions in this field. In his groundbreaking article entitled “Due esemplari dell'*Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* di Francesco Colonna”, Edoardo Fumagalli signaled, amongst other things, the presence of a heavily annotated copy of Colonna's work in the Biblioteca Comunale in Siena, which he discussed in some detail and in connection with other annotated exemplars while hoping to return one day to the same subject for a more detailed examination.¹³

On the fly-leaves, title-pages and margins of the Siena volume Fumagalli identified the presence of four different hands, which he designated as A, B, C and D respectively; two of them, A and C, stand for the exemplar's earliest and most active annotators. As Fumagalli was able to situate A and C in the years shortly after the book had been printed, he concentrated his attention on them. Both A and C filled the margins of the book, especially of its first

¹² J. RUSSELL, “*Many Other Things...*”, cit., pp. 107-123. See also S. RHIZOPOULOU, *On the Botanical Content of “Hypnerotomachia Poliphili”*, “Botany Letters”, n. 163, 2016, pp. 191-201.

¹³ Siena, Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati, “O. III. 38”. Fumagalli did return to his important early findings but only to discuss some finer points in a short article: E. FUMAGALLI, *Tra descrizione e rappresentazione. Due vignette dell'«Hypnerotomachia Poliphili»*, in: *Lettere e arti nel Rinascimento. Atti del X Convegno internazionale, Chianciano – Pienza, 20-23 luglio 1998*, ed. L. STECCHI TARUGI, Firenze, Cesati, 2000, p. 429-434.

part, with erudite references, etymologies, explanations of technical (mostly architectural) and botanical terms, occasional excursuses and – in the case of A – also drawings. This last feature, together with the frequent and delicate shading of many of the woodcuts that accompany the narration, reveals A as an expertly trained hand. Moreover – and this is another of Fumagalli’s important conclusions – both hands need to be considered together, as A and C can work independently as well as in tandem, with one occasionally complementing what the other had initiated.¹⁴

The hand that has left a note of ownership in the top right corner of the title-page is probably to be identified with Fumagalli’s Hand B, which he described as dating back to the late 16th century but left aside momentarily.¹⁵ While clearly much later than A or C, it still helps us locate the exemplar’s whereabouts on the cusp of the 16th and 17th centuries.

Hand B marks the copy’s ownership with the phrase “delli libri del Cau. [alie]re Federigo Schaller di Weyer” (1 r). An individual matching this name is listed as a student at the University of Siena as “Fridericus David Schaller Augustanus” (i.e. from Augsburg), matriculating on 3 July 1599.¹⁶ At the opposite end of the book, Schaller wrote “1467 –” under the date given in Roman numerals at the end of the narration (F iii r), right before the final page bearing Polia’s epitaph.

The middle name “David” as well as “di Weyer” (i.e. “von Weyer”), together with Schaller’s roots in Augsburg, suggest an association with David Weyer, one of a pair of merchant brothers who represented the Fuggers in Lyons and lent money to King Henry II of France (the firm of the Weyer brothers went bankrupt in 1557 when the King of France suspended

¹⁴ E. FUMAGALLI, *Due esemplari...*, cit., p. 423: “Occorre innanzi tutto chiarire che le due mani principali, A e C, lavorano insieme, alternandosi almeno nella prima parte del volume; non appartengono, cioè, a due lettori successivi, ma a persone che agiscono nello stesso tempo e nello stesso ambiente [...] un’opera comune, che tuttavia, naturalmente, non esclude caratteri individuali, riferibili ai gusti e alla cultura dei singoli”.

¹⁵ Ivi, p. 422: “[...] la mano B, del pieno secolo XVI, non ha qui alcuna importanza [...]”

¹⁶ MS. Siena, Biblioteca Comunale, “A. XI. 13”, fol. 248 v (published in: F. WEIGLE, *Die Matrikel der deutschen Nation in Siena (1573-1738)*, 2 vols, Tübingen, Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1962, vol. 1, p. 145).

payments).¹⁷ The fact that Augsburg and the Fuggers had very strong ties with the University of Siena is well-known.¹⁸ One wonders whether Friedrich Schaller von Weyer, who went to study in Siena four decades later, was also a member of that family.

A different and earlier note of ownership, “Francisci Fīni sum” (but the sign above the “i” of “Fīni” is rather a swirl than a *titulus*), can be read at the top of the internal title-page (a i r). As Fumagalli has noted, this is Hand A, to which an actual name, albeit shortened, can at least be assigned.¹⁹ This hand annotates the text assiduously and with almost calligraphic precision. Hand A also sketches visual representations of architectural visions described only in prose with the dedication of a draughtsman. The marginalia thus appear to be considered works of a piece with printed text and intended to complement the whole, rather than the impromptu responses of the moment.

Given the authority and complementarity of this hand with the name of “Francesco”, the mind naturally and circumstantially leaps to the “Franciscus Columna” formed by the acrostic of the initial capitals of the chapters, or an individual in his circle. The “Franciscus” of the *ex libris* is notably the earliest of the hands, since Fumagalli’s Hand C rather shows a tendency to respond – as has been seen – to what Hand A annotates (although the roles are occasionally inverted). Furthermore, Hand A is also the writer of a distich *Ad lectorem* revealing the acrostic:

Ad lectorem

Si cupis auctoris divinu(m) noscere nomen.

Cunctar(um) capitu(m) prima elementa legas. (A i r)

¹⁷ M. HÄBERLEIN, *The Fuggers of Augsburg. Pursuing Wealth and Honor in Renaissance Germany*, Charlottesville and London, University of Virginia Press, 2012, p. 78.

¹⁸ Cf. F. WEIGLE, *Die Matrikel...*, cit., vol. II, p. 584; D. BORGHESI, *Orazioni accademiche*, ed. C. CARUSO, Pisa, ETS, pp. 73-74. See also G. NEBINGER-A. RIEBER, *Genealogie des Hauses Fugger von der Lilie Stammtafeln*, Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr, 1978. The online site managed by Heinrich Wember of Augsburg ([on-line] [<https://heinz-wember.de/gen/fugger/>] – 20 II 2020) offers further valuable information on the Fugger family.

¹⁹ E. FUMAGALLI, *Due esemplari...*, cit., p. 422.

The meaning of “F̄ini” remains unresolved. However, if we were to assume that the swirl on the first “i” of “F̄ini” might be an abbreviation for “F[lorent]ini”, then there could perhaps be a candidate who would be a match for both the architectural skill of the annotator and the publication date of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. The nature of his marginalia betokens an architectural professional, and there is a “Franciscus Florentinus” whose dates do correlate with those of our book. Florentinus is an architect recorded as taking part in the remodelling of Wawel Castle in Kraków, a project which lasted from 1502 to 1537.²⁰ An individual by this name is recorded as being at Buda in 1502, possibly en route to Kraków, and at Wawel itself, where he worked from 1506 to 1516.²¹ These dates would have given Franciscus Florentinus the opportunity to acquire a copy of the HP in Italy following its publication in 1499.

If this proposal has a chance to be correct, one also feels further tempted to fantasticate as to how and why the exemplar owned by Franciscus Florentinus (Hand A) should eventually end up in Siena and be acquired by Friedrich Schaller (Hand B) in due course many years later. Among the Florentine artists active in Poland in the same circles that had been Florentinus’s, the architect and sculptor Giovanni Cini (1495-1565) had links with Siena, where his family had moved in the early 16th century and where he spent time between 1529 and 1531 and again in 1562. It would not be out of order to suggest, at least as an invitation to further investigations, that Cini may have acquired the exemplar of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* formerly owned by Florentinus and transferred it to Siena during one of his journeys there.²²

²⁰ D. WIEBENSON-J. SISA, *The Architecture of Historic Hungary*, Cambridge (Mass.), MIT Press, 1998; for the surname cf. J. LABNO, *Commemorating the Polish Renaissance Child. Funeral Monuments and Their European Context*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2011, p. 80.

²¹ D. POPP-R. SUCKALE, *Die Jagiellonen. Kunst und Kultur einer europäischen Dynastie an der Wende zur Neuzeit*, Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, 2002, p. 219; A. MIŁOBĘDZKI, *Franciscus Italus [Franciscus Florentinus; Francesco Fiorentino]*, in: *Grove Art online*, [on-line] [<https://www.oxfordartonline.com/groveart/view/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.001.0001/oa-9781884446054-e-7000029657>] – 20 II 2020, who denies the correctness of the traditional identification of Franciscus Florentinus with Francesco Della Lora.

²² H. KOZAKIEWICZ, *Cini, Giovanni*, in: *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 25, 1981, pp. 613-616; A.M. SCHULZ, *Giammaria Mosca Called Padovano. A Renaissance Sculptor in Italy and Poland*, University Park, Penn State Press, 2010, pp. 99-101. An enquiry into possible in-

III

Among the many interesting features that would deserve systematic examination, the Siena copy shows the persistent effort made by both A and C to amend the text. The misprints listed in the *Errata corrigere* at the end of the volume are scrupulously highlighted and accordingly amended in the text or along the margins. Yet the corrections performed on the text go well beyond those reported in the *Errata*. Right on the first page of the story, for example, in the expression describing the furious Northern winds as “gli fure(n) ti Aquili” (a *iiii r*, translated as ‘la veemente tramontana’ in *HP 2*, p. 15), an otherwise unrecorded “Aquili” is emended into the standard form for ‘Northern [winds]’, “Aquikonarij”.

Occasionally the correctors’ intervention does not seem to be wholly and utterly justified. This needs to be stated right away for the sake of methodological caution, for even coeval readers could easily misunderstand the work’s extraordinary language. A good example comes from earlier on in the story. As soon as Poliphilo has emerged from a thick forest into a clearing and started inspecting the beauty of the palm trees scattered all around, a wolf unexpectedly materializes before him:

Ma peregrinando solitario tra le non densate, ma intervallate palme spectatissime, cogitando delle Rachelaide, Phaselide, & Libyade non essere forsa a queste comparabile, ecco che uno affermato e carnivoro lupo alla parte destra cum la bucca piena mi apparve (a *vii r*).

Either A or C corrects “affermato” into “affamato” by merely superimposing the letter –a– over –er– (something which makes it impossible to identify the corrector’s hand). At first glance the correction looks legitimate, and the 1545 edition of the *Hypnerotomachia* presents in effect “affamato” (although this later edition is known to be occasionally prone to textual

fluences of the book’s woodcuts (and of the marginal drawings in the Siena copy) on Florentinus’s and Cini’s oeuvre might offer interesting results: cf. J. GODWIN, *The Pagan Dream of the Renaissance*, London, Thames & Hudson, 2002, Chapter IV.

banalizations).²³ On the other hand, one cannot rule out the possibility that “affermato” was used as the past participle of “affermare/-rsi”, ‘to stop and stand’, hence as an attributive adjective in hendiadys with “carnivoro”. (That the two adjectives do not fit reciprocally well in our modern languages, where one would rather have something like ‘There stood a carnivorous wolf [...] before my eyes’, is obviously no valid argument for 15th-century prose, and for the peculiar style of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* at that.) One also needs to consider that, in the following page, “affermare” bears exactly the same meaning of ‘stop and stand’: “ad questo deserto loco pure avidamente venuto, [...] me quietamente affermai” (a vii v); the same can be said of at least another occurrence: “Per la quale cosa eccessivamente volentiera alquanto di morula harei affermatome” (h ii r). In the episode of the wolf, “affermato” is undoubtedly *lectio difficilior* if compared with “affamato” and, as such, prone to be trivialized into its plainer substitute.

This and other similar cases may be regarded by an untutored eye as trifles.²⁴ Nevertheless, other occurrences, of greater momentum and greater significance, where the annotators have supplemented the narrative with textual portions which are not to be found in any of the first edition’s surviving copies or in the 1545 edition do exist.²⁵ Fumagalli has discussed an eloquent case that occurs at fol. a iiii r. The phrase describing the sound of cicadas as “il cicicare dell’amante rauco della roscida Aurora” is emended by C in the margin as “il cicicare dell’acheto, amante rauco della roscida Aurora” (a iiii r). From the same hand is an adjacent note offering the supposed etymology

²³ *La Hypnerotomachia di Poliphilo, cioè Pugna d’Amore in sogno [...] Ristampato di novo, et ricorretto con somma diligentia, a maggior commodo de i lettori*, Venice, Manuzio, 1545, a vii r.

²⁴ Similarly, the proposed correction “quassabondo mandavano ad gli teneri ramuli” for “quassabondo el mandava gli teneri ramuli” in the work’s first paragraph (a iiii r), discussed by Fumagalli (*Due esemplari...*, cit., pp. 427-428), may only offer a partial solution to what looks like desperately entangled syntax.

²⁵ See J. RUSSELL, “Many Other Things...”, cit., pp. 208-211. Variant readings from the surviving copies are discussed in: F. COLONNA, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. Edizione critica e commento a cura di G. POZZI-L. A. CIAPPONI, 2 voll., Padua, Antenore, 1980 (1st ed. 1964), vol. II, pp. 37-38; F. COLONNA, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, ed. M. ARIANI-M. GABRIELE, 2 voll., Milano, Adelphi, 2004 (= HP), vol. II, pp. XCV-XCVI.

of the given Greek term for cicada (“acheto”) as “achete idest argutae”.²⁶ Now, is “acheto” a legitimate insertion, an arbitrary interpolation, or a mere gloss? As Fumagalli has remarked, the palaeographical evidence shows that the textual addition (“[a]cheto”), and the attached lexical note commencing: “Cicadae vermes sunt [...]”, are kept rigorously separate of each other. It looks as if the annotator is here attempting to improve the text on the authority of an unknown source.²⁷

Further evidence seems to point in the same direction. Thelemia, one of the young women in attendance of Queen Eleuterillida, is described in another passage in the act of commencing a song: “cum celica melodia, & i(n)audita suavitate edyepea incominci [sic] a cantare” (h iiiii v). The Siena copy has a double blank space after “incominci”: the final –o, preserved in most copies, must have inadvertently been dropped during the production of this printing sheet.²⁸ Hand A supplies the missing –o but also adds a sign of insertion, which gets repeated in the margin, in order to amend the text thus: “[Thelemia] cum celica melodia, & i(n)audita suavitate edyepea incominciò in tono lasio a cantare”. The addition ‘in a wanton tone’, not required by the sense, looks like a portion of text left behind by mistake, perhaps also on account of the little incident causing the loss (in this and possibly other copies as well) of the final –o of “incominciò”. Both in this case and the one discussed by Fumagalli, the loss of text – if loss it is – may have been facilitated by the position of the vowels affected. The segment that allegedly was lost at fol. a iiiii r occurs between two identical letters situated at the beginning of two consecutive words (“il cicicare dell’acheto amante”), a case known as homearchy in textual philology; the portion of text allegedly lost at fol. h iiiii v falls between two identical letters at the end of two words (“incominciò in tono lasio”), which is – as a matter of fact – a case of homeoteleuton.

²⁶ On the authority of Giovanni Crastone’s Greek-Latin lexicon. Cf. [G. CRASTONE], *Dictionary Graecarum Thesaurus copiosus quantum numquam antea*, Ferrara, Giovanni Mazzocchi di Bondeno, 1510, fol. 30 r/b: “Achetai [...] Achetae cicadarum species arguta”. We have had no direct access to the Manutian edition of Crastone’s lexicon (1497).

²⁷ E. FUMAGALLI, *Due esemplari...*, cit., p. 427.

²⁸ Cf. F. COLONNA, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili...*, cit. [ed. POZZI-CIAPPONI], vol. II, pp. 37-38.

Two further emendations share a reference to the same mythological character. A passage describing two columns of polished darkish-red porphyry (“di puniceo colore fusco, [...] lucido, & terso”) prompts Hand C to insert a comparison with the colour of the blood of Attis the Phrygian: “di puniceo colore fusco, [...] lucido, & terso <quale no(n) fece el cruore di Atij phrygio>” (c v r). Further on, prior to being introduced to Queen Eleuterilida, Poliphilo takes a bath with the Queen’s nymphs and puts a perfumed ointment on, which after a while makes him feel both aroused and unsettled (“Et tanto incitamento omni hora incrementare sentendo, salace et pruriente me cruciava”); after “cruciava”, Hand A adds: “più che Atij per gli monti phrygij” (e vii v).

Here, too, the additions do not look like glosses, but rather like missing bits of text reinserted by someone who had access to them. But where did this information come from? From the author’s autograph manuscript? Or from a printed copy which had already been subjected to a thorough revision, and whose emendations the Siena annotators subsequently transcribed in their own exemplar? A third possibility is suggested by the double reference to Attis. Two separate occurrences of the same name in such short textual insertions may well be the product of chance. Nevertheless, if a different explanation for their appearance had to be sought, one might imagine them as the consequence of afterthought on the part of their author, who might have gone back to his text and further embellished it – as if it were not sufficiently elaborate – with two further mythological allusions to the same character Attis.²⁹ If that were the case, these additions – and perhaps the others we have discussed – may derive from a printed copy which had remained on the author’s desk and received supplements directly from his hand, and the Siena annotators may have somehow had access to them. This, however, is mere speculation. Be that as it may, behind these textual interventions one perceives the presence of an authoritative source, the nature of which is to remain unidentified for now.

²⁹ The way in which Attis is introduced in the two additions does bear some resemblance with the only occurrence of his name in the printed text, when Poliphilo makes in the second book a lengthy account of his love’s labour to Polia and declares himself “[...] distemperato et più furioso alcuna fiata per rabido et stimulante amore, non fue Atys & Pentheo [...]” (A v v).

IV

Linguistic inventiveness plays a prominent role in the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, and the question concerning the sources of its language intersects the broader question of the work's literary and philosophical models. Among the many aspects of this varied and multifarious landscape, Marco Ariani and Mino Gabriele have highlighted as particularly significant the influence exercised over Colonna's work by Apuleius's *Metamorphoseon libri*, making good use of their predecessors' observations and adding further important points of their own.³⁰ For a variety of reasons, which will be illustrated briefly, this constitutes a good case in point. It is revealing that one of the longest notes in the Siena copy appears to take the same line.³¹ Near the beginning of the story, Hand A declares Apuleius "platonicae disciplinae Imitator" and Poliphilo an "Imitator Apulegij", at least as far as the main narrative development of the story is concerned (a iiiii r). Moreover, a considerable number of adaptations and novel word formations in Colonna's vernacular have been shown to be derived from Apuleian Latin. To describe poliphilesque as essentially Apuleian in nature is neither unusual nor illegitimate.

Even so, the metamorphic resourcefulness that characterizes the language of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* cannot merely be explained with the imitation of one or more ancient authors famous (or notorious) for their linguistic peculiarity. It owes at least as much, and possibly more, to their modern imitators. The style of a humanist like Giovan Battista Pio, and more specifically the style that defined Pio's literary taste in the years on the cusp of the 15th century right before the appearance of Colonna's work, can easily be described as hyper-Apuleian, in that the recognizable Apuleian traits look disproportionately emphasised and almost grotesquely exaggerated following contamination with a wide array of non-canonical models.³²

³⁰ Cf. the Introduction to *HP* 2, pp. IX-XXX (Gabriele) and XXXI-LXI (Ariani). Cf. also F. COLONNA, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*..., cit. [ed. POZZI-CIAPPONI], *ad indicem*; P. DRONKE, *Francesco Colonna's "Hypnerotomachia Poliphili"...*, cit., pp. 171-177, 206-211, 228-233.

³¹ E. FUMAGALLI, *Francesco Colonna lettore di Apuleio e il problema della datazione dell'«Hypnerotomachia Poliphili»*, "Italia medioevale e umanistica", n. 27, 1984, pp. 233-266.

³² Cf. C. DIONISOTTI, *Gli umanisti e il volgare*..., cit., especially pp. 73-82. On Colonna's familiarity with medieval Latin authors known for their elaborate language and style cf. P. DRONKE, *Francesco Colonna's "Hypnerotomachia Poliphili"...*, cit., *passim*.

Nor was Colonna content with culling lexical rarities from those ancient authors known for their flourishing style or from their Renaissance imitators and emulators. Like many other authors besotted with the idiosyncratic element in language, he must have spent a considerable amount of time on lexica in search of what Walter Pater would have called “strange flowers, and curious odours”.³³ Of this intense activity modern commentators, following in the footsteps of Giovanni Pozzi and Lucia Ciapponi, have provided comprehensive evidence. Interestingly, both Hands A and C in the Siena copy appear to proceed in a fashion that must have been very much like Colonna’s. The phenomenon is patent at virtually every annotated page. Hand A’s explanatory note on “lixabondo” (e vi v) ([excessively] compliant; ‘servizievole’ in *HP* 2, p. 84) reads: “*Lixabundus*, vocatus est qui exiguae mercedis gratia vilissimis sese obsequiis immiscet. Plaut. ‘Qui famam tuam lixabundus, et nomen foedas’”. It is a faithful transcription from the relevant entry in Niccolò Perotti’s *Cornucopiae linguae Latinae* – presumably Colonna’s direct source, as Pozzi independently clarified.³⁴ Another instance is shown in the note for “manando”, which occurs in the very first sentence of the narration (“Phoebo in quel hora manando [...]”). Hand C annotates: “Manare: solem dicebant antiqui cum solis orientis radij splendorem iacere cepissent: a quo dictum putabant mane. Alij mane dicunt [?] ab eo, quod manum bonum dicebant / Festus: pom.” (a ii r) – another verbatim quotation, this time from S. Pompeius Festus-Paulus Diaconus’s *De verborum significatione*, 151, 5 (“Manare”).³⁵ Here, as elsewhere, the craving for rare, recondite, archaizing

³³ W. PATER, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, London, Macmillan, 1873, p. 211.

³⁴ F. COLONNA, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*..., cit. [ed. POZZI-CIAPPONI], vol. II, p. 63. See N. PEROTTI, *Cornu copiae, seu linguae Latinae commentarii*, a cura di J.-L. CHARLET-M. FURNO, 8 voll., Sassoferrato, Istituto internazionale di Studi Piceni, 1989-2001, vol. II, p. 193. The study of Colonna’s fondness for adjectives ending with *-bundus* can still profit from such studies as Dr [?] WINCKLER’S [Oberlehrer in Colberg] *De vi et usu vocabulorum bundus finitorum commentatio*, in: *Elfter Jahresbericht uber das Domgymnasium zn Colberg*, Colberg, F. C. Postschen Buchdruckerei, 1869, pp. 1-13, and A. PREHN’S *De adiectivorum verbalium in -bundus exeuntium usque ad alterum p. Chr. saeculum usu*, in: *Commentationes in honorem Guilelmi Studemund*, Strasbourg, Heitz, 1889, pp. 1-26. If genuine, the Plautine quotation is evidently from one of the lost plays.

³⁵ On the wider propagation of this and other etymologies of *manare* cf. J. ELFASSI, *Festus chez Isidore de Séville*, “*Eruditio Antiqua*”, n. 6, 2014, pp. 153-214, citation p. 165.

terms is satisfied by resorting to those lexical tools which were evidently kept at hand by both Colonna and its annotators and which constitute a tangible element of mutual affinity.

In spite of the manifest importance of this aspect, a perceivable tendency to underrate the significance of Colonna's linguistic tour-de-force as the result of either playfulness – according to which his work should essentially be regarded as a lengthy *capriccio* – or, worse, of deconstructing irony, remains.³⁶ Such a tendency may be instigated by that feeling of surfeit and impatience which often seizes the modern reader of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*; it is however a misleading drift that ought to be vigorously opposed. Colonna's lexical antiquarianism must first and foremost be seen with the eyes of someone who lived in the heyday of sensational and enthusiastic discoveries and recoveries in the field of classical antiquities; and, before claiming that Colonna wrote in that language merely to indulge an idle whim, one should consider his toiling after the 'right' word or expression through hundreds of pages of ancient and modern texts and lexica in order to go on and produce over 400 pages of – whatever our opinion may be – meticulously crafted and stylistically sustained prose. Surely the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* was not conceived and composed overnight.

A few years ago an attempt was made to contextualize Colonna's achievement within the broader landscape of the debate on the origins of the Italian vernacular.³⁷ There is only one explicit statement in that respect, one which Guido Arbizzoni has recalled in his contribution to this volume;³⁸ yet it is a statement pronounced over a hundred and fifty years after the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* was published. When Emanuele Tesauro introduced the subject of the demise of the Latin tongue following the collapse of the Roman civilization in his *Cannocchiale aristotelico* (1st ed. 1655), he mentioned, in passing, the language of Colonna's work as an example of what the earliest

³⁶ See, e.g., Peter Dronke's respectful reaction to derogatory comments even by reputed scholars who do not appear to be immune to the occasional prejudice (P. DRONKE, *Francesco Colonna's "Hypnerotomachia Poliphili"...*, cit., p. 163).

³⁷ C. CARUSO, *L'«Hypnerotomachia Poliphili» tra esoterismo e storia linguistica*, "Giornale storico della letteratura italiana", n. 187, 2010, pp. 210-236 (pp. 226-233 are freely and extensively revisited and complemented in the final section of the present article).

³⁸ See, in this volume, pp. 11-35.

vernacular language must have been like after the dissolution of the ancient tongue:

Morissi adunque la *Lingua Latina*: & morendo partorì la *Lingua Italiana* sua matricida: null'altro essendo questa, che una Latinità sporcata di Voci barbare: & principalmente delle Galliche; onde ancor prese gli articoli, e ' piegamenti de' Casi. Quinci, se tu leggessi quel primo idioma Italiano; e' ti parrebbe una piacevole pedanteria di Fidentio: qual fu apunto il Filosofico Sogno di Polifilo, studiosamente descritto per via di Anaboli: delle quali un saggio solo ti porgerò.

After quoting a substantial passage from Colonna's work, Tesauro continues:

Non ti par'egli udir qua due linguaggi in un solo? non vedi tu in ciascun Vocabulo morire il *Latino*, & nascere l'*Italico* idioma: latineggiar la barbarie, & barbareggiare il latinesimo? Hor questa veramente esser dovrebbe la pura, & original favella italiana: havendo le Parole derivate dal buon Latino: ma piegate, & articolate alla straniera.³⁹

Is Tesauro somehow retrieving here a notion that reaches further back to Colonna's own days?

The idea of Polia as "antiquity itself", or rather as a hypostasis thereof, was aired by an early 18th-century *érudit*, Bernard de La Monnoye, in keeping with his etymological explanation of her name:

Le surnom qu'il s'est donné de Poliphile ne signifie autre chose chez lui qu'amant de Polia. [...]; soit plutôt, que comme il étoit grand amateur de l'antiquité, et que nous donnons volontiers aux personnes, que nous aimons & honorons, le nom des choses

³⁹ E. TESAURO, *Il Cannocchiale aristotelico*, Torino, Zavatta, 1670, p. 240 (fac-simile reprint: Savigliano, Editrice Artistica Piemontese, 2000, with introductory essays by several scholars and a most helpful register of the ancient sources cited in the text). Tesauro's spelling has been retained, except for *u* and *v* and accents which have been adapted to the modern use. The "piacevole pedanteria di Fidentio" alludes to Camillo Scroffa's parodistic poems in poliphilesque (cf. C. SCROFFA, *I Cantici di Fidenzio, con appendice di poeti fidenziani*, a cura di P. TRIFONE, Rome, Salerno Editrice, 1981).

qui nous sont chères, & en vénération, il ait par cette raison donné à sa maîtresse, quoique jeune, le nom Grec de Πολιά, en Latin *Canities*, qui figurément signifie *antiquité*.⁴⁰

It must be noted that this was the dominant etymological explanation not just in the days of Bernard de la Monnoye but also in the lexica available to Colonna and his annotators. Crastone's dictionary, *Etymologicum Magnum*, *Suda*, as well as the lexicon of Homeric terms prepared by Guarino Favorino and Carlo Antinori for the collection of Greek grammarians published by Aldo Manuzio in 1496, all in various ways give prominence to occurrences of Πολ- and derivatives meaning 'hoary', 'white', 'ancient' and suchlike.⁴¹ This does not mean that the interpretation of Polia as a hypostasis of Athena Polia, also frequently suggested, should be dismissed. On the contrary, allegorical interpretations of characters in narrative works are seldom mutually exclusive, as they operate on different planes of meaning. In this respect no better testimony could be found than our Siena exemplar, where Hand C glosses the heroine's first appearance in the story thus: "*Polion* Canities. Polia p(ro) ip(s)a prudentia. quae in canis est. & p(ro) ip(s)a v(ir)tute" (a ii v) – where the 'hoary' or 'ancient', as well as the 'wise' Polia indeed appear to merge into one.⁴²

One further step was taken in the 1970s by Giorgio Agamben, who wondered whether Poliphilo's quest for Polia might after all be a quest for an idealized and artificial type of language.⁴³ This he suggested after reading as an allegorical allusion to the work's language the last introductory epigram (4 iv v), where Polia is said to live on in the mouths of learned people so long as Poliphilo lies deeply asleep and fully absorbed in his dream:

⁴⁰ B. DE LA MONNOYE, in: *Menagiana, ou les bons mots et remarques critiques, historiques, morales & d'érudition, de M. Menage, recueillies par ses amis*, 4 vols, Amsterdam, Henri Bordesius, 1711-1716, vol. IV, p. 250, signalled in G. FONTANINI's *Biblioteca dell'eloquenza italiana [...]* con le annotazioni del Signor Apostolo Zeno, 2 voll., Venice, Pasquali, 1753, vol. II, p. 167. Many thanks to Richard Maber for answering our queries on this point.

⁴¹ C. CARUSO, *L'«Hypnerotomachia Poliphili»...*, cit., p. 227.

⁴² *Ibidem*. Hand C's note is also quoted by E. FUMAGALLI, *Due esemplari...*, cit., p. 424.

⁴³ G. AGAMBEN, *Il sogno della lingua. Per una lettura del Polifilo*, in: *I linguaggi del sogno*, ed. V. BRANCA et al., Florence, Sansoni, 1984, pp. 417-430, subsequently as *Il sogno della lingua*, in: *IDEM, Categorie italiane. Studi di poetica*, Venice, Marsilio, 1990, pp. 49-66.

O quam de cunctis foelix mortalibus una es
Polia, quae vivis mortua, sed melius:
Te dum Poliphilus somno iacet obrutus alto,
Peruigilare facit docta per ora virum. (4 iv v)

A word of warning is necessary at this point. The language of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* can only be understood to be a variety of vernacular. It is neither Latin (as Agamben, perhaps by an oversight, characterizes it),⁴⁴ nor is it the impenetrable mixture of Greek, Latin and Italian so frequently evoked in the ironic characterizations of late Renaissance readers (“A. [...] un libro que se dize Poliphilo, del que escrivio la Hypnerotomachia. B. En que lengua? Griega o Latina o Italiana? A. En todas essas lenguas, y en ninguna dellas”).⁴⁵ Tesauro’s description of poliphilesque as vernacular is, in this respect, unassailable. His other conviction, that poliphilesque also meant to offer an example of the earliest Italian vernacular, must be tested against earlier specimens of the work’s reception.

All the elements that are considered here were brought to light by Carlo Dionisotti as far as back as 1968. Dionisotti discussed Colonna’s work near the beginning of his invaluable book *Gli umanisti e il volgare fra Quattro e Cinquecento* and duly underscored the significance of the text in the eyes of its contemporaries.⁴⁶ On the other hand, when he introduced the *Epistola in sex linguis* published in Rome in 1513 in the book’s final pages, he did not linger on the fact that the *Epistola* itself is the first important testimony for the reception of poliphilesque.⁴⁷ At that point of his argument Dionisotti had already turned his attention to the broader issue of imitation and had no reason to re-open the case in all its implications; and after all, the *Epistola in sex linguis* uses poliphilesque as a mere satirical target. For our purpose, however, it is important to assess poliphilesque within the range provided by the other five varieties alluded to in the work’s title. The *Epistola*’s satirical intent, while

⁴⁴ G. AGAMBEN, *Il sogno della lingua...*, cit., *passim*.

⁴⁵ A. AGUSTÍN, *Dialogos de medallas, inscripciones y otras antiguedades*, Tarragona, Felipe Mey, 1587, p. 458.

⁴⁶ C. DIONISOTTI, *Gli umanisti e il volgare...*, cit., pp. 5-11; see also P. DRONKE, *Francesco Colonna’s “Hypnerotomachia Poliphili”...*, cit., p. 164.

⁴⁷ C. DIONISOTTI, *Gli umanisti e il volgare...*, cit., pp. 101-106.

it may add complications to the picture, shows that by the 1510s the perception of that arcane language had ossified into a characterization that made it easily recognizable for contemporary readers.

After a preliminary epistle in mock-archaic Latin addressed by the Roman talking statue of Pasquino to Giovan Battista Pio, the *Epistola in sex linguis* offers a four-page parodic text satirically ascribed to Mario Equicola which moves seamlessly from one linguistic variety to the next, covering the six different types the rubrics along the margins of the text thus characterize: [L1] “Lingua antiqua latina”, [L2] “Apuleiana sive Delpio[neal]”, [L3] “Mariana latina”, [V1] “Lingua polyphilesca”, [V2] “Thoscana”, [V3] “Mariana vulgare”. Two are in fact the languages proper, Latin and vernacular – as shown by “Lingua” being used only twice at the beginning of each series.⁴⁸ Each language proposes three different samples. What is remarkable is that both series are supposed to run parallel to each other. The third Latin variety, [L3] “Mariana latina”, corresponds to the third vernacular variety, [V3] “Mariana vulgare” – a satirical depiction of Mario Equicola’s style in both languages. Similarly, [L2] “Apuleiana sive Delpio[neal]”, declaring an essential identity between Apuleius and his imitator Giovan Battista [del] Pio, finds its counterpoint in [V2] “Thoscana”, a subtly crafted parody of Bembo’s flourishing style as expressed in his *Asolani* (1505). The last remaining couple, [L1] “Lingua antiqua latina” and [V1] “Lingua polyphilesca”, suggests that both stand for examples of archaic languages. As far as the latter is concerned, the *Epistola in sex linguis* silently seem to share Tesauoro’s view that polyphilesque is indeed a picture of what the earliest vernacular might have looked like. But the great value of this testimony is its being dated 1513 – less than 15 years after the appearance of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*.

Dionisotti warned that the picture can only be complete – as complete as the surviving and known evidence allows – if the *Epistola* is read alongside two other virtually coeval satires, the *Dialogus in lingua mariopionea sive piomariana carmentali pulcherrimus* (1513) and Mariangelo Accursio’s *Dialogus Osci et Volsci* (1513), both intricately crafted parodies aping archaic Latin and

⁴⁸ The text comprises as a matter of fact two letters, the former in Latin, the latter in the vernacular, both addressed to Giovanni Muzzarelli.

pseudo-Italic dialects.⁴⁹ Still it remains unclear how two distinct profiles as those of Pio and Equicola could be felt to fit so well together for their names to coalesce into the satirical adjectives *mariopioneus* and *piomarianus*.⁵⁰

It seems reasonable to propose that both Pio and Equicola had an interest for the origin of languages in common. The occurrence of such a word as *carmentalis*, for example, both in the title of the *Dialogus* and in the *Epistola*'s passage in "Lingua polyphileasca", is allusive to Carmenta and the ancient story about the invention of the alphabet.⁵¹ The fact that Pio cultivated such interests is well known and has already been noted. Equicola's own commitment to a study of the transition from the ancient to the modern tongue is attested to in a letter of 1508 brought to attention, once again, by Dionisotti: "Nos enim de ortu linguae latinae et ut altera facta sit, ut in hanc quam vulgo loquimur, veteris umbram, paulatim defluerit, longa oratione disputamus".⁵²

The debate surrounding the origin of the vernacular tongue, initiated in 1434 in the papal Curia by Biondo Flavio and Leonardo Bruni, indeed seems to provide a suitable cultural context to explain the extraordinary language of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. One would say that Colonna probably inclined to support the theory of Biondo – namely, the theory of the catastrophe, characterizing Latin as being gradually corrupted by contact with other languages and eventually transmuted into the vernacular. This appears to be in line with the very content of the work. In his dream-like journey, Poliphilo moves across a landscape littered with ruins which are the gigantic, frightening remains of a lost civilization. That lost world gets revived in the ceremo-

⁴⁹ For orientation on the debate surrounding these and other texts see P. PETTERUTI PEL-LEGRINO, *La «fixa tramontana» dell'imitazione. Equicola, il classicismo volgare e l'«Epistola in sex linguis»*, in: *Petrarca e Roma*, a cura di M.G. BLASIO-A. MORISI-F. NIUTTA, Rome, Roma nel Rinascimento, 2006, pp. 227-294; IDEM, *La maschera dell'Equicola, fra satira e parodia. Il «Dialogus in lingua Mariopionea» e le due redazioni del «Pentecontametron»*, in: *Auctor/Actor. Lo scrittore personaggio nella letteratura italiana*, a cura di G. CORABI-B. GIZZI, "Studi (e testi) italiani", n. 17, 2006, pp. 121-148.

⁵⁰ C. DIONISOTTI, *Gli umanisti e il volgare...*, cit., pp. 97-100.

⁵¹ A missive is parodically described in the *Epistola* as "Io albicante papyro de le figliole di Carmenta nigellule notato" (ivi, p. 105).

⁵² The letter was first published in 1516 in a Lyonnais edition of BAPTISTA MANTUANUS'S *Opera*, Lyon, Bernard Lescuyer, 1516, fol. Cc iij r (cf. C. DIONISOTTI, *Gli umanisti e il volgare...*, cit., pp. 112-113).

nies and rites that are performed before and for him but remains irremediably beyond his ken, so that constant awe and frequent misinterpretations are defining elements of his conduct. Yet a strenuous hermeneutic tension urges Poliphilo on to find explanations for the myriads of questions that assail his mind. He therefore sets out slowly to decipher the signs through which that ancient civilization used to express itself. To the best of his ability, he strives to translate such signs into a language that is only partly apt to the task, as he himself recognises and laments on several occasions.

Peter Dronke has successfully vindicated Colonna's narrative skills. If the language of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* genuinely aimed to achieve the effect described above, then it is perhaps time to also acknowledge Colonna's linguistic mimesis as an invention of unprecedented subtlety and sophistication, indeed the "[m]agistrale tentativo di sofiologia linguistica e iconologica" advocated by Ariani and Gabriele.⁵³

⁵³ *HP 2*, p. CIX.