CONJECTURE AND INSPIRATION

ASTROLOGY, PROPHECY AND POETRY IN QUATTROCENTO NAPLES

By

Matteo Soranzo

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We have no idea, now, of who or what the inhabitants of our future might be. In that sense, we have no future. Not in the sense that our grandparents had a future, or thought they did. Fully imagined cultural futures were the luxury of another day, one in which 'now' was of some greater duration. For us, of course, things can change so abruptly, so violently, so profoundly, that futures like our grandparents' have insufficient 'now' to stand on. We have no future because our present is too volatile. [...] We have only risk management. The spinning of the given moment's scenarios. Pattern recognition.


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Introduction

Counterhistories have tried instead to revive that alterity, fostering disciplinary eccentricity; and it was that eccentricity that the anecdote carried into literary criticism as well. The force field of the anecdote pulled even the most canonical works off to the border of history and into the company of nearly forgotten and unfamiliar existences. There literature’s own dormant counterhistorical life might be reanimated: possibilities cut short, imaginings left unrealized, projects half formulated, ambitions squelched, doubts, dissatisfactions, and longings half left, might all be detected there. They were buried beneath the surface, no doubt, but would stir, once hoped, at “the touch of the real.”


On the marginal annotation of a manuscript that used to belong to Angelo Colocci, a book collector and erudite living in sixteenth century Rome, an erudite named Girolamo Borgia recalled how in 1501 he had witnessed the public performance of a poem entitled *Urania* in Naples.¹ The author and performer of this five books long poem in Latin hexameters, the marginalia inform us, was Giovanni Pontano (1426-1503), once the leading political and intellectual figure of Quattrocento Naples, an old man retired from public life at the time of the event.² The manuscript, along with most of the documents of

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¹ *Carmina* I p. xxxiv: "Cal. Februarii 1501 Pontanus legere coepit suam *Uraniam* in sua achademia, cui lectioni fere semper quindecim generosi et eruditissimi viri affuer; nec vero ipse ego Hieronymus ullam unquam praeterii diem, quin adessem, et quae potui in margine anotanda curaverim, quae quidem sunt ab eiusdem auctoris oraculo exprompta." The anecdote has been discovered and imaginatively interpreted by Soldati, who compared this performance with the life of a workshop (Soldati 1986 p. 312).

² Giovanni Pontano was born on May 7, 1426 in Cerreto di Spoleto, near Perugia. He died in September 1503 in Naples. Pontano studied language and literature in Perugia. Thanks to Antonio Panormita’s intercession, from 1447 to 1495 he served the Aragonese kings of Naples as advisor and military secretary. From 1486 to 1495 he served as royal chancellor. In 1471, Pontano became the leader of Panormita’s humanistic circle, which was to become the intellectual community I discuss in this dissertation. For a recent biography in English, see Kidwell 1991. For a recent reassessment of Pontano’s intellectual community, see Furstenberg-Levi, 2006.
Neapolitan civilization, had ended up in Rome after the extinction of the Aragonese dynasty and the consequent diaspora of its courtly intellectuals. Among them was Giovanni Pontano’s selected group of disciples, which included the teacher’s favorite pupil Jacopo Sannazaro (1458-1530).³

Giovanni Pontano’s *Urania* is one of the many forgotten masterpieces written in the period that Christopher Celenza has defined as the “lost Italian Renaissance.” This poem in Latin hexameters sets out to formulate a conjecture about the origin of planets and celestial clusters, as well as to sum up the sky’s influence upon weather and human life, including the writer’s existence. In *Urania*, Pontano fashioned himself as a *vates* talking to his son Lucius in the surroundings of Virgil’s tomb, under the poetic inspiration caused by Venus and Mercury, two planets that he thought were favorable to poets and rhetoricians. What was the meaning of *Urania*? And what was at stake in its public performance?

A rather common figure thirty years before Pontano’s performance, at the time of Lorenzo Bonincontri and Basinio da Parma, a poet astrologer was an eccentric figure in 1501, when poets preferred to present themselves as divinely inspired prophets. Many preachers and artists of the time were inclined to wear this kind of mask that Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) had found in Plato’s writings and in the Bible.⁴ Among them, one

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³ Jacopo Sannazaro was born on July 28, 1458 in Naples. He died in Rome on April 27, 1530. After a period of early studies with Giuniano Maio, he joined Giovanni Pontano’s intellectual community. Closely bound to the Aragonese dynasty, he followed King Federico to France in 1501. Back to Naples in 1504, he became a disciple of Giles of Viterbo, who inspired his last writings and introduced him to the court of Leo X in Rome (Deramaix 2000). In the last years of his life he attended the Avalos salon in Ischia (Therault 1968).

⁴ Marsilio Ficino was born on October, 19, 1433 in Figline, republic of Florence. He died on October, 1, 1499 in Careggi, near Florence. In 1462 Ficino became the leader of an intellectual community that used
discovers Giovanni Pontano’s pupil Jacopo “Actius” Sannazaro. Sannazaro had been portrayed as the embodiment of Giovanni Pontano’s combination of astrologically determined inspiration and expertise in the art of conjecture in the dialogue Actius. Also, he had inscribed his teacher’s ideology in his Arcadia. After 1501, however, Jacopo Sannazaro was more and more inclined to envision himself according to Ficino’s ideal portrait of the poet, as a consequence of his acquaintance with the Augustinian Friar and divulgator of Ficinian themes Giles of Viterbo (1469-1532). Like Sannazaro, moreover, Giovanni Pontano’s pupils no longer considered their poetic skills as the result of an astrological configuration consistent with their old teacher’s theories. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, astrology had become the object of religious attacks coming from the proactive intelligentsia gathered around Giovan Francesco Pico della Mirandola, editor and promoter of his uncle’s Disputations against Astrology. What did Pontano mean to do by delivering his now obsolete poem to his intellectual community when its members were more and more inclined to abandon their old teacher’s legacy? And what were the differences between the theories of inspiration that Pontano and Ficino held?

In my dissertation I will try to answer these questions by approaching what Giovanni Pontano and a group of closely connected Quattrocento writers meant when they fashioned themselves and their works as the result of adflatus, furor, contagio and other words referring to a mysterious cause that was taken to turn a conjecturer into a
to gather at Ficino’s house in Careggi. In 1473, Ficino became a priest and was eventually appointed at the Florence Cathedral. He retired in the countryside after the Medici were expelled in 1494.
Giles Antonini was born in Viterbo in 1469. He died in Viterbo in 1532. He entered the Augustinian order at the age of 18 and the studied in Padua. He was appointed Cardinal in 1507 and in 1523 he became bishop of Viterbo. As a member of the Augustinian order, he travelled to Florence and Naples, where he met respectively Ficino and Pontano.
diviner, an astrologer into a seer, a writer into a poet and a philosopher into a prophet. Using Stephen Greenblatt’s concept of *self-fashioning*, I mean to detect how an author constructed his identity as a poet according to a set of philosophical principles explained in his own treatises and accepted within his intellectual community (Greenblatt 1980). However, I will use self-fashioning only as a heuristic tool, and not as a category for surveying a corpus of writings conventionally assumed as “literature” that are selected according to conventional periodizations such as “the Renaissance” or “Humanism.” Rather, I have designed my research as a case study and conceptualized my questions as a historical problem that builds upon what James Hankins and Christopher Celenza have called *sources and influence kind of intellectual history* (Hankins 1990 pp.xv-xviii; Celenza 1999 p.668). In line with the critics who work within this scholarly tradition, I assume that an interpretation that does not start from the identification of an author’s culture based on the study of his library and the sources exhibited in his works results in a kind of nihilism. The identification of sources, consistent with Hankins’ methodological directions, should not be an end in itself or the opportunity for a display of erudition, but rather the springboard for formulating a hypothesis about an author’s relationship with his intellectual and social contexts. In particular, I will focus on how the notions of conjecture and inspiration were defined and explained differently in the contexts of Pontano’s astrological writings, and Marsilio Ficino’s exegetical summaries of Plato’s dialogues. I will eventually examine the impact of these notions on the writings of Jacopo Sannazaro and Ludovico Lazzarelli (1447-1500).⁶

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⁶ Ludovico Lazzarelli was born on February, 4, 1447 in San Severino, Marche. He died in San Severino on
The notions of inspiration and conjecture, as I will demonstrate, were not a trivial curiosity or a quaint literary theme but rather a central matter of controversy and an important object of research for the authors who interacted with each other and negotiated their ideas within the geographical and chronological limits set out by my case study. This study will thus contribute to existing scholarship by challenging two conventional interpretations of fifteenth-century literature found respectively among historians of philology and aesthetics. The first interpretation envisions Early Modern humanists as protomodern philologists who were interested in every kind of ancient document thanks to a form of antiquarian aloofness, or even because as part of a rigorous search for historical objectivity that foreshadowed historical criticism. Against this paradigm, whose bedrock is found in the works of Remigio Sabbadini and Carlo Dionisotti, my case study demonstrates that it was actually the curiosity about the causes of inspiration - as the chapters on Giovanni Pontano and Marsilio Ficino will demonstrate - that provided these authors with the impetus for devoting their exegetical acumen to the books written by, or erroneously attributed to Ptolemy, Plato, Hermes and their Hellenistic interpreters (Sabbadini 1920; Dionisotti 1968). The second interpretation conceives the figure of the inspired poet as a kind of romantic precursor of modern aesthetics or the symptom of a growing awareness of the autonomy of poetic language. In contrast with this conventional view, my case study will illustrate how the choice of a certain approach to inspiration - as the chapters on Ludovico Lazzarelli and Jacopo

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6 For a general critique of this conventional paradigm see Hanks 1990 p.14n. As an example of what this approach could produce, one may look at Dionisotti’s designation of Marsilio Ficino as a pseudo-philosopher tainted by medieval allegorism (Dionisotti 1968 pp. 81, 87).
Sannazaro will demonstrate – had broad cultural implications in the contexts of rhetoric, astrology, theology and theory of language that had nothing to do with aesthetics. Therefore, I propose that an individual’s choice to fashion himself as a naturally inspired astrologer or a divinely inspired prophet is a useful tool for practicing what Christopher Celenza, based on Carlo Ginzburg, calls a microhistory of intellectuals (Celenza 2006 pp. 58-79). The decision to explain what turns a writer into a poet according to the teachings of an ancient text determines an actual individual’s identity, his intellectual itinerary, friends and frequentations. Thus, it gives access to what Christopher Celenza calls an an intellectual community, by which I mean a group of individuals whose interests and ideas were determined by the materials they were discussing and studying (Celenza 2006 p.75).

The use of self-fashioning as a clue to the culture shared by the intellectual community gathered around Giovanni Pontano in Naples, and the study of how this community interacted with the members of other communities will challenge a conventional conception of Renaissance culture as a cross road of prepackaged ideologies such as Humanism, Neoplatonism or Hermeticism, which occasionally manifested themselves in literary texts. In agreement with Dominick LaCapra, I believe that this use of the intellectual context as an explanatory matrix results in a kind of genetic structuralism. LaCapra defines genetic structuralism as an approach that tends to explain the work of a single author as a predictable articulation of a supposedly coherent structure that exists beyond the individual text (LaCapra 1983 pp.72-83, 77; LaCapra 1985 pp. 34-35). In contrast with this approach, I will interpret individual texts in light of external

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8 For a broader discussion of this point, which I think stems from a misunderstanding of the meaning of Plato’s Ion, see the second chapter (p.96).
factors such as an author’s biography or the system of patronage. By so doing, however, I will try not to fall into the opposite pitfall of explaining literary texts as simply caused by their social and institutional contexts (LaCapra 1983 pp. 84-117, 99). This misleading use of the intellectual and the historical context as an explanatory matrix, which LaCapra denounced as falling into a form of determinism, can be fruitfully bypassed by looking at what role these contexts play within a text, and how a text inscribes different discourses within itself. I propose to do this by reading dialogues such as Lazzarelli’s *Crater Hermetis* or narrative texts such as Jacopo Sannazaro’s *Arcadia* in search of what Michail Bakhtin’s calls an *ideologeme*, by which he means a word or discourse that individuates one character’s ideology (Bakhtin 2002 p. 333). In this perspective, I will show that Astrology, Platonism, Humanism and Hermeticism are better envisioned as the result of a process of negotiation between ancient texts and exegetes as well as among exegetes, not as organized intellectual traditions.

The use of intellectual and historical contexts enriches literary analysis and contributes to reassessing the very notion of text in light of what Christopher Celenza calls the *epiphenomenon of writing*. The result of a critical interpretation of a text’s history, the epiphenomenon of writing refers to the development of a written work after its initial composition in relation to the intellectual contexts in which it happened to circulate during its author’s lifetime (Celenza 2006 p.119). In contrast with a view of philology as a method for identifying a supposedly original text that progressively...

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9 I discuss this point in further details when I refute current interpretations about the relationship between Hermeticism and Lazzarelli’s *Crater Hermetis* at p.150.

10 The notion of *ideologeme*, its originary meaning, and its use in the analysis of Lazzarelli’s *Crater Hermetis* and Sannazaro’s *Arcadia* are discussed on p.159.
deteriorated once in the hand of its copiers, the study of the epiphenomenon of writing contributes to envision a text as a performance that changed according to its different audiences and in response to external factors of change. Consequently, the interpretation of different versions of a text in relation to the intellectual communities within which it circulated enhances the historical understanding of the ideology shared by a group of scholars and of one author’s perception of this ideology. The case of Lazzarelli’s *Crater Hermetis*, Sannazaro’s *Arcadia* and Pontano’s polemical writings against Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, in this perspective, are meant to provide the reader with additional evidence for understanding how and why the ideology shared by Giovanni Pontano’s intellectual community changed at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Rather than as an end in itself, therefore, I will adopt the concept of epiphenomenon of writing as another heuristic tool to understand the relationship between astrology and prophecy in the context of Giovanni Pontano’s Naples.\(^\text{11}\)

This dissertation is divided into two sections and each of them is divided into two chapters. The first section (“Foundations”) investigates how Giovanni Pontano and Marsilio Ficino developed their definitions of conjecture and inspiration as interpreters and cultural translators of Ptolemy and Plato. In this section, I propose to ascribe their contrasting theories to the ambits of astrology and prophecy. In the first chapter (“Astrology, Rhetoric and Poetry in Giovanni Pontano”), I explore how Pontano resolved an exegetical problem posed by the canon of Ptolemy, and the ramifications of his solution in the contexts of rhetoric, astrology and his astrological poems *Urania* and

\(^\text{11}\) The concept of “epiphenomenon of writing” and its application to the context under examination is discussed in further details on p. 142.
Meteorum liber. I also propose to revise conventional interpretations of Pontano’s writings as an expression of humanism or as an example of didactic poetry. In the second chapter ("Prophecy and Poetry in Marsilio Ficino"), I investigate how Ficino resolved an exegetical problem posed by Plato’s texts on poetry and rhetoric, and how his solution was criticized in Pontano’s late writings. Finally, I challenge conventional interpretations of Ficino’s writings on poetry as an expression of his “neoplatonism” or as the foreshadowing of modern aesthetics. The first section provides the “foundations” for interpreting what might have been at stake when a poet decided to fashion himself either as an astrologically inspired conjecturer or as a divinely inspired prophet, and how these views were competing in late Quattrocento Naples. I propose that the ideology shared by Pontano’s intellectual community responded to external cultural influences, in particular to the connection between inspiration and prophecy that marked the intellectual community of Ficino’s Florence.

The second section ("Encounters") tests the hypothesis advanced in the first section by focusing on two specific “encounters” between astrology and prophecy in Quattrocento Naples. In the third chapter ("Hermes in Naples between Ludovico Lazzarelli and Giovanni Pontano"), I try to understand why Lazzarelli’s attempt at installing himself within Pontano’s community as a divinely inspired prophet and interpreter of the Corpus Hermeticum failed. To do so, I examine these authors’

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12 In this dissertation, I have tried to systematically avoid the term “neoplatonism” in relation to Marsilio Ficino. Coined by Schleiermacher in the XIXth century in reference to Late Ancient interpreters of Plato’s writings, this term is misleading if applied to Ficino who used neoplatonic commentators in his exegetical works, but did not belong to, or think of himself as a member of this intellectual community. I examine the historical reasons behind the Quattrocento use of Late Ancient interpreters of Plato in the second chapter (p.76).
reciprocal criticisms found in the dialogues *Crater Hermetis* and *Aegidius*. I also update conventional definitions of Hermeticism in light of recent historiography on the subject, and integrate recent scholarship with additional information on the reception of Hermetic ideas in the context of Naples. In the fourth chapter ("From Astrology to Prophecy: Jacopo Sannazaro between Giovanni Pontano and Giles of Viterbo"), I look at how Jacopo Sannazaro progressively moved away from Giovanni Pontano’s theories on conjecture and inspiration by fashioning himself as a divinely inspired prophet in his last poem *De Partu Virginis*. In this final chapter, I also interrogate the conventional portrait of Jacopo Sannazaro as an expression of Renaissance pastoralism or as a vernacular writer. This second section advances the hypothesis that the cause of Pontano’s reaction to Ficino’s theories was the preaching of Giles of Viterbo, an Augustinian Friar who converted Pontano’s intellectual community from the latter’s ideas on astrology to the former’s ideas on prophecy.

At first glimpse, the anecdote of Pontano’s public performance of *Urania* in 1501 may sound like an erudite curiosity. However, if my dissertation succeeds in framing this event in what might have been its original context, Pontano’s performance can be understood as an event of capital importance in the intellectual life of Naples at the beginning of the sixteenth century. It marked the end of Pontano’s legacy and the diaspora of his intellectual community.
Section 1

Foundations
Chapter 1

Astrology, Rhetoric and Poetry in Giovanni Pontano

Introduction

In this chapter I address the problem of how the discourse of astrology intersects with the tradition of the studia humanitatis in the writings of Giovanni Pontano. In line with Kristeller's definition of fifteenth century humanism, Pontano distinguished himself as a moral philosopher, a philologist, a poet, a rhetorician and an historian (Kristeller 1961). Even more, consistent with the broader definition of humanism as an intellectual orientation characterized by civic engagement and historical awareness (Burckhardt 1860; Baron 1955), Pontano was a secretary and political advisor, actively involved in diplomacy, political theory and ambitious political enterprises such as the reconciliation of the Aragonese king Ferdinand I with the pope Innocent VIII (Kidwell 1991; Bentley 1987). Pontano, however, also composed works of astrology that do not easily fit the above mentioned definitions of humanism as a set of scholarly practices or as an intellectual orientation. Rather, his treatises incorporate the expertise of the philologist, the rhetorician and the poet in order to restore this divinatory practice at the light of his newly acquired skills in classical studies. Therefore, the first question I ask in this chapter is the extent to which the author perceived astrology and humanism as distinct intellectual endeavors.
Not only does the author's career challenge traditional historiographical categories, but his production in Latin hexameters constitutes a puzzle for conventional classification of fifteenth century literary genres if not of poetry itself. Pontano's poems *Urania* (first printed Venice 1503) and *Meterorum liber* (first printed Venice 1503) venture into astrology and meteorology and could be easily defined as didactic texts or humanistic imitations of the Latin poets Lucretius and Manilius, whose rediscovery marks the end of the century of Poggio Bracciolini and Angelo Poliziano. Puzzling as it may seem for contemporary scholars, who have often approached Pontano's poems from a sixteenth-century perspective and with the rigid categories set out by the interpreters of Aristotle's *Poetics*, astrology and poetry are bound by a solid and problematic link in Pontano's abundant writings on the subjects. The most evident exchange between these two kinds of writings is that Pontano's astrological treatises continuously incorporate quotations taken from the author's astrological poetry, whereas his astrological poetry transposes into narrative form the astrological schemas that his treatise sets out to revise and restore. The second question is thus whether Pontano was really aware of crossing a boundary when writing astrological poetry, or whether this boundary is a consequence of later classification of genres.

Previous solutions to this problem can be grouped into two broad categories characterized by two different definitions of humanism. The first category groups solutions that build upon the definition of humanism as a heroic struggle for the cultural emancipation of mankind or as a philosophy marked by a renewed sense of human autonomy in history. These definitions, whose genealogy can be traced back to Ernst
Cassirer and Eugenio Garin, has led scholars to interpret Pontano's astrological works as the expression of a bold materialistic worldview borrowed from Lucretius (Tateo 1960). Also, some scholars have interpreted Pontano's writings the context of the crisis that marks the last years of the Quattrocento and the end of the Aragonese dynasty (Santoro 1967). The second category groups solutions that have built upon Kristeller's definition of *studia humanitatis* and have stressed upon the elements of continuity between Pontano's rhetorical culture and his astrological and natural philosophical works (Trinkaus 1970; 1985). This direction of inquiry merges into a recent scholarly trend that is attempting to rethink the problem of the intersection between “humanism” and “science.” This approach shifts the attention from the study of recurrent themes in discursive traditions assumed as separated, to the identification of common hermeneutic practices in the work of fifteenth-century humanists, natural philosophers and astrologers (Grafton 1992). Its goal is to understand early modern intellectuals beyond overarching categorizations (Grafton 1998 p.12; Grafton 2000). A third question is therefore how the modern critic can reconcile these directions of inquiry without losing the ideological implications of Garin's humanism and the historical accuracy of Kristeller's *studia humanitatis*.

In this chapter I propose an analysis of discourse that identifies and explains the way in which the author's writings envision and practice knowledge, in order to define how he fashions himself. I begin by recognizing a constant *mode of thinking* in Pontano's writings on rhetoric, astrology and poetics. By mode of thinking I mean the way in which the texts do not represent but rather construct their object of inquiry through language. This mode is signaled on the one hand by words such as practice (*ars*),
conjecture (conjectura), observation (observatio) and experience (experientia); on the other hand by the notions of poetic frenzy (furor), inspiration (adflatus) and astrological contact (contagio). A formalization of this mode of thinking is found in Pontano's late rhetorical treatise De Sermone (written 1499-1502; first printed 1509), whose development I illustrate by looking at the annotated translation of the pseudo-Ptolemaic Centiloquium (written 1474-1479; first printed Naples 1512),\(^\text{13}\) the astrological treatise De Rebus Coelestibus (written 1495; first printed 1512),\(^\text{14}\) the dialogues Antonius and Actius (written 1471-1499; first printed 1507),\(^\text{15}\) and the poems Urania and Meteorum liber (first printed 1503). In my view, Cicero's De Divinatione is the source and theoretical bedrock of Pontano's mode of thinking marked by the notions of inspiration and conjecture.

In this chapter I argue that Pontano brings forth the practices of conjecture and inspiration as the best means for accessing truth in contrast with and as a response to other intellectual options available at the time. By so doing, the author defines a group of astrologically inspired poet-diviners within his intellectual community, while at the same time he fashions himself as a vates. This argument helps me to rethink traditional definitions of humanism in a way that gives access to a distinct intellectual current in the context of fifteenth century Naples. It also contributes to the definition of an approach to

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\(^{13}\) For the chronology of this work, see Rinaldi, 2002 pp.101-102.

\(^{14}\) This text was first drafted in 1475-1476 but completely revised in 1495 (De Nichilo 1975 pp. 18-22; Trinkaus 1985 p. 499). Initially conceived as organized into thirteen books, the text was printed posthumously and divided into fourteen books because of Summonte's editorial choices (Monti Sabia 1986 p. 201).

\(^{15}\) For the chronology of the dialogues, see Monti 1963 pp. 269-305.
Pontano's poetry that does not rely on abstract categories such as that of didactic poetry, but rather seeks to understand his work in its changing intellectual context.

**The use of Cicero's *De Divinatione***

The theoretical framework and the language of Pontano's approach to rhetoric, astrology and poetry stems from Cicero's *De Divinatione* (written ca. 45BC), a text organized into two books in which the Roman philosopher wrote in favor and against divination in the form of a dialogue with his brother Quintus. Pontano's knowledge of this text is documented by a direct quotation found in the discussion about fortune, fate and prediction in the philosophical treatise *De Fortuna* (written 1501; first printed 1512). In addition, a personally transcribed copy of this text was still in Pontano's personal library at the time of its donation to the monastery of San Domenico Maggiore in Naples (Kaeppeli 1966 pp.48-50; Rinaldi 2002 pp. 122-123). Pontano, as I will demonstrate, borrowed from Cicero's distinction between two kinds of divination (from art and from nature) as well as the function assigned to conjecture and inspiration in his theory of knowledge. In Cicero, Pontano also found the link between rhetorical-poetic discourse and astrology. To understand the role Cicero's text plays within Pontano's writings, it is worth inquiring into the theoretical framework used in Cicero's *De Divinatione*.

In the first book of *De Divinatione* (which is set in the surroundings of Cicero's house in Tusculum), the author's brother Quintus sets out a defense of divination from the point of view of Stoic philosophy. Quintus defines divination as the "foreseeing and

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16 *De Fortuna* lib. I c.141r: "Iam igitur quid fatum sit tenes, de quo dicendum proposuimus, ac ne Ciceronis de eo praetere at te sententia, audi quid de fato in libris de divinatione et loquatur."
foretelling of events considered as happening by chance” (I v. 9) and offers a typology of divination based on whether divination comes from art or from a nature. The first kind, which also includes astrology, is characterized by the practice of conjecture (coniecturā) and is compared to medicine, navigation, military science and statecraft (I xiv 24). This first kind of divination includes the practice of constant observation (observatio) and the keeping of records (monumenta), from which the future can be inferred by extrapolation (I vii 12). Divination is thus conceived as benefiting from experience (usus, experientia) and as a work in progress (I lvii 131). The second kind is characterized by the presence of mental excitement (concitatio) or frenzy (furor) and the occurrence of dreams (I xviii 34). Quintus likens this altered state of mind to the poetic frenzy theorized in Plato’s Phaedrus (I xxxvii 80), but refutes Aristotle’s opinion which assigns divinatory qualities also to those individuals who suffer from black bile (melancholici) (I xxxviii 81). Quintus ascribes this second kind of divination to the contact (contagio) between the divine Mind of Nature and the human soul (I xlix 110). Between these two kinds of divination, Quintus assigns a distinct position to prudence (prudentia), a mechanism for foreseeing the future that is based on the certain knowledge of natural causes rather than on the interpretation of occult relationships among signs (I xlix 111).

In the second book (which is set in Cicero’s library), the author’s persona conducts a point by point refutation of the arguments brought forth by his brother in defense of divination. His method is that cultivated in the New Academy (II iii 8).

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17 Cicero’s use of “nature” may be counterintuitive for a modern reader. As a Stoic philosopher, Cicero refers to nature as an immanent cosmic entity that is not opposed, but rather coincides, with the divine.

18 De Divinatione II iii 8: “I must now reply to what you said, but I must do so with great diffidence and with many misgivings, and in such a way as to affirm nothing and question everything. For if I should...
Divination, Cicero argues, has no specific place in any art (II iii 9- iv 11) and therefore the best conjectures are those formulated by professional physicians, philosophers, political theorists with prudence (II v 13). In addition, Quintus's definition is said to be contradictory because what happens by chance cannot be predicted by means of conjecture and reason (II vi 15): for example, there is no way of keeping track of events that happen randomly such as the inspection of entrails (II xii 28). In his refutation, Cicero shifts the level of the discussion from the study of what divination does to why divination does what it does (II xx 46); in other words, he invites his brother to inquire into the causes of divination rather than on its results. Consistently, Cicero juxtaposes the ideal of a systematic inquiry into natural causes to the conjectural interpretation of events whose unknown causes are supposed to depend on the divine Mind of Nature (II xxviii 60).

Consistent with the scope of the philosophy of the New Academy, Cicero's book leaves its reader with a theoretical framework and a series of arguments in support and against the problem discussed. In particular, it offers an important distinction between two forms of knowledge, their respective sources and their practice. On the one hand, Cicero's persona brings forth the exact explanation of natural causes as an ideal form of knowledge. This form, which corresponds to Aristotle's notion of science (episteme), originates in a state of wonder and puzzlement that follows the observation of unknown events. Its scope is grasping why an event happens, that is, its scope is to arrange natural events in a hierarchy of causes and effects. On the other hand, Quintus defends the
interpretation of natural events as if they were distributed on a matrix of mutual and occult relationships, which can be disclosed artificially or naturally. Artificially, this form of knowledge can be obtained by extrapolating plausible conjectures about an inexperienced event from a set of experienced facts. This kind of divination is thus polemically compared with the rhetorician's discussion of judicial causes (II xxvi 55). Also, this form of knowledge can be achieved by natural infusion of truth via direct contact with the Divine Mind in visions and dreams. Whether one reaches foresight by artificial or natural means, the scope of this form of knowledge is to understand what events mean, that is, its scope is to read natural events as signs.

Conjecture and Inspiration

Pontano elaborates on both sides of the problem of divination set out in Cicero's book. On the side of artificial divination, the problem is articulated into questions such as how conjecture works and what is the most reliable form of conjecture. On the side of natural divination, the problem is articulated into questions such as from whence inspiration comes and who is more inclined to receive it. Pontano addresses all these issues by exploring their implications in the contexts of rhetoric, astrology and poetry. As I will illustrate, these issues are closely intertwined.

The Context of Rhetoric

Pontano accepts the distinction between two forms of knowledge (explanation of causes/ conjectural interpretation of signs) envisioned in Cicero's book by working further on its rhetorical implications. In Cicero, the comparison between divinatory
conjectures and judicial discourse can be read as a rhetorical move meant to discredit the validity of the art that the second part of the dialogue is systematically questioning. In Pontano, however, this analogy is explored in the context of a discussion that postulates not only two forms of knowledge but also the existence of two kinds of truths for the philosophical and the rhetorical discourse. This distinction is drawn in the treatise *De Sermone*, a book in which the author defines the virtues of rhetorical discourse and outlines the ideal role of language in the life of society. At the heart of the first book, the author defines his object of inquiry by distinguishing between a philosophical truth (*veritas*) pertinent to the inquiry of natural philosophers and mathematicians and expressed in form of syllogism; and a discursive truth (*veracitas; veridicentia*) that pertains to the sound rhetorician's discourse and consists in an attitude (*habitus*) toward truth rather than in the formulation of exact demonstrations.\(^ {19}\)

Although the rhetorical context of the *De Sermone* brings the author to deal mostly with problems of rhetoric and public speaking, Pontano's distinction between scientific and discursive truths also encompasses divination. As they practice a kind of discourse, soothsayers and diviners are subject to the same sets of qualities that cluster around the ideal figure of individuals virtuously inclined to truth that the second book of the treatise

\(^{19}\) *De Sermone* pp.109-110: “Loquimur autem de *veritate* hoc in loco, non illa quidem quae a *physicis quaeritur aut mathematicis* quae ve versetur circa certitudinem syllogismorum in ipsisque disputationibus, quae sunt de rerum natura deque disciplinis atque scientiis hominum ac facultatibus, verum de veritate ea, quae nihil *in sermonibus atque in oratione*, nihil etiam in moribus inesse fictum, fallax, fucatum inicet; nihil quod simulatum, adulatorium, mendax, gloriosum, vanum quodque supra vires appareat supraque facultates ipsas aut veri fines excedat captus ve nostri terminos […]et virtus ipsa veritas, ni fortasse proprie magis veraces illi, virtus autem ipsa *veracitas*, ut veritas sit rei ipsius, veracitas vero ea utentis *habitus*.” (italics mine). Pontano's discussion on *habitus* is closely intertwined with the discourse of ethics, and in particular with Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. In order to detect the contacts between Pontano's astrology and rhetoric, however, I have to emphasize the rhetorical and epistemological implications of Pontano's treatise.
outlines. In this treatise, not only does Pontano reiterate the distinction between truths (veritas/veracitas), but he also introduces some examples of individuals whose discourse is considered trustworthy, namely trustworthy soothsayers (vates) and diviners (harioli) whose research is driven by an honest attitude toward their object of inquiry. The art of soothsayers is assimilated to that of physicians, as they both can abuse the credulity of their interlocutors by attributing to themselves skills that they do not really have.

The discursive truth treated in the second book of De Sermone also applies to poetry, which the author defends from the traditional charge of lying by incorporating fiction and fables. In line with the main thesis of De Sermone, which maintains that the use of discourse has been naturally given to mankind in order to reinforce societal bounds and relieve individuals from pain, the author ventures into a short defense of poetry. The passage combines traditional arguments with an interesting allusion to the world of divination which induces the reader to think that the connection between this practice and the author's literary activity is more problematic than it may seem. In his defense of poetry, Pontano reminds the reader how Aristotle's philosophical works often incorporate quotations from Homer and that poets invite men to the exercise of virtue and save the civilization from wilderness. Also, he reminds that poems have been considered as

20 De Sermone pp. 172-174: “Sequitur igitur veritatis studium virtus ea, quae suo nomine est veridicentia, unde et qui utuntur veridici, unde et qui vera vaticinantur, sive vates sive harioli, dicti sunt veridici pariter ac veriloqui. Quanquam autem in iis, quae supra sunt a nobis dicta, satis praefati sumus hac nos in parte hocque in tractatu minime loqui ea de veritate, quae in inquirendis versatur rerum ac naturae causis aut de lure iniuriae ac sive forensibus in negotiis sive physicis mathematicisque inquisitionibus, tamen id ipsum iterum testatum volumus.” (italics mine).

21 De Sermone p.199 “Consuesse autem ea sibi affingere, quae latere quidem posse eaque haud paulam fieri arbitrentur, ut qui, cum e medicina aut divisione aliquid modo attigerint, et medendi tamen et divinandi maximam se peritiam assecutos gloriuntur profintenturque ea se tenere, quae sint earum artium abditissima, deque se ipsis magna cum ostentatione ac iactantia praedicant.” (italic mine).
oracles throughout history. In Pontano's view, the role of the poet (poeta) and that of the soothsayer (vates) are linked by the practice of a similar form of knowledge.\footnote{De Sermone p. 192: “Non esse autem despiciendos \textit{scil. “poetas”}, verum admirandos potius illud docet, quod Aristoteles et Homed et aliorum poetarum auctoritate in maximis quibusque rebus utitur et poetarum dicta \textit{pleraque habita sunt pro oraculis}, cum mendaces ipsi atque ostentatores nugentur ac garriant magis quam fingant sitque fabula ipsa inventa non vanitatis gratia, verum ut arte ea homines vel deterrentur a viciis [...] vel incitarentur ad virtutes [...].” (italics mine).}

The genre (treatise) and the subject (rhetorical discourse) of the \textit{De Sermone} have induced scholars to interpret Pontano's distinction between the truth of natural philosophy (veritas) and the truth of rhetoricians (veracitas) as a product of fifteenth century rhetoric. For a long time this text has been judged against the standard of systemacity and theoretical consistency of sixteenth century philosophical treatises, and thus criticised for its incoherence, the fragility of its argumentation and the lack of structure (Burckhardt 1860; De Robertis 1966). Recent interpreters, however, have questioned this interpretation and have tried to evaluate Pontano's book either in the context of his moral treatises (Tateo 1972) or in the history of humanistic rhetoric (Mantovani 2002). These readings have contributed to qualify Pontano's distinct argumentative style and to frame the author's thought in its theoretical and historical context. Moreover, these readings have persuasively ascribed Pontano's thought to the revival of rhetorical studies that mark the tradition of fifteenth-century \textit{studia humanitatis} and explain it as a product of the distinction between syllogistic-deductive truth cultivated in the context of universities and the argumentative-discursive truth that marks the societal discussion of humanistic gatherings (Battistini-Raimondi 1990).
These readings, however, have failed to frame Pontano's rhetorical writings in the context of his astrological and natural philosophical writings. In contrast with this scholarly tradition, I am persuaded that the source of Pontano's defense of discursive and poetic is actually his work as a practicing astrologer and exeget of Ptolemy. My argument is that Pontano's astrology is not an extension of his rhetorical culture into a different field. Rather, the author's views on rhetoric and poetry are grounded in what the author's commentary on the pseudo-Ptolemaic Centiloquium and the late treatise De Rebus Coelestibus have to say about conjecture and inspiration in the context of astrology. If ignored, the astrological background of the author's mode of thinking will either neglected or even perceived as the result of a speculative flaw in the author's reasoning (Mantovani 2002 p. 39).

The Context of Astrology

The canon of Ptolemy

Rather than being the manifestation of pre packaged ideology such as humanism or naturalism, I envision Pontano's mode of thinking as the result of a process of negotiation between the author and an ancient text that he interpreted and translated into the terms of his own culture. As James Hankins emphasized, however, it is misleading to assume that Quattrocento humanists like Pontano were simply interested in whatever was ancient and that they approached ancient texts with the aloof detachment of a twentieth century philologist trained in Lachman's method (Hankins 1990 p.14). Rather, fifteenth
century interpreters are better envisioned as cultural translators, whose works betray the attempt at adjusting the products of a culture that was not their own to their horizon of expectations. Moreover, they had to imagine this culture based on documents that were often accessible only in corrupt and misleading forms. In the second half of the Quattrocento, the “otherness” that interpreters had to encounter was the remaining of Greek culture, whose documents began to circulate after the Council of Florence and as a consequence of the emigration that followed the fall of Constantinople (Shank 2008; Pingree 1964; Paschos and Sotiroudis 1998 pp. 13-14). Pertinent to Pontano’s case, I have recognized the pattern of conjecture (coniectura), observation (observatio), experience (experientia) and poetic inspiration (furor, contagio) in his annotated translation into Latin of the pseudo-Ptolemaic Centiloquium, a collection of astrological aphorisms traditionally, and wrongly, attributed to Ptolemy. In this commentary, Pontano employed the language of Cicero’s De Divinatione and the typology of divination outlined in this dialogue in order to resolve a major interpretive problem posed by this text.

Ptolemy’s was a second century Egyptian astronomer from Alexandria, whose attributed works covered astronomy, astrology, geography and mathematical sciences such as music. Part of his canonical works was already known to the Latin world thanks to the translation of Gerard of Cremona, a twelfth-century intellectual who led a school of translation at the court of the Spanish king Alfonso X, in Toledo. Astronomical works such as the Almagest, therefore, along with the astrological treatise Tetrabiblos were not new to Italian scholars. With the establishment of lectureships in astronomy/astrology at
the University, Ptolemy’s books became part of standard syllabi and were widely studied and annotated. In 1405 Bologna, for example, fourth year students in astronomy/astrology were supposed to study book three of the *Almagest* along with the entire *Tetrabiblos*. University statutes such as that from Bologna, however, give evidence that not only books belonging to Ptolemy’s canon but also apocryphal texts passed under Ptolemy’s name in Italian universities. One of these writings is the collection of one hundred aphorisms entitled *Centiloquium*, a book that the chair of astrology was to teach during the second academic year along with the commentary written by Ali ibn Ridwan (usually indicated as Haly) (Shank 2008; Grendler 2002 p. 410).

While the access to Greek sources of Ptolemy’s works proved to be crucial for the reception of texts such as the *Almagest* and the *Tetrabiblos*, the rediscovery of a Greek version of the one hundred aphorisms created an interpretive problem. Rather than unmasking the misattribution and inducing readers to approach Ptolemy’s thought in its original form, Greek language provided the *Centiloquium* with a renewed authority and stimulated the work of new translators and commentators. The problem is that Ptolemy’s canonical and apocryphal texts are mutually inconsistent. *Tetrabiblos* is a textbook in astrology that is conceived as complementary to the *Almagest*. While the *Almagest* focuses on problems such as the solar theory, the motion of stars and planetary nomenclature in order to predict the positions of heavenly bodies, *Tetrabiblos* (also known as *Apothelesmata*, i.e. “influences of stars”) outlines a way for interpreting their influence upon earthly things such as weather, the body and water. The treatise is based on the assumption that since the sun and the moon have evident influences upon
terrestrial phenomena, all the other celestial bodies must have similar effects. However, the treatise does not deal with important branches of astrological divination such as the prediction of particular events or the choice of the right time for an action. This is why its authority in the field of astrology was rather limited and later authors felt the need of integrating this work with new treatises that specifically focused on this kind of technical problems. Among these later works, there is the Centiloquium (Toomer 1970 p.198).

Originally entitled Kitab Thamara, the Centiloquium is the work of an Egyptian astrologer of the tenth-century Tulunid era (869-905 A.D.). The work includes one hundred aphorisms (originally called kalimat) grouped into topics such as the interpretation of the disposition of stars at birth, the rules for determining the right time for an action and the relationship between celestial patterns and pathologies such as epilepsy, folly and blindness. Accompanied by the commentary of Ahmad ibn Yusuf, the text was translated into Latin in the thirteenth century. Only later, the text was translated into Greek in the fourteenth century either from the Arabic of Ahmad or maybe from the Twelfth century Latin translation (Lemay 1978 pp. 96-97). This Greek version entitled Karpos was retranslated into Latin by Quattrocento scholars such as George of Trebizond and, pertinently to this chapter, Giovanni Pontano.

Among the many inconsistencies between Ptolemy’s original works and this collection of aphorisms, the most striking one is the outline of the system of astrological knowledge found in the first kalima-aphorism. In the first book of Ptolemy’s Tetrabiblos, the author presents astrological divination as the result of a rational process of inference from the disposition of celestial signs and the positions of the planets. Prediction, in other
words, is said to have an inferential status. However, the first aphorism of the *Centiloquium* presents astrological knowledge as working on two different levels. The first level, which is similar to that found in Ptolemy, is based on the formulation of a probable hypothesis based on observation and experience. The second level, which differs from Ptolemy, is said to stem from a kind of inspiration that exercises its influence on a special portion of the soul that is closer to the stars (Lemay 1978 p. 92). Differently from the experienced conjecturer envisioned in Ptolemy’s book, the *Centiloquium* compares the perfect astrologer with prophets, hermits, epileptics. How did Pontano make sense of this striking contradiction? The answer can be found in the gloss to this first aphorism found in Pontano’s commentary to the *Centiloquium*.

Giovanni Pontano’s commentary to the *Centiloquium* was written between 1474 and 1478 and dedicated to the Duke of Urbino Federigo da Montefeltro. Pontano, who was among the first protagonists in the rediscovery of Ptolemy that marks the fifteenth century (Faracovi 2003 p.197), devoted his best philological acumen to the study of this text and conceived his effort also as a response to the Greek astronomer and scholar George of Trebizond (Rinaldi 1999). In the preface, the author presents his work as a tribute to the Duke’s literary and astronomical studies, and also as a follow-up to the conversations they previously had in Rome. The context of this intellectual enterprise is the courtly patronage of Duke Federigo, who was a patron of astronomical/ astrological studies and often commissioned literary and artistic works on the subject.

The commentary is written according to the standard of the “running commentary,” which presents a short quotation from the original text (in this case the single aphorism)
and accompanies it with a long gloss (sententia). The book is divided into two sections, which include the glosses to the first and the last fifty aphorisms respectively. The author’s translation of the first aphorism runs as follows:

From you and from science. It cannot happen that one who is learned (sciens) predicts specific forms of events, just as sensory perception receives not the particular but the general form of a sensible thing. One should handle this kind of things by means of conjecture (coniectura). Only those who are divinely inspired (numine afflati) formulate predictions on particular events.23

The text continues with a gloss that draws a line between two kinds of divination, which the author indicates as natural and artificial. He ascribes them respectively to a naturally infused gift and to art. In distinguishing natural from artificial divination, the author writes:

The first kind seems to be triggered by the stars: nothing that is indicated by celestial motions is rationally or intentionally disposed. We usually call frenzied those motions that are uncontrolled and are not moderated by human art and reason, and we call frenzied and raving those who move in that way; some people even call them demonic, while they are vulgarly defined spirited. As I said, the predictions of these individuals are ascribed to the stars, although we believe that prophets divine under the influence of some kind of divine inspiration (divino quodam afflato), and their prognostications and predictions are called God’s oracle. The second kind consists of reason and observation.24

The discussion continues by providing a list of examples of these two kinds of divination, which includes on the one hand individuals such as Sibyls and Muslims, on

23 Centum Ptolemaei Sententiae ad Syrum Fratrem A Pontano E Graeco in Latinum Translata Atque Expositae lib I Sig. AaII v: “A te et a scientia. Fieri enim nequit, ut qui sciens est, particulares rerum formas pronuntiet, sicuti nec sensus particulararem sed generalem quandam suscipit sensibilis rei formam; oportetque tractantem haec rerum coniectura uti. Soli autem numine afflati praedicunt particularia.” (italics mine).
24 Centum Ptolemaei Sententiae ad Syrum Fratrem A Pontano E Graeco in Latinum Translata Atque Expositae lib I Sig. AaIII r: “Et prior illa videtur a stellis excitari, nulla eorum quae dicantur, quaeque coelestibus motibus indicentur, habita ratione aut consilio. Hos motus ut inconsideratos, ac nulla humana arte rationeque temperatos appellare sollemus fanaticos, et eos ipsos sic moveantur, tum fanaticos, tum lymphatos dicimus, quidam etiam daemoniacos, vulgus spiritatus appellat.”
the other hand augurs, conjecturers and astrologers. The author, however, conceives the two kinds as mutually related. He exemplifies his point by comparing the inspired astrologer with the good poet:

But as art alone does not make poets good because nature crucially counts in making them, likewise discipline alone does not make an astrologer. Since the astrologer is an interpreter of celestial signs, it is necessary that nature exercise its influence upon him even more than it does upon the poet: as they assert, physicians and emperors should be fortunate, and this is ascribed to a benign celestial configuration at birth.  

To sum up, Pontano resolves the inconsistency between Ptolemy’s Tetrabiblos and the apocryphal Centiloquium by presenting a system of knowledge that relies on two kinds of divination that he calls natural and artificial. Based on his knowledge of Cicero’s De Divinatione, the author defines an ideal figure of astrologer-poet that combines the gift of an astrologically disposed inspiration to the results of a life long trained practice. He provides the perfect astrologer with the gift of inspiration and the expertise in the practice of conjecture. Likewise, he envisions the perfect poet as the recipient of an astrologically imparted inspiration and as the expert practitioner of an art. How does the language of conjecture and inspiration formulated in the Centiloquium commentary apply to poetry? Is there a link between the act of formulating an astrological prognostication and writing a poem? The answer to these questions is to be found in Pontano’s De Rebus Coelestibus.

Conjecture and Knowledge

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25 Ibid. “Sed ut bonos Poetas ars sola non efficit, plurimumque in iis natura valet, sic neque sola disciplina mathmaticum perficit, in quo cum coelestium significationum interpres sit, multo etiam magis quam in Poeta necesse est uti natura ipsa vires suas exercet, quando medicum quoque et imperatorem asseverent fortunatum esse oportere, quod natalium stellarum beneficio illis tribuitur.”
Having seen how Pontano's ideas on rhetoric stem from the author's writings on astrology, one may ask why in the last part of his career these subjects are treated in apparently independent kinds of writing and addressed to a radically changed audience. As it has been illustrated, the commentary of the *Centiloquium* is dedicated to the Duke of Urbino and thus conceived within the system of courtly patronage. In the introduction, the author reminds his dedicatee of their erudite conversation in Rome at the end of 1460s and presents astrology as a highly dignified subject that is worthy of a prince. The prestige of this endeavor is confirmed by the history of the book, which circulated as an elegant presentation copy directly sent to Urbino, which subsequently started circulating in the form of a well crafted incunable. The situation drastically changed at the time of Pontano's *De Rebus Coelestibus*, the fourteen-book-long treatise that sums up the author's views on astrology at the end of his career. Pontano left this work unrevised and unpublished during his life. The few intended interlocutors were only a part of the members of the author's intellectual community in Naples. Unlike the *Commentary*, this work does not appear to have been directed toward a specific patron neither to have circulated within the system of courtly patronage. Rather, *De Rebus Coelestibus* seems to have been a private kind of writing, whose changing readership the author and his posthumous editor repeatedly manipulated in the prologues.

The link between the theory of knowledge found in the treatise on rhetoric and the author's opinions about astrology are found in Pontano's late astrological writings collected in *De Rebus Coelestibus*. This link also constitutes a means for accessing the author's astrological poetry. In the second book of *De Rebus Coelestibus*, in the context
of a discussion on the mental process involved in assigning names and figures to celestial clusters and planets, Pontano states that human beings are naturally inclined to knowing ("insita est a natura sciendi cupiditas"), and that knowledge (scientia) is produced by observation and reason. He further asserts that this process is at work also in the case of ignorance, which natural philosophers (physici) named privation (privatio), but that should be more appropriately named shortage (carentia).²⁶ This distinction has its premises in the reception of Aristotle's theory of knowledge. Natural philosophers like Alexander of Aphrodisias interpreted this theory by stressing the materialistic implications of De Anima (ignorance as a privation of impressions upon the soul). In response to natural philosophers, Pontano's text describes the activity of the mind in the language of rhetoric. Under the stimulus of empirical observation, the mind is said to judge (decernere) and conjecture (coniectare) by means of similes (similitudines), comparisons (comparationes), approval (comprobatio) and concession (concessio). The judgments and the conjectures that result from this process are then represented to the soul which divides them into the domains of reason (which collects necessary events) and conjecture (which collects possible events):

The mind uses similes and above all those similes that either are true or look certain. And these similes refer not only to qualities but also to motions and time. Once the mind has used similes as if they were a kind of middle ground, it weighs them. When they all convene, approval arises along with the kind of admission that has an exceptional power for conjecturing. Then, the mind represents this approval and mutual admission of similes to the soul, through which it indicates the right way. Meanwhile, it shows the way to those things that belong to the

ambit of reason and those that belong to that of conjecture, which although they are not necessary, most of the time happen, and in their usual way occur.\textsuperscript{27}

The passage fills the abstract theoretical mould of Aristotle's epistemology with the language and actions of the rhetorician. In rhetoric, the comparison is one of the devices used for defending a fact whose justice is discussed as something useful and one of the genres of amplification. As a figure of thought, the comparison is created by arranging similes (Lausberg 2002 pp.25, 56,222; Veding 1994 p.293-294). The process of arranging similes by comparing them is said to produce admission and approval, which have the quality of triggering judgment and conjecture. Admission (\textit{cocessio}) is one of the devices used to excuse a person whose action has been judged guilty; as a figure of thought, it is a kind of digression that admits the adversary's correctness (Lausberg 2002 p.26, 243; Veding 365-367). Approval, on the contrary, is the sympathy between speaker and audience that results from the success of the speech (Veding 1994 p. 305-306). Therefore, Pontano envisioned conjecture as the device of a process of induction through the use of comparisons/admissions, whose results are possible arguments about events that may happen.

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Ibid.} : “Cum autem mens ipsa plurimum nitatur \textit{similibus}: atque illis maxime: quae aut sunt: aut certe videntur eadem: ipsaeque \textit{similitudines} non qualitatum modo sint: verum etiam motuum ac temporum: his tanquam mediis quibusdam usa: \textit{similitudines} eas simul comparat: quarum e \textit{comparatione} ubi omni e parte una convenerint: enascticit \textit{comprobatio} atque \textit{consenso} illa: quae mirificam in se vim habet et ad conticiendum: et ad decernendum. Mens igitur \textit{comprobationem} hanc: \textit{similitudinumque} inter se \textit{consensionem} secuta: ea \textit{repraesentat} animo: per quem viam illi monstrat: et tanquam iter inernit nunc ad ea quae \textit{rationis} ipsius sunt: nunc ad illa: quae \textit{coniecturae}: quae si non omnino certa ac necessaria sunt: plurumque tamen evenire: atque ita sese habere sunt solita.” (italics mine). It is not clear to me whether Pontano is alone in this “epistemological” use of rhetorical language or this kind of language is common at the time. Standard reference book insists on the humanistic revival of analogical thinking in the discourse of moral philosophy (Veding 1994 p. 297). My hypothesis is that Pontano’s revival of the heuristic function of conjecture/analogy is a trademark of his intellectual community. Its interlocutors may be commentators of Aristotle’s rhetoric and philologists who cultivated natural philosophy such as Ermolao Barbaro, George of Trebizond, Lorenzo Buonincontri and Angelo Poliziano.
Pontano's ideas on the function of comparisons in formulating conjectures sharply contrasts with alternative positions available at the time, and more specifically with the ideas cultivated within Marsilio Ficino's intellectual community in Florence. Some scholars occasionally compared Pontano's works with Marsilio Ficino's astrological meditations based on these scholars' common interest in astrology and medicine (Saxl Panofsky-Klibanski 1964 pp.277-278). However, I propose that these authors' work give evidence of two incommensurable modes of thinking concerning the nature of comparisons. In the third book (De Vita Coelitus Comparanda) of his treatise De Triplici Vita (first printed 1489), for example, Ficino used the verb comparare to describe not only the identification of occult analogies between macrocosm and microcosm, the stars and the sublunar world but also the process by which the human soul can find and obtain life from the stars and the natural world.\(^{28}\) It must be conceded that Pontano used comparisons as instruments for understanding otherwise obscure connections of events by means of plausible conjectures. Pontano, however, framed these associations within the rhetorical concept of convenience (convenientia) and elegance (concinnitas). Moreover, he questioned their appropriateness and motivated their use with didactic (nowadays we would say heuristic) utility.\(^{29}\) Pontano envisioned conjectures, in other words, as heuristic fictions.

\(^{28}\) *De Triplici Vita* III xxii: 10-15 (p.362-363): “Sicut enim corpus per harmoniam quotidie suam, id est per situm et habitum et figuram opportune lumini calorique Solis exponimus, sic et spiritum occultis stellarum viribus comparandis per suam quandam similem harmoniam imaginibus (ut opinantur) et certe medicinis, odoribus harmonice compositis comparatam.”

Rather than tracing Pontano's views to the context of Marsilio Ficino, I propose to interpret the author's views on what conjecture means and how it works as an extension of what Cicero meant by conjecture in *De Divinatione*. This extension can be understood within the discourse of rhetoric set out by Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. In Aristotle's text, conjecturing (*proeikazein*) is a process associated with discourses that belong to the deliberative genre, which deals with events that happen in the future. Aristotle ascribed conjecture to the rhetorical argument called example (*paradeigma*), namely to the example drawn from the knowledge of past events in order to foresee something that may happen in the future based on a relationship of resemblance (*eikai*). The scope of examples is limited to create persuasion (*pystis*) and its cognitive principle is found in induction (*epagoge*). An extension of the scope of conjecture is found in Cicero. In *De Inventione*, Cicero indicated conjecture as the operation for finding arguments in response to questions that deal with whether a fact occurred or not (*constitutio coniecturalis*). Whereas *De Inventione* reports examples of conjecture only from the context of judicial discourse, Cicero extended the domain of conjecture to other ambiits in his late writings *Topica* (xxi 82) and *De Oratore* (III xxix 113). These texts bring forth the ideal of the learned rhetorician as one who is able to find arguments about every kind of question. These writings present conjecture as the process of finding arguments to address not only practical but also theoretical issues concerning the causes of an event.

30 Aristotle's term *proeikazein* was translated into the Latin *conjectatio*. See, for example, Ermolao Barbaro's translation of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* lib.I cap.IX "Sed incidunt tamen causae plerumque ut necesse sit, et rerum prateritarum admonitionem quandam, et mentionem institui, et futurorum interpretationem et coniectationem aliquam adhiberi." (italics mine).
Evidently, the use of conjecture that Cicero's *persona* presents in the second book of *De Divinatione* narrows the semantic extension of the term to the judicial cause for the sake of the argument (refuting artificial divination and its tools). This does not mean that Pontano could not find in Cicero a precedent for the wide use of conjecture found in his astrological works. Conjecture and the use of comparisons are thus intended as instruments for formulating hypothesis.

Although Pontano's extended use of conjecture can be described as a consequence of the author's knowledge of Cicero and framed within the ideal of learned eloquence, its function can be grasped by looking at how the author presented his astrological work and responded to competing divinatory systems such as physiognomy. Pontano's definition of an inductive and conjectural form of knowledge takes part in an ongoing discussion among other scholars of the time, whose work of translation and rediscovery of ancient texts was often accompanied by the research of potential practical applications. This critique is found in the fourth book of *De Rebus Coelestibus*. This text sets out to cross reference astrological theories about the planets with recent natural philosophical findings by weighing all the systems for interpreting celestial signs with the physical explanation of the natural causes that link the celestial and the sublunar sphere. The goal is that of achieving more and more accurate divinatory conjectures by inferring them from a set of safer data. The task implies the reconciliation of a kind of divination (astrology) with the findings and the methodology of the study of natural causes practiced by natural philosophers. The guiding assumption is that a better knowledge of *why* natural phenomena occur will conversely allow more accurate interpretation of *what* these
phenomena mean in their mutual relationship. Pontano is convinced of being the first person to venture into a task which in his words is motivated by the state of abandon in which the discipline was left at his time. This intention is expressed with great emphasis at the beginning of book 4, which addresses the reader by announcing the priority and difficulty of the project of explaining physically the properties (vires), quality, quantity, meaning (significatio) and ordinance (decretum) that each planet (erratica) has upon inferior things. This project is said to be worth undertaking because of the pitfalls of the Latin astrological tradition (nostra traditio) in fields such as planetary astrology. 31

Pontano emphasized upon the difference between astrology and physiognomy. The argument in support of astrology is wrapped in the language of a friendly exchange which cross reference the practice of conjectures based on the observation and the interpretation of signs with literary criticism and erudite allusions. Pontano makes reference to and quotes from Theodore Gaza's translation into Latin of Aristotle's De Animalibus (written ca.1454; first printed Venice 1476) a work that is praised because it had shown the light to a group of blind scholars (that is, ignorant of Greek language) but that is criticized for having indulged too much to the expectations of certain unnamed

Latinists. This work, argues Pontano, had taught how to infer the inclination of individuals to fraud or the length of life from the observation of the shape of feet or from the number of teeth. These clues (indicia), however, are too unpredictable to be reliable, and this makes celestial configurations and movements the source of more meaningful signs.

Conjecture and Planetary Models

Pontano’s *De Rebus Coelestibus* applies the language of conjecture to the discussion of planetary models, thus originally responding to the ongoing debate between natural philosophers and astronomers concerning the status of astronomy. Pontano took part in this debate by explaining planetary motions in the language of conjecture. In the third book of *De Rebus Coelestibus* the author discusses the physical properties of celestial bodies (nowadays, we would say cosmology) along with the astronomical models used for calculating planetary positions and motions. This section explores whether stars, planets and their mutual configuration have the physical properties that

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32 This note of subtle polemic may echo the polemic that surrounds Gaza’s collaboration with the philologist Andrea Bussi in Rome. Bussi had mentioned Gaza’s help in the preface to his edition of Pliny’s *Historia Naturalis* (first printed before 1470); this edition, however, was harshly criticized by contemporaries.

astrologers attribute to them. If true, this claim would imply that heavens are corruptible as the sublunar sphere. If untrue, this claim would require an explanation of the causes of heavenly motion that is different from the one that holds true for the sublunar world. This question originates from the interpretation of a passage from Ptolemy’s *Tetrabiblos* discussed at the end of the second book. More specifically, the author asks whether the properties associated with the celestial signs belong to the signs themselves or rather to terrestrial elements\(^34\) as Ptolemy’s attribution of moist and cold to the moon itself seems to imply.\(^35\) The question crystallizes at the end of the second book, in which the author weighs the opinion according to which Mercury becomes dry or moist because of its propinquity to the Sun and the Moon. In this context, the author also announces the discussion of book three.\(^36\)

The author asserts that there is no generation and corruption in the sky and celestial bodies exercise their effect upon the sublunar sphere (e.g. solar heat, generation of winds) by means of an intrinsic power (*vis insita*) that radiates upon the elements.

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\(^35\) *Ibidem* lib. II F ii v : “Non erit igitur minus calida (seil. luna): quod aut humida: aut frigida: praesertim cum Ptolemaeus putet ab evolantibus e terra vaporibus hoc ei contingere: quod falsum esse supra ostensus est.”

Consistent with these premises, the author explains planetary motion by conjecturing that planets move spontaneously based on the analogy with fish, birds and their motion in water and air. The explanation is offered in the form of a rhetorical question. At this point the author discusses the astronomical model that assumes the existence of epicycles in order to save retrograde motion. In a language that echoes his discussion on poetic fictions, Pontano defines them as fictionally created (commenti, imaginarii) devices. He admits their didactic utility, denies as absurd any claim about their physical reality and compares them with the lines traced in the sky by the soothsayer.

Pontano's conjectural approach to the physical features of celestial motions and the mathematical models used to predict their possible positions participates to the fifteenth century debate on the science of stars and its status. According to Pierre Duhem, the science of stars was traditionally divided between two different disciplines (natural philosophy and astronomy) animated by different goals and ambitions (Duhem 1969). This division stemmed from Plato's definition of astronomy as the science that is in charge of accounting for observed celestial motions by means of hypotheses that “save the phenomena” (Duhem 1969 p.6). The counterpart of Plato's view of astronomy was Aristotle's ambition of assessing a science of stars made of propositions based on a consistent theory about the nature of heavenly bodies (Duhem 1969 p. 7). According to


Duhem, this dichotomy manifested itself throughout the centuries, and also in the Renaissance before Copernicus (Duhem 1969 pp.46-60). Astronomers like Regiomontanus, Duhem has explained, developed their technical skills without questioning the nature and value of Ptolemy’s planetary hypotheses (Duhem 1969 p. 46). In contrast with astronomers, natural philosophers who followed Averroes' commentary on Aristotle (the Paduan School) questioned the status of astronomical hypotheses. In their perspective, astronomical hypotheses could compete with physics in explaining the actual structure of heavens (Duhem 1969 pp. 46-47).

Although highly influential and extremely useful analytically, Duhem’s thesis is currently under scrutiny among historians of science who have investigated the competition between astronomy and natural philosophy. Duhem’s interpretation of the astronomer Regiomontanus, for example, has recently been questioned through a close analysis of his ideas on the status of astronomical models in the context of a controversy with George of Trebizond (Shank 2002). Pertinent to Pontano’s case, Duhem has proposed to frame *De Rebus Coelestibus* in the current that understands astronomical hypotheses as heuristic fictions invented to visualize and understand the otherwise unknowable real structure of heavens (Duhem 1969 p. 56). Pontano's views on the status of planetary models can be usefully understood in the framework of Duhem's theory. However, the author’s ideas on planetary models are best understood in the context of his astrological and rhetorical writings, rather than a manifestation of fictionalism in Duhem’s sense. Rather than being a precursor of the form of positivism that Duhem's theory was trying to trace back in the history of Western culture, I propose that Pontano’s
view on the didactic utility of fictional astronomical models is consistent with the
treatment of astronomical/natural philosophical problems as conjectural issues left open
to discussion.

Celestial Nomenclature

Pontano further defines his views on the conjectural status of his knowledge of
stars in the discussion on celestial nomenclature found in the second book of *De Rebus
Coelestibus*. The topic of this book stems from the status of astrology itself. As a mode of
foretelling, astrology implies a practice - divination achieved by reading a set of given
celestial signs - based on the mechanism of writing a map of celestial signs recognised in
the sky (Sabbatucci 1989). Writing the celestial map has literary and rhetorical
implications which are announced in the status of this book, which is conceived as a
discussion between the author (who plays the role of the star-gazer) and the Neapolitan
poet Jacobo Sannazaro (Actius Sincerus).39

Pontano interpreted the mechanism of grouping and naming celestial clusters as the
task of stargazers and poets. He described the writing of the celestial map as a rhetorical
endeavor that adopts the rhetorical trope of analogy (*similitudo*) in the process of finding

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39 The dedication of book II presents some philological problems. In the apograph Barberiniano Latino
338 the author generally did not indicate the dedicataires, so the choice has to be ascribed to Pontano's
editor Summonte (Monti Sabia 2000 pp. 60-61). In the apograph, Sannazaro's shows up as the dedicataire
of book VII (which becomes the VIII in the printed edition because Summonte split book II in two parts);
Summonte then dedicated to himself this book and moved Sannazaro's name up to the second book.
Although this change can be read as Summonte's tribute to Sannazaro (Monti Sabia 2000 p.64),
Sannazaro's presence in the second book makes perfectly sense within the praise of poets and poetic talent
that is found in this prologue.
connections between stars, animals and things. In meditating on the linguistic process that underpins the knowledge of stars, the author brings forth the language and the motifs of Lorenzo Valla's views on language as they are expressed in the *Elegantiae Linguae Latinae*. In this book, which is not limited to the stylistic improvement of humanistic Latin, Valla had formulated an epistemology Marsh has persuasively labeled as a form of empirical inductivism, whose main focus was the study of language and especially of meaning (today, we would call it *semantics*) (Marsh 1979). Valla's approach to linguistic inquiry is based on the notions of experience (*usus, consuetudo*) and observation (*observatio*). Valla's method adopted the study of etymologies as a way for accessing the customs of a certain society, and is applied almost eminently to juridical and theological problems.

Pontano often attacked Valla by attributing his ideas and behaviors to grammarians of the past such as Macrobius and Gellius and directly mentioned him as a negative example of behavior to keep in society. However, in his dialogues Pontano inherited the method and the philosophical perspective of his former teacher and enemy (Marsh 1979 pp. 114-115). Likewise, I propose that Pontano used Valla's ideas in addressing the

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41 Lorenzo Valla was in the service of Alfonso of Aragon, king of Naples and Sicily, between 1435 and 1448. Although respected for his learning, Valla did not get along at all with Antonio Beccadelli, Pontano's mentor. The reasons of this conflict are complex, but they certainly include a different attitude toward the study of Greek and the role of grammar in the study of poetry, as one can evince from Pontano's retrospective look upon these humanists that is found in the dialogue *Antonius*. Valla's rhetorical background along with his conversational and dialogic way of practicing philosophy, however, presents strong elements of continuity with Pontano's dialogues and theoretical writings.
problem of celestial nomenclature. In Pontano’s view, poets who named stars did not
transmit their knowledge by wrapping it into a discourse deprived of rhetorical
embellishment (*inornata*). Celestial names are poetic inventions (*commenta*), which
function on the one hand to transfer this knowledge to posterity through the use of
analogy (*similitudo*), and on the other hand to distinguish one sign from the other.\(^{42}\) This
mechanism is understood within an overarching idea that considers language as the
cement of society and its mechanism is explored through a study of etymologies, which
Pontano interpreted as deductions from observed properties.\(^{43}\)

Celestial naming is the result of a poetic ability to assign names to stars in order to
preserve the memory of their features and properties. Moreover, celestial naming is the
mechanism that created the system itself. If the reliability of the system can be validated
by the regularity of celestial motions and their interpretation can be described by a
rhetorical theory of conjectural knowledge, Pontano needed to explain the origin of this
system by reconciling artificial and natural divination, knowledge based on conjecture
and frenzy (*furor*). This attempt, which transcends the author’s rhetorical framework,
finds its clearest formulation in a passage of the second book that summarizes the
progress of human knowledge as a cyclical succession of discovery, oblivion and

\(^{42}\) *De Rebus Coelestibus* lib. II sig. D7v: “Quibus quidem *nominum* inditionibus: *decretorum ac*
*potestatum notis ornamenti plurimum atulere Poetae: dum commentis suis illum quoque cognitionem*
*partem: quae ad stellas pertinent: intactam inornatamque relinquere noluerat. Neque ab re igitur neque per*
*iocum indita fuere stellis ac coelestibus signis nomina: neque dicendi aut fingendi lascivia comparata:*
*quando ea commenta est observatio rationi contiuncta: atque illius socia: quo et naturam proprietatemque*
*cuiusque indicaret: quandamque (ut dictum est) per similitudinem transferret ad posteros: et alterum ab*
*altero signum propria ac sua ciusque appellatione distinguere.”

\(^{43}\) *De Rebus Coelestibus* lib II sig.D7v: “An non idem quoque ab hominis ipsis servatum est imponendis
notis: appellandisque suo nomine rebus singulis? quibus *hominum coetus* uteretur ac sine quibus constare*
*humana societas nulla ratione posset. In quibus id praecipue animadversum est: ut notae ipsae rerum ab*
effectionibus potissimus proprietatibusque deducerentur: ut Mamae a manatu lactus dictae [...].”
rediscovery, harmoniously triggered by the movement of stars. This cyclical process is conveyed stylistically through a striking alternation of verbs in the perfect and future perfect tenses along with an exceptional use of the rhetorical figure of anticipation (prolexis). The author envisions this process as occasionally broken by the birth of an exceptionally gifted individual whose discoveries are as important as they are unpredictable. The work of this solitary hero is said to transcend the diligent work of pattern recognition conducted by the rest of mankind. Triggered by an almost divine impulse, this individual can disclose secrets of the heavens that human experience has never known:

Although, I think, nature itself has set out that one day, every thousand years and sometimes after long periods of time, it will have generated and in the end will generate a person who - after everything is forgotten and will have disappeared from the memory of humans (as everything disappears and more and more often will disappear) - inspired by some kind of divine inspiration that surpasses that of common men will have revealed celestial secrets, which neither observation had never penetrated nor even the most constant application ever had exposed for observation.44

The *vates* as Astrologer

The dynamics between natural and artificial divination, inspiration (*adflatus*) and conjecture (*coniectura*) is at the heart of Pontano’s mode of thinking. Pontano defined his

44 *De Rebus Coelestibus* lib.II sig. D vi v: “Quanquam natura ipsa comparatum esse arbitror: in tot annorum ac seculorum millibus: ut *unum* quandoque aliquem interiectis videlicet multorum temporum intervallis protulerit: ac tandem etiam aliquando sit in lucem prolatura: posteaque res ipsae obliteratae seculorum vetustate ab hominum memoria exciderint: ut quidem et saepius excidere: et etiam excidere: *qui coeli secreta divino* quodam *adflatu maioreque* quam homunitorum *impulsu* reseraverit: sitque suis etiam seculis reseraturus: ad quae neque *observatio* antea penetraverat: neque *consuetudo* quamvis diuturna viam monstraverat *observationi*."

position within the theoretical framework of Cicero's *De Divinatione*. He explored its rhetorical implications in the treatise *De Sermone*. These rhetorical implications are grounded in Pontano's astrological writings *Centiloquium* and *De Rebus Coelestibus*. On the one hand, Pontano defined an independent position between astronomy and natural philosophy that brings forth the virtues of rhetorical truth and the practice of observation-experience in the development of learning. On the other hand, he ascribed a prominent position to astrologically inspired truth in the progress of knowledge. What role do these positions play in the author's poetic writings? How did he incorporate the dynamics between conjecture and inspiration in his dialogues and poems? The remainder of this chapter will address these questions by insisting on the correspondance between the author's theoretical and poetic writings.

**The Origin of Poets**

Pontano explored the poetical implications of Cicero's discussion on divination in the dialogues *Antonius* and *Actius*. In the *Centiloquium*, the author had stated that poetry and astrology stem from a natural disposition to knowledge that can be ascribed to the influence of the astrological configuration at the moment of an individual's birth. This view is reiterated in the second book of *De Rebus Coelestibus*, which states that no poet has ever been born without Venus and Mercury in the right locations of his natal chart. To prove this point, the author uses his own horoscope in order to explain his own inclination to poetry and knowledge:

No good poet was ever born, in whose natal chart Venus and Mercury were not found in the apposite signs and in the appropriate houses. Indeed, poets are made
by stars: [...] I, who am writing this, never had a teacher who taught me to write verses, to learn philosophy or to understand the meanings of the sky. Nature alone, the intimate part of my soul and the constant devotion to ancient writers brought me to these studies.

Consistent with this view, Pontano circumscribed a group of naturally gifted poet-philosophers within his intellectual community. This group of chosen few includes Actius (Sannazaro), the addressee of the second book of *De Rebus Coelestibus*. This view also distinguishes the author's position with regard to the debate on poetic inspiration which marks the last decades of the Quattrocento.

In the dialogue *Antonius*, Pontano advanced the thesis that only poets can appropriately interpret poetry and by so doing he criticized the work of grammarians. The polemical target of this discussion is Lorenzo Valla's pedantry. This text presents itself as a tribute to Antonio Panormita, who was Pontano's master and predecessor in the leadership of his intellectual community in Naples. By staging a discussion about Virgil's *Aeneid*, the dialogue defines a critical approach that combines rhetorical expertise, natural philosophical learning and an undefined sympathy with the author's writing. This approach, however, is reserved for a "happy few" who are naturally inclined to poetry (p.67: 25-30) and thus excludes the grammarians' approach. Grammarians are constantly described as rabid dogs animated by an exaggerated polemicism. Their approach consists

45 *De Rebus Coelestibus* lib. II Sig. E ii v. : "Nullus evasit bonus Poeta: cuius in genitura Venus Mercuriusque in signis accommodatis: in locis idoneis: in apporsitis configurationibus inventi non fuerint. Nanque ab iis potissimum stellis Poetae formantur. [...] Nos qui haec scribimus nullo a praeceptore ad carmen componentum: aut ad philosophiam ediscendam: aut ad coeli significaciones intelligendas instituti sumus. Sola enim natura insitaque animi vis: ac vterum scriptorum lectio assidua: ad haec ipsa nos traxit." This view, as I will show, is reiterated through Pardo's persona in the dialogue *Actius*. 
in searching the meaning of a poem by testing it against a set of dogmatic linguistic prescriptions, naïve criteria of historical consistency and excessive attention to Greek models. Although the dialogue does not mention his name, it is more than reasonable to think that the rabid dogs, the “sleepy Gellius” and the “drunken Macrobius” whom the interlocutors ridicule refer to Lorenzo Valla and his reductionist views about literary interpretation. The idea that only poets can understand poetry because of a natural gift is thus used as an antidote against the reduction of poems to the status of historical documents. However, the source of this natural gift is not explicitly stated in the dialogue Antonius.

Pontano incorporated his astrological views into his works on literature to define poetry as a specific object of inquiry and the poet-philosopher as a distinct intellectual figure. By so doing, he used astrology in order to respond to alternative solutions available at the time. In the dialogue Actius (written post 1471; first printed Naples 1507), Pontano used Pardo's persona in order to transmit his own views on astrology and poetry by staging the interpretation of a dream which occurred to the poet Actius (Jacobo Sannazaro). Pardo (ironically represented as suffering of sleepiness and dizziness) explains why dreams occur and links their cause to the Platonic theory of frenzy (furor) and the contact with the Divine Mind (sympathy-contagio). In his excursus, Pardo clearly links divination and poetry, and insists on the rarity of true diviners and poets. Pardo also alludes (in form of praeteritio) to the astrological explanation of this fact, and reiterates the analogy between poets and diviners based on the etymology of the word vates.
How few and rare poets are, whose ability is believed to emanate from the sky! They have an inborn acquaintance with divine visions, as for some kind of right of hospitality. Also, they draw from the sky a disposition to knowledge and are apt to receive celestial things that glide into them because of direct contact. On this subject many things are told by those who are devoted to that sidereal discipline called ἀστρολογία in Greek. At this point, however, I prefer to leave aside the instruction about these things.\(^\text{46}\)

In the overall structure of the dialogue, this passage plays the role of leading the conversation toward Actius' discussion of the musical and rhetorical features of the hexameter (ironically, Pardo says that this transition will wake up the audience, made sleepy by his talk).\(^\text{47}\)

Pardo's irony about his own excursus on the astrological causes of poetry may be read as a response to the way these arguments were addressed in the context of Florence. Poet and literary critic, Cristoforo Landino (1424-1498) reacted to Lorenzo Valla's reductionist way of interpreting poetic works as historical documents. Landino envisioned a theory of poetry and an approach to the literary text that was meant to counter the technical drift triggered by grammarians (Cardini 1973). Like Antonio Beccadelli and Pontano, then, Landino promoted a way of teaching literature that was based on the active assimilation of the authors and the practice of poetry. His response to Valla's technical philology, however, was formulated in relation to his life-changing encounter with Marsilio Ficino, who shows up as a dramatic person\(\)a in Landino's

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\(^{46}\) Actius p.146 ll. 27-33: "Quam paucissimi vel rarissimi potius existunt poetae, quorum ingenii vis e coelo manare credita est! Quibus itaque divinis cum visionibus haec inest familiaritas, tanquam hospitii ius, et ilia quoque eisdem inest a coelo informatio accipiendi apta visis quae de coelo per contagem illabuntur. Qua de re ab illis qui sideralis scientiae quae ἀστρολογία Graece dicitur studiosi sunt permulta traduntur, quae nos ad illorum hac in parte disciplinam relegamus."

\(^{47}\) Actius p.145 ll.31-37: "Quodque poetica vis vaticinatium habetur persimilis, unde poetae et ipsi vates dicuntur, Syncri ipsius, poeticae quam studiosissimi vel poetae potius et quidem elegantissimi, officium neque indignum fuerit necque ingratum, si et ipsa consensu in hoc de poetis afferret in medium aliquid, quo consessores hos dormitantis iam avocet a somnio, quando loquens ipse de suis quae inter dormiendum offeruntur somnum iam videor audientibus provocasse."
Disputationes Camaldulenses and is a constant interlocutor of his literary works. This conversion to Ficino's interpretation of Plato brought Landino to read poems as if they were philosophical allegories. Consistent with the arguments that were being discussed in Ficino's intellectual community, he explained poetic inspiration within Plato's theory of frenzy (furor). In the dialogue Actius, Pardo's persona illustrates this position while at the same time he alludes to Pontano's astrological explanation of the causes of poetic frenzy. This allusion also plays an important role in Actius' discussion on the musical properties of the hexameters.

Scholars have read the metrical discussion found in Pontano's Actius as foreshadowing stylistic criticism (Martellotti 1970) or as an attempt to counter Florentine approaches (Ferraù 1983). These scholars, however, have isolated Actius' speech on the properties of Virgil's hexameters from Pardo's discussion on astrological inspiration. Consequently, they have overlooked Giovanni Pontano's writings on astrology and natural philosophy in their interpretation of his works on rhetoric and poetry. In contrast with these reductionist interpretations, I propose that the character Actius is meant to embody Pontano's views on inspiration and conjecture. As the recipient of the ominous dream interpreted by Pardo, Actius is characterized as an individual who is astrologically disposed to poetry and divination. His portrait, therefore, is based on the figure of poet-astrologer discussed in the first gloss to the Centiloquium and in De Rebus Coelestibus. Actius' ability in crafting hexameters, on the other hand, is presented as a form of conjecture.
Pontano constructed Actius’ persona as skilled in recognizing patterns of sounds, combinations of vowels and schemas of accents that he reorganizes into new verses for the audience’s admiration. In constructing Actius, Pontano’s language betrays the discussion on the musical properties of the hexameter found in Coluccio Salutati’s *De Laboribus Herculis* (written 1391), a text that had formulated an apology of poetry based on the mathematical exactness of verses (Laurens 2004). Also, Actius is represented as able to recognize the appropriateness of sounds to the subject imitated. This extension of the rhetorical principle of convenience to the phonetic level resonates with George of Trebizond’s *Rhetoricorum Libri Quinque* (written 1433-1434; first printed 1472) (Laurens 2004), which played a crucial role in Pontano’s rhetorical education (Ferrau 1983). The rhetorical context, however, does not exhaust the meaning of Actius’ characterization.

In order to demonstrate that those who are not the recipient of this astrological disposition cannot be good poets and critics, Actius is interrupted by Summonte’s persona. Summonte, who is characterized as the embodiment of the grammarian, complains that Actius is hiding the most interesting arguments (metaphorically designated as “goods”) on poetry. Consistent with Pontano’s views on the superiority of poets over grammarians, Actius rejects Summonte’s comparison between poems and goods as a shallow utilitarian view of literature.

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48 *Actius* p.162 ll.1-3; 7-8: “Ego vero, Parde, arbitror Syncerum (scil. Actius) nostrum multa nos celare velle, quo post, ut mercatores consueseere, longe pluris vendat quod in arca sepositum est, viliori merce iam divendita. [...] Resera igitur arcas mercemque nobis selectiorem explica.”
Astrological Self-Fashioning

Pontano's dialogues explore the poetical implications of Cicero's dynamics between natural and artificial divination in a way that presents the astrological view on the origin of poetic inspiration. In his late poem *Urania*, Pontano translated this dynamics by fashioning himself as an astrologically inspired poet (*vates*) engaged in a dialogue with a young pupil who bears the name of his son (*Lucius*). In the proem to the first book of *Urania*, the author sets out to sing the description of planetary features and movements along with the causal explanation (*unde*) of phenomena that occur in the sublunar world:

> Which fires shine in heaven, which stars move on the silent sky; with which stars the zodiac glitters, and how the planets follow their roots, whence the offspring of men and animals, whence the sea and the winds get their motion; whence the prosperous earth gives birth to diverse creatures from more than one seed, and whence the past and future of things are; ⁴⁹

The author constructs his poetic *persona* as that of the inspired poet (*vates*) directly moved by the Muse Urania:

> such things tell me, o divine Muse Urania, most famous daughter of Jupiter, who draw your name from the sky itself, and may your sisters follow these prayers as well. ⁵⁰

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⁴⁹ *Urania* 1:1-7: "Qui coelo radient ignes, quae sidera mundo/ Labantur tacito, stellis quibus emicet ingens/ Signifer, utque suos peragant errantia cursus,/ Vnde hominum genus et pecudes, unde aequor et aurae/ Concipiunt motus proprios, unde optima tellus/ Educit uarios non uno e semine foetus/ Et rerum euentus manant seriesque futuri."

⁵⁰ *Urania* 1: 8-10: "Dic, dea, quae nomen coelo deducis ab ipso/ Vranie, dic, Musa, Iouis clarissima proles,/ Et tecum castae ueniant ad uota sorores."
The language and the structure of this passage contribute to posit the author's undertaking into a Roman rather than a Greek poetic lineage whose chief model is Virgil, and in particular Virgil’s self portrait inscribed in the *Georgics*. The use of *ignes* ("fires") in reference to the planets, for example, is a distinctive virgilian feature that is meant to evoke in the reader’s mind the language of the cosmic passages of *Georgics.* The position of the list of questions before the invocation to the Muse Urania further links *Urania* with Virgil’s *Georgics* against the models of Hesiod, Lucretius and Manilius (Dalzell 1996). The allusion to Virgil is explicitly stated in the following verses, in which the author presents himself as crowned with the attributes of the *vates* (ivy and laurel) and engaged in a celebratory ritual on Virgil’s grave:

> While you all sing and Echo resounds through the empty valleys, I will tie laurel crowns and green ivy; I will prepare altars and worship the shadows, and bring solemn gifts to the tomb of my favorite poet, who is protected by Parthenope on a green mountain and Sebethos on the clear waves.\(^52\)

Virgil’s name is hidden in a periphrasis that alludes to the poet’s epitaph, which indicates the place of his burial - Naples – by the name of the Siren Parthenope. Virgil is also invoked by the setting of the discussion between the author and his pupil. Virgil’s legendary tomb is indeed located in in the environs of Pontano’s property. In celebrating

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\(^{51}\) *Georgics* I: 335-337: “hoc metuens caeli mensis et sidera serua,/frigida Saturni sese quo stella receptet,/quis ignis caelo Cyllenius erret in orbis.”

\(^{52}\) *Urania* 1: 11-16: “Dum canitis resonatque cauis in uallibus echo,/Ipse legam laurique comas hederamque uirentem,/Ipse aras statuam uiridi de cespite et umbras/Lustrabo, tumuloque feram solennia dona/ Dilecti uatis, uiridi quem monte sepultum/Parthenope liquidamque coli Sebethos ad undam/”
this ritual, the author wears the ivy (*hedera*) and the laurel (*laurus*), which can be read as allusions to the figure of Ennius as he is described by Ovid.\(^53\)

The conventional elements of the proem contribute to situate *Urania* within a well defined literary tradition, that is, the Latin branch of the Hesiodean cosmogonic poetry represented by Virgil. Consistent with Pontano’s views on the astrologically imparted inspiration that turns a writer into a true poet, however, the poet fashions himself as acting under the influx (*numen*) of four planets. First of all, the poet presents his endeavor as undertaken under the protection of the Sun (indicated with the exhornative attribute of Apollon-Phoebus) and the Moon (indicated with the exhornative adjective *Latonia*):

> Assist me, Phebus, father and prince of dancing, author of poetry; and you, Latonian virgin, splendor of the night; and you all gods and goddesses under whose influx (*numen*) is the sky.\(^54\)

The poet envisions the ideal setting of the discussion as well as the task of the addressee as influenced by the powers of Venus and Mercury. The second book of *De Rebus Coelestibus* states that no poet has ever been born without Venus and Mercury in the right locations and ascribes the author’s own inclination to knowledge to these

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53 *Ars Amatoria*. 3: 405-412: “Cura deum fuerunt olim regum que poetae./ Praemia que antiqui magna tulere chori./ Sancta que maiestas et erat venerabile nomen/ Vatibus, et largae saepe dabantur opes:/ Ennius emeruit Calabris in montibus ortus/ Contiguus poni, Scipio magne, tibi,/ Nunc hedereae sine honore iacent, operata que doctis/ Cura vigil Musis nomen inertis habet.” Ovid’s changing use of the figure of *vates* in his poetry goes beyond the scope of this chapter. In *Ars Amatoria*, Ovid plays between prophetic authority and experience in defining himself as a “love prophet” (Ahern 1990 pp.46-48). Ovid also plays with the notion of *vates* as prophet and elegiac in the *Amores*, where he applies this attribute to Tibullus (Perkins 2000). Considering the presence of the word “vates” in Pontano’s elegies, it would be interesting to study whether Pontano employs the term in a way that is allusive of Ovid’s attitude.

54 *Urania* I: 17-19: “Ipse chori pater ac princeps et carminis auctor,/ Phoebe, adsis, noctisque decus *latonia* uirgo./ Dique deaeque omnes, quorum sub numine coelum est.”
planets. Likewise, in *Urania* the poet's reference to these planets' influx is accompanied by the recusation of previous poems written about his son's young age:55

And you, companion of the Aonids, most excellent guide of poets, vivifying Venus (we have already spent enough time playing on the baby's tender fires), while I sing the errant celestial fires, the beloved constellation where the earth and sea and sky begin, which signs you give, which constellation follows you; assist and come prosperous on your white swans. [...] And Mercury, whose ancestor is the sky-bearer Atlas, will assist you, and as a boy will provide boyish skills.56

*Urania* and its meteorological sequel *Meteorum liber* translate into mythical terms the conjectural mode of thinking outlined in *De Rebus Coelestibus* and explored in its rhetorical implications in the treatise *De Sermone*. In these poems the conversation between the mind (who collects observations and represents analogies to the soul) and the soul (who approves these representations and formulates conjectures and judgments) is poetically translated into the conversation between the poet-teacher and the son-pupil. In other words, the dialogic structure of the poem reiterates poetically the mode of thinking that *De Rebus Coelestibus* had cloaked in the language of rhetoric. Consistent with the second book of *De Rebus Coelestibus*, the poet-teacher uses poetic analogies as alternative ways of explaining the causes of celestial and meteorological phenomena. In the third book of *Urania* the author focuses on the *paranatemontea*, that is, those constellations that even if are not part of the zodiac exercise their influence upon human

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55 I propose that “teneros ignes” refers to Pontano's collection of lullabies *Naeniae*.
beings. Of all these constellations, the poet describes properties and mythical origins. In introducing the constellation Auriga, the author gives this theoretical indication:

From there the burning Auriga moves on its beautiful course, and not without a reason he has his name. If myth adorns the sky, fictions are based on usage.\(^57\)

The quotation reveals that a correlation is assumed between the phenomenon that the author wants to explain (\textit{res}) and the way this reality was traditionally represented by assigning a name to it (\textit{nomen}). The quotation may be read as a reference to a realist perspective, which assumes a direct correlation between the name and the thing that the name signifies. The use of the double negation, however, has the effect of attenuating this statement and presenting it as probable. The knowledge of the mythical etiology of a name (\textit{fabula}) is thus presented not only as a mere adornment without any cognitive value, but as a narrative that can serve as a didactic tool for knowing plausible explanations.

In the conclusion of the \textit{Meteorum liber}, the author presents himself as bursting into a prognostication about the future of earth, which in his view will one day be submerged by a flood and then will cyclically renew after this catastrophe. Consistently with the views on conjecture exposed in \textit{De Rebus Coelestibus}, the poet presents himself in the act of extrapolating his own conjecture about the future of earth from the constant observation of natural phenomena. In his view, the sea that separates Europe from Libya,

\(^{57}\textit{Urania} 3: 596-598: \text{“Hinc fervens Auriga vago sese exercit axe,/ Nec sine re nomen traxit. Si fabula coelum/Ornavit, tamen ipsa usum commenta sequitur.”} \)
for example, used to be a strand of land\textsuperscript{58} and the land of Aegypt used to be covered by a lagoon.\textsuperscript{59} \textit{De Rebus Coelestibus} had envisioned the existence of exceptionally gifted individuals cyclically triggered by nature to access secrets generally denied to mankind. Likewise, the poet constructs himself as the recipient of a special gift that allows him to see the future of earth, which after an universal cataclysm will eventually be born again.

In a few verses of rare power, the inspired poet conveys the vision of the flood that will devastate the remaining civilization regardless of honor, piety and familial ties:

[...]

A time will come with the passing of decades when a new land will emerge from the sea, and when reversing upon cities and walls with its huge weight the sea will drown down into its whirlpools fields made sterile. No honor will be for the tombs of kings, without punishment the gods’ temples will collapse, and the same wave will crush the sheep and Jupiter’s golden statue on the rocks. And only one disaster will devastate young and old people, and mothers and husbands and the dear bodies of their siblings. And the desperate mother won’t have enough time to embrace her offspring in tears: the blue whirlpool will swallow her screams and cries, and a wave will sweep away prayers and painted Penates.\textsuperscript{60}

In the conclusion, the poet spectacularly accumulates a series of catastrophic images tied together with future tense sentences. In these verses, the poet exposes his bleak view of history as a constant repetition of destruction and renewal. Deprived of any kind of finality and completely subordinated to the inexorable cycles of nature, the poet

\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Meteorum Liber}: 1159-1561: “Hoc mare, quod nunc ingenti duo litora tractu/ Europam Libyamque secat (non fabula), quondam/Tellus una fuit; medio stetit aequore taurus.”

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Meteorum Liber}: 1568-1572: “Aegyptum Casii soluens de rupe secabat/Nauta uagus, nondum ullum illi nomenque decusue,/ Sed pelago stagnante palus hudaecae lacunae/Nunc regio et populos late foecundat et urbes./Pyramidum ostentans monumenta et nomina regum.”

\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Meteorum Liber}: 1574-1586 [...] “Adueniet lustris properantibus aetas,/ Cum pelago emerget tellus noua, cum mare terris./Incumbens mole ingenti simul oppida et arces/ Cultaque sub rapido secum feret hausta profundo./Nullus honos regum tumulis, impune deorum/ Templa ruent, idem fluctus pecudemque Iouemque/ Auratum affliget scopulo, exitium omnibus unum./ Et clades una absuinet iuuenesque senesque,/ Matres atque uiros et corpora cara nepotum,/ Nec natum complexa parenis miserabilis hudis/ Proficiet lacrimis, clamantem et acerba gementem/ Coeruleus cano uortex absorbet hiatu,/ Et uota et pictos secum feret unda penates.”
astrologer's prediction ends with the vision of a future world that will slowly arise from the ruins of the old one:

After a given time, a new sky, new shores and rivers flowing with crackling water will begin to sustain the new dwellers, and a new world will be slowly restored by Fate.61

Once the poet astrologer has delivered his inspired prognostication, the author can depose the mask of the vates and return to his regular life and studies in the garden of his Villa Antiniana. In a conclusion that corresponds to the proem of Urania, the author greets his Muse and ends his dialogue with his son. Symbolically, the author’s demise of his poetic persona is indicated by the recusation of the vates’ ornaments (ivy and laurel), and his conversion to an easier subject is indicated by the willow tree.62

And getting to the end of labour will be pleasant for you too, Urania, although there is still a light murmur of a water fountain and the gentle currents of prosperous Zephir are still blowing. But his fields and the prosperous Parthenope are calling their vates to take some rest, and so is his pupil. May the ivy and the laurel not crown my head; it will be enough if Sebethus with its blue waters will give me the gift of the willow tree, and Antiniana will welcome me into its fruit bearing gardens.63

One may think that Pontano's poems are examples of didactic poetry conceived as imitations of Lucretius' De Rerum Natura or Manilius's Astronomica. Indeed, Pontano's poetry makes occasional allusions to Lucretius and Manilius (Godard 1991; Hubner

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61 Meteorum Liber: 1595-1599: "[...] Post tempore certo/ Terra recens, coelumque nouum, noua litora, et hudi/ Labentes passim lymphis crepitantibus amnes/ Incipient praebere nouis alimenta colonis,/ Paulatimque nouus fato instaurabitur orbis."

62 The willow tree may refer to the poetic genre coined by Jacopo Sannazaro’s mythological poem Salices.

63 Meteorum liber 1600-1608: "Te quoque uel iuuet ad finem uenisse laborum,/Vranie, licet et fontis leue murmuriue,/Spirarint placidae Zephyris felicibus aurae./ Rura senem, uatemque suum sua ad ocia felix/Parthenope uocat et fesso blanditur alunno./ Non hederae mea non lauri per tempora serpant;Me sat erit, si coeruelse Sebethus ab amne/Intactae salicis fluuiali munere donet./ Ac mihi pomiferis uacet/ Antiniana sub hortis."
1979). Also, the tribute to poetry that Actius' persona pronounce in the conclusion of the dialogue Actius situates Pontano's Urania in a poetic lineage that includes these Roman poets along with Empedocles, Manilius and Arato. This lineage, however, is not used only for defining a poetic genre or justifying the choice of a subject (astrology) that is felt as unappropriate to be addressed in verses. The view of poetry inscribed in Urania reiterates Pontano’s astrological theories and the poem itself can be read as a material demonstration of the author’s ideas on what turns an astrologer into a diviner or what turns a writer into a poet. In this sense, the public performance of Urania before of the members of his intellectual community in 1501 can be interpreted as the living demonstration of Pontano’s philosophical legacy.

Poetic Conjectures

I propose that the dynamics between natural and artificial divination is inscribed in Pontano’s poetic translation of astrological themes in Urania. Some scholars have interpreted Pontano’s astrological poetry as the result of a combination between rhetoric and poetry in Pontano's writings (Tateo 1959; Deramaix 1987). Others have argued that the main difference between prose treatises and poems is the changing degree of amplification (amplificatio) and competitive intention (aemulatio) that these writings display (Ferraù 1983 pp.49-50; Haskell pp.506-507). These interpretations are perfectly acceptable within an exclusively rhetorical-literary perspective. However, I would suggest to shift the focus to how astrological schemas are actually transformed into the language of poetry. This approach can productively reconfigure the boundaries assumed between the author’s poetry and prose works (Miernowski 2008).
Like the poets and diviners inscribed in the *Centiloquium*, the naturally inspired *vates* inscribed in *Urania* presents the stories of planets and constellations as conjectures, thus translating the theory of knowledge outlined in *De Rebus Coelestibus* into the poet’s dialogue with his son. In the conclusion of the first book of *Urania*, the author seals his description of the seven planets with a cosmogonic myth. He demonstrates a critical detachment from his fictional explanation of the first cause. He conceives the first cause (*sator rerum*) as impossible to observe empirically, although he envisions the possibility of finding (*invenire*) arguments about it:

One is the founder of things who rules upon everything. Eyes will never see and hands will never touch him, but only with your mind will you find out about him. Unreachable, he observes the clouds below, walks on the sky’s tops and moderates everything; the most excellent author and only cause of perfect works and good things has ruled upon everything for a long time.64

The *iunctura* “*sator rerum*” needs to be taken as an allusion to the tradition of religious hymns, which was being revived within Ficino’s intellectual community during Pontano’s time. Among the poets who were exploring Ficino’s ideas in their works was Michele Marullus (1450-1500), a Greek refugee who used to be a member of Pontano’s intellectual community before leaving for Rome and Florence. In Florence, Marullus was close to Ficino and Giovanni Pico, under whose invitation he composed his *Hymni Naturales*. Marullus’s poetic collection consists of a series of hymns addressed to mythological personifications of abstract entities such as Chaos, Eternity and Earth.

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64 *Urania* 1: 744-749: “Vnus enim *sator* est *rerum*, qui cuncta gubernat,/ Quemque oculis neque cernere erit neque tangere palmis,/ Sed *tantum mente inuenias*. Nanque arduus imas/ Despectat nubes et coeli culmina pressat,/ Cuncta regens; nam cuncta tuit longe optimus auctór/ Perfectorum operum et rerum causa una bonarum.”
Marullus fashioned himself as a divinely inspired *vates* who reveals cosmogonic myths as ultimate truths (Chomarat 1987) in a way that gives evidence of a quasi-ritualistic way of performing poetry and philosophy commonly practiced by Marsilio Ficino and his entourage. As Walker has persuasively documented, Ficino used to interrupt his philosophical seances to embrace the lyre and burst into hymns addressed to abstract entities such as Justice, Light, Eternity or Truth (Walker 1972 pp. 22-29, 36-7; Walker 1958 pp. 85-110).

I read Pontano's treatment of the cosmogonic myth as a response to the performance of hymns and the image of poets cultivated within Ficino's Florentine circle. As noted earlier in the discussion of inspiration found in Pontano's astrological treatises, the poet of *Urania* consciously distances himself from the literary products that characterize the Florentine enclave. By so doing, the author presents his cosmogony as a fictional episode that results from the poet's invention. The reader is invited to interpret the text as a plausible fabrication resulting from plausible associations of images. This poetic invention builds upon two main *topoi* that are drawn respectively from the traditions of epic and panegyric poetry. As in epic poetry, the author envisions the relationship between prime mover and planets as a reunion of gods that occurs immediately after creation:

After he made every single thing with an easy gesture, the maker of things and creator of the eternal sky calls for a council and summons the gods on the Olympus.65

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65 *Urania* 1: 870-872: “Quae postquam facili perfecit singula nutu/ Ille opifex rerum et mundi inuiolabilis auctor,/ Concilium vocat et superos arcessit olympo.”
The residence of God is envisioned by means of an allusion to the description of place (*topotesia*) found in Claudianus' panegyric *De Consulatu Styliconis*, a text found in Pontano's library (Percopo 1926) that is recalled from the opening lines of the description (Kemp 1969 p.151-152):

Faraway there is an unreachable place of the world, unexplored by men and unknown to human senses. This is the prestigious residence of God, whether he is giving orders to a summit of gods or he is receiving public gifts.  

Claudianus' text offers an empty mould that Pontano fills with an allegorical personification of the Trinity that echoes, and at the same time corrects, Marullus' hymn to Eternity. Pontano's fiction substitutes the elements described in Claudianus' cave of Eternity (the mother of years and the Ouroboros) with the allegorical personifications of the Trinity (God, wisdom-*Sapiencia*, and love-*Amor*), who rule over Fortune and Necessity (*ordo*):

He sits in the middle: Wisdom sits on his right, Love on the other side, and as three gods they sit together on the same throne; mighty Nature, Time, Space, and changing Fortune and immutable Order are under his feet; and then other princes and gods coming from afar.

(Urania 1:875-881)

The description of the place is followed by a list of troops (in this case the seven planets) that will execute God's orders (Urania 1:882-923). The poet translates the planets into poetic terms based on the astrological system of domiciles (*domicilia*), which

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66 *Urania* 1: 873-876: “Est procul immensi regio late ardua mundi/ Non homini explorata, humano aut cognita sensu./ Hic sedes Augusta Dei, siquando uocatis/ Dat leges superis, aut publica munera tractat.” The language echoes Claudianus' panegyric dedicated to the consol Stylichio; *De Consulatu Sylichonis* 2: 424-426: “Est ignota procul nostrae que inperuia genti,/ uix adeunda deis, annorum squalida mater,/ immensi spelunca aeuli, quae tempora uasto.”
associates the seven planets with one (in the case of Leo-Sun and Cancer-Moon) or two constellations of the zodiac. Not only does the passage constitute the poetic correspondent of the discussion on planetary domiciles found in the first book of Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos* (1: 20), but also of Pontano's *De Rebus Coelestibus*. In the treatise, Pontano had tried to explain the rule (*ratio*) of this traditional system by inquiring (when possible) into the nature of planets and constellations. He found the rule in the analogy among the natures of planets and constellations. The system, however, is also explained by means of a web of similes with civic life and music, which stems from the idea that the celestial order follows the rhetorical principle of convenience. The text of *Urania* assumes the knowledge of this system and translates the signs into the attributes assigned to the personification of the planets gathered around God. Saturn, for example, is described as holding the skin of Capricorn and the symbol of Aquarius. Analogously, the poet describes Jupiter as girding quiver and arrows, the weapons of Sagittarius, and wearing two scaly shoulder bands portraying the Pisces.

The execution of God's orders is announced by the reported direct speech of the Creator, which functions the physical structure of the universe envisioned in *De Rebus*

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Coelestibus into epic language. The passage follows the convention of the epic narrative and is introduced with a language (924: “Tum genitor solio placidus sic coepit ab alto”) modelled on Virgil’s Aeneid (2: 2: “inde toro pater Aeneas sic orsus ab alto”). This reported direct speech emplots into the tale of creation Pontano’s cosmology as it is outlined in the third book of De Rebus Coelestibus. God’s orders explain the superiority of celestial forces (935-936: “Vos autem coeli meliore in parte locauí/ Aetheriumque dedi insontis habitare recessum”), which are considered responsible for the generation of the inferior sphere (941-943: “Nunc igitur quae certa manet sententia menti/ Accipite, et quae sit reliquis mihi cura creandis/ Absoluenda quidem mundi inferioris imago) presented as unworthy of God’s direct touch (945: “Nec manibus tractare deum mortalia fas est”; 950: “Pars operi aut rebus desit pater ipse creandis”). Humans are the last to be created and are said to be suitable to receive the celestial fire (953: “Cura sit, aetherios diuini seminis haustus/ apta haurire animos coelesti e fomite ductos”). Humans are therefore inclined to knowledge, virtue and spirituality.

Some critics have interpreted the tale of creation and the representation of the development of humanity from an initial state of scarcity to the triumph of civilization as a consequence of Pontano’s humanism. Interpreters have insisted on how this passage can be understood within a definition of “humanism,” by which they mean the promethean emancipation of mankind from religious ignorance toward a renewed confidence in his skills and potentials (Tateo 1960). This definition has its bedrock in Ernst Cassirer’s reading of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola’s so called Oration on the Dignity of Man, a text that Cassirer has chosen as the epitome of fifteenth century humanism. This text was
thus linked with the Florentine literature on human dignity exemplified by the writings of Giannozzo Manetti. Consequently, its original function and conceptual apparatus were obscured. If understood in its original context, however, Pico's text should be separated from its conventional title, which was attached to it for the first time by its posthumous editor Jacob Wimpfeling in 1504. Moreover, it should be interpreted as a statement of the author's anthropology, which combined the reading of the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the esoteric method of reading the Bible (cabbala) that Giovanni Pico intended to introduce among pre-Reform theologians (Hankins 1998 pp. 476-477; Copenhaver 2002). This reinterpretation of Giovanni Pico's oration induces me to rethink Cassirer's definition of humanism and to formulate a new hypothesis about the meaning of *Urania*.

Rather than the manifestation of a prepackaged humanistic ideology, I propose that the meaning of this passage is better understood in the context of Pontano's own writings *De Rebus Coelestibus* and *De Fortuna*. The conception of human progress from an initial state of poverty to the discovery of crafts and societal bounds triggered by the unpredictable invention of fire a consequence of his humanism. Rather, this passage translates poetically the view that God affects human life through the intercession of planets, who act as necessary causes upon the development of nature. Nature, however, is also affected by accidental causes (*causae eventitiae*) that Pontano conceptualized within

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69 Seznec has proposed to interpret this passage as an expression of Renaissance attempts at reconciling astrological determinism and God's providence. In Seznec's perspective, this reconciliation is ultimately impossible and can occur only in the ambit of art. Then, the author has argued that Pontano's theoretical writings are ultimately contradictory (Seznec 1981 pp.82-83).
the notion of Fortune.\textsuperscript{70} De Rebus Coelestibus had advanced the view that human knowledge develops through a constant process of observation, experience and conjecture, which is occasionally broken by the birth of exceptionally gifted individuals who are naturally inspired by a celestial impulse and have access to areas of knowledge that transcend observation and experience.\textsuperscript{71} This view is reiterated in Pontano’s De Fortuna, which argues that excellence in art and study cannot be achieved through constant work but stems from a natural impulse.\textsuperscript{72}

Consistent with these views, Urania explains that primitive humans learned to protect themselves with shelters from the observation of natural cavities (1131-1134: “[...] aut sicubi montis/ exesi specus, hic aestus et frigora primum/ vitare, et subita se a tempestate tueri/ monstruit) and to collect seeds and fruits from the observation of ants (1137-1138: “Condere poma, nucesque hiemi signare repostas,/ Formica monstrante, causis dum condit in antris). In this phase of human history, knowledge came from labour and experience (\textit{pervigil usus}). The sudden and mysterious apparition of fire breaks the regular development of primitive humans. Although its cause is left unanswered (1142-1143: “Siue ille excussus coelo pugnantibus Euris,/ seu silicis uenis manus extudit), fire is introduced with a biblical \textit{iunctura} (1141: \textit{Ecce autem e mediis terrae fornacibus ignis},

\textsuperscript{70} De Fortuna lib I Sig.273 v: “Utque haec ipsa, quae de casu dicimus et fortuna, deque primigeniis, atque eventitius causis, testimonium quoque comprobata, notiora fiant, et tanquam constituuntur in aperto, sit hoc maxime exemplum.”
\textsuperscript{71} I discuss Pontano’s views on the concept of “fortune” in the context of a comparison with Marsilio Ficino in Chapter II p. 106. I also discuss how these views are inscribed within the narrative of Sannazaro’s Arcadia in Chapter IV
\textsuperscript{72} De Fortuna Lib. I Sig. 154v: “Itaque quod poeticam ad dignitatem, magnitudinemque ars, doctrinaque labore etiam summo industriaque comparata neque at omnino accedere, praeterea quod neque studiorum assiduitas, neque vigilantissima praestare poest cura, eo posse accedere, id utique et assequi et praestare, naturali huic, atque, ut putatum est, divino impetui datum est, atque concessum. Qua de re quibus magis quam his ipsis credendum est poetis? Aut quorum potius standum dicto?”
is called a divine gift (1149: "Cognitus et tandem diuini muneri usus") and its role is that
of triggering a series of technological achievements along with the birth of societal
bounds and religion.

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To conclude, Giovanni Pontano's approach to poetry and astrology stems from the
author's solution to an exegetical problem posed by Ptolemy's canon. The sources of
Pontano's solution are on the one hand Cicero's De Divinatione and on the other hand
Aristotle's Rhetoric. The study of Pontano's use of these sources gives access to a
consistent mode of thinking that is signalled by the notions of inspiration (adflatus) and
conjecture (coniectura), which Pontano explored in their respective philosophical and
rhetorical implications. This philosophical viewpoint is embodied in Pontano's Urania, a
text that translates the author's doctrine into Latin hexameters and constitutes material
proof of his ideas on inspiration and conjecture. As the next chapter will demonstrate,
Pontano's use of astrological arguments in his discussion of poetic inspiration can be
understood as an attempt at gaining artistic recognition and intellectual legitimacy in
competition with Marsilio Ficino's books and ideas, which were widely circulating
among Neapolitan intellectuals.

In 1501 Pontano gave a public reading of Urania in front of a small audience of
pupils and admirers. If understood within the context of Pontano's astrological treatises,
the poem Urania is the definitive demonstration of a point: a kind of inspiration
descending from the stars and the constant studies of classical authors can give birth to a
great poet. In 1501 the Aragonese court was falling apart under Charles VIII's invasion and the legitimacy of Pontano's circle was threatened by its founder's old age, the diffusion of alternative philosophical currents, and the emigration of its most promising young member Jacobo Sannazaro. I propose that Pontano's public performance of *Urania* was the ultimate defense of his philosophical views. By offering a public display of inspiration and conjecture, Pontano had fashioned himself as the living proof of his philosophical views.
Chapter 2

Prophecy and Poetry in Marsilio Ficino

Introduction

In chapter 1, I have suggested that Giovanni Pontano's views on conjecture and inspiration were responding to Marsilio Ficino. In this chapter, I will further investigate these authors' ideas and compare their views on poetic inspiration. Pontano's approach to poetry stemmed from his solution to an interpretive problem caused by the unstable canon of Ptolemy's works. Likewise, I am persuaded that Ficino's ideas on poetic inspiration stemmed from his own solution to a broader hermeneutical problem posed by Plato's dialogues. Ficino lived and worked in Florence in a period of great literary and artistic rebirth. His writings were often addressed to poets such as his patron, Lorenzo de Medici, or other eminent literary scholars such as Cristoforo Landino, professor of Rhetoric and Poetry at the University of Florence. Moreover, Ficino devoted his life to the translation and study of Plato and other thinkers such as Plotinus and Iamblichus. Ficino belonged to that category of philosophers that developed outside of the universities and within the rhetorical and literary culture of the studia humanitatis. At the same time, Ficino defined his philosophical views while engaged in writing translations, exegetical summaries and commentaries of Plato's dialogues. These dialogues were originally written against rhetoricians and poets in an intellectual context that was the exact opposite of Ficino's. Differently from Ficino's times, Plato's Greece was dominated by poetic and rhetorical culture and philosophers were struggling against these
intellectual endeavors. The first question I pose is how Marsilio Ficino came to terms with this open contradiction between his object of study and his own culture.

Previous solutions to this question can be summed up within two main categories, which rely respectively on modern definitions of aesthetics and humanism. Scholars in the first category have read Ficino's works in search of a consistent philosophy of art that assumes the autonomy of artistic beauty and the artistic object. This orientation has led some scholars to interpret Ficino's doctrine of divine inspiration as foreshadowing the experience of artistic appreciation as it is conceptualized in modern aesthetics (Saitta 1923). Recent scholarship has warned against the anachronism of this approach and has pointed out the necessity of a close reading of Ficino's exegetical works on platonic dialogues to understand the author's thought on art and poetry (Megna 1999). However, recent readings stem from the assumption that notions such as the autonomy of artistic object are what Plato's dialogues actually meant (Megna 1999 p.121, 124). This is an interpretation of Plato's works traditionally found among historians of aesthetics (Stefanini 1951; Schaper 1968 pp.48-50). This interpretation, however, is obsolete among classicists, who have interpreted Plato's texts in their intellectual context and have understood their polemical implications (Murray 1996). Having reconsidered the meaning of Plato's dialogues that deal with poetry and rhetoric, I will explore how Ficino came to terms with some exegetical puzzles posed by Plato's texts concerning poetry in light of recent scholarship on the subject.

Scholars in the second category have envisioned humanists as the precursors of modern philologists whose works foreshadow modern criteria of methodological rigor
and historical objectivity. This approach has led them to detect a philological scientific strain in fifteenth century culture whose chief representatives are writers such as Lorenzo Valla, Angelo Poliziano and Ermolao Barbaro (Dionisotti 1968; Branca 1983). Consistent with this approach, a division has been assumed between the fronts of Angelo Poliziano's philology and Marsilio Ficino's “neoplatonism.” As a result, these scholars have perceived Ficino as a pseudo-philosopher, whose legacy they interpreted as the manifestation of a form of irrationalism, characterized by metaphysical speculation, a taste for “medieval allegorism,” magic and a reductionist view of human crafts as the effect of divine inspiration (Dionisotti 1968 p. 81; Cardini 1973 II pp.67-68). In line with this paradigm, scholars have interpreted Giovanni Pontano's veiled criticism of Marsilio Ficino's views on poetry and language found in the dialogue Actius as a defense of humanism against Platonism (Ferrau 1979 p.50n; Ferrau 1983). Although still very useful analytically, this clear cut division between two hypothetical fronts of “humanists” and “neoplatonists” is currently under scrutiny (Godman 1998). Pertinent to my case, the interpretation of Pontano's attitude toward Ficino stems, as I will demonstrate, from a partial knowledge of Pontano's corpus of writings. This interpretation, in particular, disregards Pontano's astrological treatises and the late treatise De Fortuna, which is actually engaged in a dialogue with Ficino's views. Having reconsidered this conventional definition of humanism and based on my knowledge of Pontano's corpus of writings, I will challenge this conventional interpretation by investigating the differences between Pontano and Ficino in regard to poetry and, more generally, to language.
The overall solution that I bring forth builds on the assumption that there is no system of aesthetics to be found throughout Ficino's writings (Vasoli 1959). In contrast with the interpretation of Marsilio Ficino's works as the manifestation of a prepackaged "neoplatonic" ideology, I will demonstrate that Ficino's views on language and poetry are found in his generally neglected exegetical summaries of Plato's dialogues. These texts indicate a mode of thinking that brings forth prophecy (vaticinium) as the only reliable source of knowledge. Consistent with this view, Ficino conceived language (written language in particular) as an imperfect and misleading way to reach and transmit knowledge. As a result, Ficino held a position that is completely different from that detected in Pontano's writings. In particular, Ficino presented conjectural thinking as an inferior form of understanding that he associated with artificial diviners and rhetoricians, whose claims he rejected in the name of non-discursive sources conceptualized within the hierarchy of divine frenzies (furores).73 If Ficino praised non-discursive thinking and denounced the pitfalls of language and writings, one asks, what kind of poetry and poets did he envision in his writings? My argument is that Ficino's texts, differently from most of his contemporaries, draw a sharp distinction between prophets (vates) and poets, thus redefining the conventional topos of the poeta vates. Also, Ficino's works do not save poetry in general (or a morally safe form of poetry), but only the specific genre of the divinely inspired hymn. The evidence I will focus on are mainly Marsilio Ficino's interpretative summaries (argumenta) of Plato's dialogues Phaedrus, Cratylus,

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73 By non-discursive, as opposed to discursive, thinking, I mean a kind of thinking that cannot be articulated into words. This label, currently used -for instance- among scholars of Neoplatonic exegetes constitutes a valid alternative to the misleading, and ultimately anachronistic, opposition between "rationalism" and "irrationalism."
Occasionally, I will cross reference these works with other writings from the author's corpus, that is, the treatises *De Religione, Theologia Platonica*, Ficino's interpretive translation of Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis* and the dialogue *De Raptu Pauli*.

Ficino's early views on poetry and language

Standard histories of Renaissance poetics usually take Ficino's 1457 letter to Pellegrino degli Agli as the most important evidence of the author's ideas on poetry. Indeed, this text played a pivotal role in the history of European poetics (Greenfield 1981; Langer, forthcoming). Its printed versions had an immediate and international resonance, which marks the beginning of European literary Platonism in the context of both Latin and vernacular literatures. Its consistency with Cristoforo Landino's literary theories and its systematic application to the exegesis of texts such as Dante's *Commedia* had a remarkable impact on the critical vocabulary and the expectations of Quattrocento readers (Cardini 1973; Gilson 2003). Influential as it might have been among contemporary readers, however, the letter is misleading if one wants to understand how Marsilio Ficino made sense of Plato's negative views about the cognitive status of language and poetry. In particular, this letter brings forth a praise of written poetry that is in sharp contrast with Ficino's claims after having read Plato's original texts, documented

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74 Ficino's interpretative summaries of Plato's dialogues are entitled “epitome” in the Basilea edition of his work. This title, however, does not have any support either in the manuscript tradition or in the first Quattrocento editions (Hankins 1990 pp. 341-343). These texts are now available in English translation in Farndell 2006. Concerning the composition of these exegetical summaries, the most credited hypothesis is that they were composed along with the translations since 1464 (Kristeller 1: xcvi-xcvi). However, some critics ascribe these texts to the years 1475-1476 (Della Torre 1902 pp. 606-607; Marcel 1958 pp. 457-458).
by his exegetical summary of the dialogue *Ion* (written 1464-1484; first printed 1484). First, let's look at what Ficino wrote in the letter to his friend Pellegrino degli Agli.

On December 1st 1457, in response to Pellegrino degli Agli, Ficino set out to persuade his friend of a counterintuitive truth: his written works were not the result of his technical skills, but they were caused by divine frenzy (*divinus furor*). The first lines of the letter stress the contrast between on the one hand Pellegrino's young age and the quality of his works, on the other hand Pellegrino's achievements and those of the ancient writers. This contrast, the author implies, cannot be explained by means of familiar notions such as that that hard work or natural inclination makes the poet good. Also, this contrast challenges the assumption that his skills result from Pellegrino's acquaintance with antiquity. That the author has to ascribe this exceptional event to "divine frenzy" stems on the one hand from Pellegrino's writings themselves, on the other hand from the authority of ancient philosophers, and more specifically from Plato's authority. Consequently, the author promises to report what Plato thinks that divine frenzy is, how many kinds of it there are and which god is responsible for them. The rest of the letter addresses these three points in the order they are displayed in the introductory lines.

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75 *De Divino Furore (On Divine Frenzy)* vol. I p.42: “Indeed, my dearest Peregrino, when I consider your age and those things which come from you every day, I not only rejoice but much marvel at such great gifts in a friend. I do not know which of the ancients whose memory we respect, not to mention men of our own time, achieved so much at your age. This I ascribed not just to study and technique, but much more to divine frenzy. Without this, say Democritus and Plato, no man has ever been great. The powerful emotion and burning desire which your writings express prove, as I have said, that you are inspired and inquardly possessed by that frenzy; and this power, which is manifested in external movements, the ancient philosophers maintained was the most potent proof that the divine force dwelt in our souls.” Volume and page numbers refer to Kristeller's English translation of Ficino’s epistolary.

76 *Ibid.* pp.42-43: “But since I have mentioned this frenzy, I shall relate the opinion of our Plato about it in a few words, with that brevity which a letter demands, so that you may easily understand what it is, how many kinds of it there are, and which god is responsible for each. I am sure that this description will not
The author situates Plato in a genealogy of philosophers started in ancient Egypt and inserts his doctrine in the framework of the theory of recollection (*anamnesis*). The accumulation of sources is meant to show that in antiquity there was a general agreement about the doctrine of divine inspiration found in Plato's work. This doctrine is explained in mythical terms as the soul's descent from an initial state of contemplation of eternal ideas (perfect knowledge) toward a progressive oblivion. This descent and this oblivion end up with the soul's incarceration in the body. The return to the divine is conceived in terms of a remembrance of this initial state. Plato, the letter summarizes, explained this remembrance as the practice of two virtues (justice and wisdom), which he metaphorically represented with two wings in the dialogue *Phaedrus*. Socrates, as Ficino reports, stated that we acquire these virtues by means of two kinds of philosophy (active and contemplative) in the dialogue *Phaedo*. Divine frenzy occurs when the soul is drawn away from its prison by the memory of divine contemplation.

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only please you, but also be of the very greatest use to you. Plato considers, as Pythagoras, Empedocles and Heraclitus maintained earlier, that our soul, before it descended into bodies, dwelt in the abodes of heaven where, as Socrates says in the *Phaedrus*, it was nourished and rejoiced in the contemplation of truth.”  

77 *Ibid.* p.43: “These philosophers I have just mentioned had learnt from Mercurius Trismegistus, the wisest of all the Egyptians, that God is the supreme source and light within whom shine the models of all things, which they call ideas. Thus, they believed, it followed that the soul, in steadfastly contemplating the eternal mind of God, also beholds with greater clarity the natures of all things.”  

78 *Ibid.* p.43: “So, according to Plato, the soul saw justice itself, wisdom, harmony, and the marvelous beauty of the divine nature. And sometimes he calls all these natures ‘ideas,’ sometimes ‘divine essences,’ and sometimes ‘first natures which exist in the eternal mind of God.’ The minds of men, while they are there, are well nourished with perfect knowledge. But souls are depressed into bodies through thinking about and desiring earthly things. Then those who were previously fed on ambrosia and nectar, that is the perfect knowledge and bliss of God, in their descent are said to drink continuously of the river Lethe, that is forgetfulness of the divine. They do not fly back to heaven, when they fell by weight of their earthly thoughts, until they begin to contemplate once more those divine natures which they have forgotten. The divine philosopher considers we achieve this through two virtues, one relating to moral conduct and the other to contemplation; one he names with a common term ‘justice,’ and the other ‘wisdom’.”  

79 *Ibid.* p.43: “For this reason, he says, souls fly back to heaven on two wings, meaning, as I understand it, these virtues; and likewise Socrates teaches in *Phaedo* that we acquire these by the two parts of philosophy; namely the active and the contemplative. Hence he says again in *Phaedrus* that only the mind of a
Ficino had to resolve the problem that Plato's theory of knowledge is inconsistent with the works of Saint Paul and Dionysius the Aeropagite. In Plato's view, the text recalls, human beings are caused to remember God thanks to the physical perception of images and shadows. Paul and Dionysius, however, maintained that humans can understand divine things only by inference from worldly experience. Ficino resolved this inconsistency by appealing to the experience of sight and hearing. Regardless of what these theologians say, these senses are said to perceive beauty and harmony, which are respectively the images of divine harmony and beauty.

Paul and Dionysius, the wisest of the Christian theologians, affirm that the invisible things of God are understood from what has been made and is to be seen here, but Plato says that the wisdom of men is the image of divine wisdom. He thinks that the harmony which we make with musical instruments and voices is the image of divine harmony, and that the symmetry and comeliness that arise from the perfect union of the parts and members of the body are an image of divine beauty. (43-44)

This experience is said to revive the memory of a time when humans existed outside of the "prison of the body" and prepare the soul for four different kinds of divine frenzy: love, poetry, mystery and prophecy. Ficino envisioned these frenzies as twofold entities, which have a positive and a negative side. Poetry, in particular, is presented as the authentic expression of divine frenzy as opposed to the imperfect imitation of celestial harmony found in music:

philosopher regains wings. On recovery of these wings, the soul is separated from the body by their power. Filled with God it strives with all its might to reach the heavens, and thither it is drawn. Plato calls this drawing away and striving 'divine frenzy,' and he divides it into four parts. He thinks that men never remember the divine unless they are stirred by its shadows or images, as they may be described, which are perceived by the bodily senses."
Some imitate the celestial music by harmony of voice and the sounds of various instruments, and these we call superficial and vulgar musicians. But some, who imitate the divine and heavenly harmony with deeper and sounder judgment, render a sense of its inner reason and knowledge into verse, feet and numbers. It is these who, inspired by the divine spirit, give forth with full voice the most solemn and glorious song. Plato calls this solemn music and poetry the most effective imitation of the celestial harmony. For the more superficial kind which I have just mentioned does no more than soothe with the sweetness of the voice, but poetry does what is also proper to divine harmony. It expresses with fire the most profound and, as a poet would say, prophetic meanings, in the numbers of voice and movement.

(46)

The conclusion of the letter anticipates a possible objection about the structure of this text. The text devotes a longer part to the discussion of the first two kinds of frenzy (poetry and love) and only briefly touches upon the other two. Ficino defends himself by reminding his interlocutor about the context of their discussion. First of all, he knows that his interlocutor is moved only by the first two kinds of frenzy. Second, he wants him to remember (the choice of the verb echoes Plato's theory of *anamnesis*) the cause of his skills as a writer, that is, God. The author states that this awareness will make Pellegrino act rightly and justly.80

The sources and the method of reading used in the letter to Pellegrino degli Agli indicate that the text is conceived within and addressed to an intellectual community devoted to rhetorical studies. The author's views about Plato's theory of knowledge are

80 *Ibid.* p.48: "I have chosen to describe at greater length the frenzy belonging to divine love and poetry for two reasons: first, because I know you are strongly moved by both of these; and second, so that you will remember that what is written by you comes not from you but from Jove and the Muses, with whose spirit and divinity you are filled. For this reason, my Pellegrino, you will act justly and rightly if you acknowledge, as I believe you do already, that the author and cause of what is best and greatest is not you, nor indeed any other man, but immortal God. Farewell, and be sure that nothing is dearer to me than you are[...]"
drawn from Macrobius' widely known commentary of Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*. The praise of the analogy between the metrical structure of verses and celestial harmony, found in Latin sources such as Boethius, was a *topos* of Quattrocento treatises of poetics such as Coluccio Salutati's *De Laboribus Herculis*.\(^8\) Briefly, most of the sources displayed in this letter stem from Latin texts rather than the author's personal acquaintance with Plato's works (Gentile 1983 pp.35, 39, 46-47, 52, 56). In particular, the aproblematic use of Plato's *Phaedrus* and of its theory of poetic frenzy can be easily explained by cross-referencing Ficino's text with its most plausible source, that is, Leonardo Bruni's paraphrasis of parts of this dialogue and his letter to the poet Giovanni Marrasio (Gentile 1983 pp.36-38, 54-55). Moreover, the use of many disparate sources as edifying examples to praise Pellegrino's literary enterprise can be ascribed to the doctrinal and imitative typology of reading that was typical among early Quattrocento teachers of the *studia humanitatis* (Hankins 1990 pp. 66, 112, 139, 343). Thanks to this method of reading, Leonardo Bruni had managed to turn Plato's problematic treatment of poetry into the more familiar language of the defense of poetry, which he used in corresponding with his friends (Hankins 1990 pp.67-68, 70-72). Ficino, at this point of his career, was aligned with his contemporaries.

Secondly, and more broadly speaking, Ficino's solution to the contradiction between Christian authorities and Plato is consistent with the culture of rhetoricians and more specifically with a mode of thinking that Charles Trinkaus has labeled "double consciousness" (Trinkaus 1979 pp.27 - 51). By "double consciousness," Trinkaus means

\(^8\) I briefly discuss Coluccio Salutati's theory on the properties of the hexameters in the first chapter (p.48).
an idea of truth that sums up revelation and experience, whose bedrock he has indicated in Saint Augustine's reading of Plato's *Protagoras* (Trinkaus 1979 pp. 44-48). This idea is at the heart of Petrarch's defense of rhetoric and poetry as disciplines that can act upon the soul and therefore are involved in the process of salvation. Also, this idea underpins a theory of language and knowledge that ascribes great importance to persuasion, thus resulting in a poetic and rhetorical theology (Trinkaus 1979 p. 90). Trinkaus has proposed that a theology based on the alternation of ordained and absolute power and an ontology that belongs to the tradition of nominalism underpin this idea. Through the works of Petrarch and Boccaccio, this mode of thinking spread among Quattrocento poets and rhetoricians who also cultivated philosophical studies (Trinkaus 1979 pp. 114-135, 115). This mode of thinking, I would suggest, also operates within Ficino's early writings.

Although this letter became standard reading among rhetoricians and poets in the second half of Quattrocento, it would be a mistake to assert that it represents Ficino's ultimate views on poetry and on the cognitive status of language. The interpretive context of Plato's reception was about to drastically change a few months after Ficino's letter to Pellegrino degli Agli was written. In 1458, the Cretan scholar and rhetorician George of Trebizond wrote the *Comparatio Aristotelis et Platonis*, a polemical text that attacked Plato and his legacy. Whereas Plato's potentially dangerous claims about the status of rhetoric and poetry had been overlooked by early Quattrocento interpreters, George's text was directed against Plato's *Gorgias*, the dialogue in which Socrates refutes the usefulness and value of rhetoric. This text triggered a polemic that lasted for more than a decade and involved the most eminent intellectuals of the time. On Plato's side, one finds
the Byzantine scholars Gemisthus Pletho and Cardinal Bessarion along with literary scholars such as Filelfo and Poliziano. On the opposite side, there were Aristotelian philosophers such as Scholarius and George of Trebizond. Initially confined among the subculture of intellectual circles of Greek emigrees, the diatribe soon entered the mainstream and profoundly shaped the way Plato was interpreted in the second half of the century (Hankins 1990 pp. 208-216).

Among other things, this polemical discussion had intercultural and methodological ramifications. At the intercultural level, Cardinal Bessarion's apologetic strategy contributed to the diffusion not only of Plato's texts but also of Platonic exegetes' commentaries written in late Antiquity. In the attempt to isolate and refute George of Trebizond's *Comparatio* with his book *In Calumniatorem Platonis* (first printed 1469), Bessarion had to emphasize the agreement between Plato and Aristotle based on ancient exegetes' authority. Differently from George, Bessarion based his argument on a corpus of commentaries whose authority stemmed from their antiquity. In addition, late ancient exegetes presented Aristotle as one among Plato's pupils and as an inferior follower. Also, these interpretations resolved the more obscure and problematic passages of Plato's texts. At the methodological level, Bessarion's use of late ancient Platonic commentaries exposed Quattrocento readers to a kind of hermeneutics that assumed Plato's dialogues as divinely inspired writings whose real meaning was unwritten and transmitted orally among a group of selected recipients (Hankins 1990 pp. 251-253). For the first time, I would like to emphasize, readers were also exposed to the theories of language and
textuality cultivated among exegetes such as Plotinus, Proclus and Damascius along with the modes of thinking (and writing) practiced at their schools in Late Antiquity.

The polemics between George and Bessarion drastically changed the interpretive context of Marsilio Ficino’s translations and exegetical works. Having been exposed to the tradition of Late Ancient commentaries, I propose that Ficino was aware of these exegetes’ views on inspiration, poetry and language. Given that this is the interpretive context of Ficino’s works on Plato, I will explore how the author came to terms with Plato’s dialogues that investigate the relationship between language and knowledge. First, I will try to understand how Ficino’s encounter with Plato and his interpreters changed his initial rhetorical conception of language. Second, I will assess how this change influenced Ficino’s mature views on poetic language. I now move to Ficino’s exegetical summary of Plato’s *Cratylus* to address the first of these issues.

**Ficino’ interpretation of *Cratylus*: craftsmen, dialecticians and divinely inspired poets**

*Cratylus* is one of the most enigmatic texts found in Plato’s dialogues. The text consists of a discussion between Hermogenes, Cratylus and Socrates on the principles of names, that is, what is the best theory for explaining the relationship between words and objects. The dialogue belongs to the so called “middle period” of Plato’s career. Therefore, it is not one of those dialogues in which Socrates questions his interlocutor in order to leave him in a state of puzzlement (*aporia*) such as the *Ion*. Also, it is not one of
those late dialogues in which a character is requested to outline an overarching theory about, for instance, the perfect political model (Republic) or cosmology (Timaeus). While interacting first with Hermogenes and eventually with Cratylus, Socrates refutes his interlocutors and at the same time he sums up their views into a theory that the reader is left to extract from the text. On the one hand, Hermogenes maintains that names are always correct because their meaning stems from an agreement among speakers. Socrates, however, refutes this view by demonstrating that once endorsed it ends up in the rhetoricians’ subjectivism, which ascribes truthfulness to whatever an individual thinks. Since this notion is in contrast with experience - drunken and mad people can think what is not true- and logic - if everybody is right, then opinions should not diverge- Socrates rejects it. On the other hand, Cratylus maintains that a natural law explains how certain things are translated into names. Socrates, however, demonstrates that some names designate the same things by means of different sounds. Since this experience contradicts his thesis, Cratylus is forced to admit that an agreement among speakers must play an important role in assigning names.

In the process of refuting his interlocutors’ views, Socrates reconciles them within a third theory of meaning. This theory can be summed up in these terms: although there is not an exact relationship between a name and the thing it designates, there are some elements of a name that have the power (dynamis) to signify an object. Although the relationship between names and things does not reside in an agreement, it must be conceded that the first name-giver had to assign names according to some kind of subjective representation that eventually imposed itself as the convention. This subjective
representation can be grasped in the course of a discussion between the name-maker and the dialectician. Its origin, however, is left unexplained in Plato’s text.

Scholars do not agree on whether Socrates’ theory of meaning is internally consistent or not. The most recent editor of the dialogue has proposed that that the text brings forth a reconciliation of two diverging views and has interpreted Socrates’ theory of language as internally consistent (Reeve 1994). Other scholars, however, have argued that the dialogue ultimately results in an interpretive puzzle that is reminiscent of Plato’s aporetic texts (Mackenzie 1986). This second group, in my view, also includes scholars of semiotics. In their reading of Plato’s Cratylus, semioticians have usefully identified and conceptualized two theories of meaning that correspond to the aforementioned notions of power (dynamis) and of agreement between subjective representation and name (Di Cesare 1989; Manetti 1993 pp.57-66).

Both of these interpretations have their merits and flaws. The first is historically sound because it is happily confirmed by the hypothetical chronology of Plato’s works and is coherent with the text in its entirety. Also, it is consistent with Socrates’ use of etymologies, which is a feature of Plato’s dialogue that has been understood only in recent times (Sedley 2003). However, the second interpretation provides the reader with a sharp analytical grid for interpreting Marsilio Ficino’s complex – and often idiosyncratic – exegetical summary of Plato’s Cratylus. Moreover, Ficino’s solution to the puzzle posed by Plato’s theory of language sets the stage for understanding his views on poetry and eloquence without falling into the conventional anachronism of aesthetics or the misleading historiographical schema of humanism versus Platonism.
How does Ficino translate Plato’s notion of *dynamis*? In the first part, Ficino’s exegetical summary translates *dynamis* as active power (*viva virtus*), by which the author means a power that emanates from God into the different layers that form the hierarchy of being. In this perspective, the text maintains that since things are charged with a power that stems from the act of creation, things can act upon individual subjects’ perception and reach their mind. Mind (*mens*) eventually turns this power into a word. In Ficino’s perspective, the mind also transmits its power to the word. Therefore, the text envisions meaning (*significatio*) as a kind of power.\(^82\)

But no one will wonder that such great power resides within true names, once we have considered that the natural power of anything, when we perceive it aright, moves from objects to the senses, from the senses to the imagination, and from the imagination, in some mysterious way, to the mind. Next, it is initially conceived by the mind and then, like a child, it is expressed by means of a word. *And within this word, which is composed of its own parts, the power of the subject resides, like life, in the form of its meaning:* I am speaking of that life which is initially conceived by the mind itself through the seeds of creation,\(^83\) which is later uttered through spoken sounds, and which is finally preserved through writings.

Based on this passage, some interpreters have argued that Ficino was inclined to embrace what corresponds to Cratylus’s theory of language because of his interest in

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\(^82\) Ficino, for what I could see, does not distinguish between signification and meaning as modern semioticians do. This is unfortunate, but the problem can be resolved. Since Plato deals with signification in the dialogues *Phaedrus* and *Theaetetus* whereas the *Cratylus* is about meaning, it is possible – I would argue – to use this analytical distinction by looking at Ficino’s exegetical works on these texts in two separate steps. This is what I do in this chapter, in which I rely on Manetti’s reading of Plato.

\(^83\) The seeds of creation (*semina rerum*) are a crucial element of Ficino’s theory of creation. The history of this notion has been recently studied by Hirai 2005.
occultism (Vickers 1984). This interpretation stems from the view that Plato’s dialogue is structured on an opposition between naturalism and conventionalism (Kretzman 1971). This analysis, which used to be standard reading among Plato scholars, have induced interpreters to construct their readings upon questions such as whether Socrates holds a conventionalist or a naturalist view of language. In other words, scholars have tried to assess whose view Socrates was endorsing or refuting. However, recent interpreters have dismissed these research questions as misleading for understanding the *Cratylus* as a whole (Reeve 1994; Sedley 2003). Pertinent to Ficino’s exegetical summary, I would argue, this approach is also inadequate to understand how Ficino tried to interpret this text. In particular, if the reader labels Ficino as a “naturalist,” he fails examine how Ficino struggled to understand the other side of Plato’s theory of meaning. Along with the notion of *dynamis*, Plato’s *Cratylus* suggests that meaning results from the agreement between the name-giver’s subjective representation and words. Since Plato left this question partially unanswered, one wonders how Ficino filled a gap in Plato’s task to explain from whence the name-giver drew his subjective representation.

Ficino’s exegetical summary resolves this interpretive puzzle by reading Plato’s *Cratylus* in light of the theory of signification outlined in the dialogues *Phaedrus* and reiterated in the *Ion*. Plato’s interpretive puzzle stems from Socrates’ refutation and partial endorsement of Hermogenes’ thesis. While Socrates and Hermogenes agree that different people use different words, Socrates suggests that beyond these differences there must be a common design. This design (*idea*) is what makes words achieve their task, that is, to slice reality into understandable units (388c). In Socrates’ view, name-
givers can understand what this common idea is by discussing existing words with a dialectician. However, Socrates does not explain on which subjective representation the first name-giver had to rely.

Ficino’s exegetical summary integrates the discussion between the name-giver and the dialectician with the figure of the divinely inspired poet. In Ficino’s perspective, only this kind of poet turn words into entities that correctly signify another entity. In the language of semiotics, one would say that Ficino’s poet turns words into signs:

You may draw the conclusion that, if names are to be true and are to be correctly set down, they must be framed by the wise establisher of names, and the dialectician must advise on the form they should take, so that they copy and develop, as fully as possible the properties of the objects. After this, when he is making a careful inquiry concerning those from whom the correctness of names is to be learnt [...] he scorns the Sophists and directs us instead to the poets: not to the poets indiscriminately, but to the divine poets, as to men who have received the true names of things from the gods and whose writings contain the true names.

(100)

Consistent with this view, Ficino’s text further integrates Plato’s dialogue by explaining that the first name-giver’s subjective representation stems from divinely inspired knowledge:

Next, consider the following: the man who first named the objects knew them before he named them. Again, consider the view held by the ancients, which maintains that a divine power instructed man from the beginning and taught him the names of things. [...] For it was not possible for the human race, either from the beginning of the world or after catastrophic floods, to be instructed except by God.
This form of knowledge resides in ideas which the subject can reach by "noetic" contemplation, that is, through a process of meditative detachment of the self from the mind. The process of contemplation, in Ficino's view, is compared to a prophetic dream:

But because Socrates says that he dreams about ideas, he makes it clear that [...] the awareness of Ideas, through detachment of the mind, is considered similar to prophecy imparted in a dream.

The knowledge of ideas does not have only a chronological but also an epistemological precedence over its articulation into words. Therefore, the knowledge of names is presented as inferior and misleading:

His conclusion is that the knowledge of things is to be sought, not from names, but from ideas, whose concepts have been imparted to us as the first true names of things.

To sum up, Ficino resolved the problem posed by the two theories of meaning found in Plato's *Cratylus* by framing them within a world view in which everything is organically connected and works according to a direction of finality. At the level of the relationship between *res* and *verba*, both names and things are caused by and transmit a power that is uniformly widespread, so that they cannot be technically conceived as
At the level of the relationship between concepts and words, the architect of the system is also the cause of these concepts. This makes these ideas necessarily true. It also implies that words are only an inferior reflection of ideas.

What's the context of Ficino's solution to the problems posed by the Cratylus? Ficino's exegetical commentary approaches Plato's dialogue from a theological and epistemological perspective that would probably be upsetting for modern commentators. In discussing the correctness of names, Ficino's text adopts the standard of divine appellation and God's names, which are envisioned as divinely imprinted upon ancient people's minds. Ficino cross-referenced this view with his apologetic treatise De Religione Christiana (written in 1474), which is the context of his interpretation of Plato's Cratylus. In discussing how divine names were divinely imparted to Moses and his followers, Ficino's De Religione makes reference to the dogma of unwritten tradition and exhorts Hebrews to endorse this belief:

Hence they (i.e. Hebrews) are obliged to admit that Jesus, whom they themselves call 'Nazarenus', was divine, since, indeed, they confess that he performed wonders through the true understanding and pronunciations of this tetragrammaton name. But we have spoken fully on these matters in our book On Religion.

In my view, this allusion refers to chapter 30 of Ficino's De Religione Christiana. In 1474, Ficino wrote this extremely interesting book after having become a priest and

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84 As Allen has brilliantly exposed, it is a mistake to approach Ficino's view on the relationship between res and verba in terms of a dichotomy: this distinction, he argues, is "anchored in a materialist metaphysics, and specifically in Aristotelian form-matter theory." Therefore, Ficino's philosophy of language needs to be framed within an all encompassing world view that envisions things as produced by God's word, and is therefore beyond the magic of names (Allen 2002 pp.38-39, 41-42).
dedicated his work to Lorenzo il Magnifico.\textsuperscript{85} The intention of the text is mainly apologetic. The book sets out to prove and defend the authority of Christ against non-believers. Among other things, the text devotes a great deal of ingenuity to collecting and presenting signs (by which Ficino means, as I will illustrate later, “divine manifestations” or “epiphanies”) of Christ’s authority taken from pagan (e.g. the prophecies of Sybils), Muslim (e.g. the presentation of Christ in the Koran) and Hebrew sources. In his apology of Christianity against the Hebrews, Ficino strategically used quotations from Islamic texts and Judaic versions of the Bible in order to isolate his adversaries. Among these sources, he mentioned a Hebrew book in which the name of God is referred to as the “tetragrammaton.” He used this source as proof that even though Hebraic sources were sound their interpreters were wrong and ignorant:

\begin{quote}
Among you (i.e. Hebrews) there is still a book on the life of Jesus the Nazarene. This book reports that Jesus, among other miracles narrated in this book, resuscitated a dead person because he knew the accurate pronunciation of God’s name. You worship this name above other names because it consists of four vowels and is therefore the most difficult to pronounce. This name, as most of Hebrews think, sounds like “Hiehouahi,” that is, “he was, he is and he will be.” If this is true, since you do not consider anything more sacred than this name, and since it cannot refer to anything worldly, it is most certainly our Christ’s divine doctrine, which grew up, as you say, because of that most divine name thanks to God’s virtue, as we assert.\textsuperscript{86}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{85} The allusion is also a \textit{terminus post quem} that could contribute to resolve the problem of the chronology of these exegetical summaries. In particular, it would add credit to the chronology proposed by Della Torre and Marcel against that proposed by Kristeller. For the chronology, see note on p. 68.

\textsuperscript{86} Quotations from \textit{De Religione} are taken from the only modern edition available, that is, Zanzarri’s annotated translation. I did not have access to the original Latin text, so I had to rely on Zanzarri’s works. I plan to revise this pitfall in case of publication.
In his exegetical summary of the *Cratylus*, Ficino extended what was originally conceived as an apologetic argument into a doxography on the origin of language. God’s name, the text argues, has four letters in all the languages of the world. Therefore, all ancient and foreign religions must have a common source that Ficino did not hesitate to ascribe to divine inspiration.\(^87\)

In contrast with the 1457 letter to Pellegrino degli Agli, Ficino came to consider divinely inspired knowledge as a notion that precedes language and the basis of his theory of meaning. Consequently, Ficino perceived names as faulty cognitive devices open to deception, which produce a kind of knowledge that is unreliable. True knowledge, instead, stems exclusively from divine inspiration. Since this theory of language is presumably grounded on a theory of knowledge, one may wonder what Ficino’s mode of thinking was and what the author’s polemical target might have been. I will investigate Ficino’s exegetical summary of Plato’s dialogue *Theaetetus* to address these issues.

**Against conjectural thinking: Ficino’s reading of *Theaetetus***

Differently from *Cratylus*, Plato’s *Theaetetus* belongs to the group of early dialogues that scholars have defined “aporetic” because Socrates questions his interlocutors’ assumptions in order to leave them in a state of puzzlement. Consistent with the features of an aporetic dialogue, Theatreus’ persona tries to bring forth (seven) sound definitions of knowledge that Socrates systematically refutes. Originally, the

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87 Although I agree that Ficino explains the origin of names within the pattern of the Biblical narrative (Bono 1995 p.33n), I don’t exclude that his interpretation of the *Cratylus* might have a Neoplatonic context. In particular, I wonder whether Ficino knew Proclus’ exegetical commentary.
polemical targets of this dialogue were rhetoricians and their culture. In particular, Socrates argues against the view that the subject is the measure of all things. In this perspective, which is traditionally associated with the philosopher Protagoras, the individual is responsible for actively pursuing and producing knowledge. Socrates rejects this view of knowledge by presenting it as mere opinion because it cannot be said whether it is true or false. Differently from the Cratylus, Socrates does not refute his interlocutor by proposing an alternative theory. However, in the course of his refutation Socrates presents knowledge as the result of an imprint left on the subject's mind (191a - 195b) and argues against that kind of knowledge that relies on inference (Ficino translates it conjecture, conjectura) from natural signs (208c - 209c).

Differently from late ancient commentators, Ficino did not usually follow the hermeneutic habit of looking for the dialogue's unity (skopos). However, the subtitle of his summary suggests that he did read this text in an attempt at providing a sound definition of knowledge against Protagoras' view. In particular, Ficino tried to extract from this dialogue a theory of signification that ascribes a superior position to divinely imparted ideas against the formulation of conjectures based on the perception of natural signs. In doing so, he had to integrate the text with a long reference to Plato's Republic. In his praise of non-discursive knowledge, Ficino ascribed Plato's worldview to two Pythagorean philosophers and interpreted his position as an extension of Socrates' own discussion. He associated Plato with a higher level of understanding that goes beyond dialectics and touches upon the non-discursive intuition of Ideas. While the text asserts
that Socrates, like a mid-wife- has only discussed how knowledge is acquired, it assigns
the role of defining what knowledge is only to Plato.

In the first part of the summary, Ficino illustrates how Socrates refutes seven
definitions of knowledge and groups these around the notions of sense and opinion. The
summary starts by reporting Socrates's refutation of Theaetetus' definition of knowledge
as consistent with Protagoras' definition of knowledge and coincident with sense
perception. The text remarks that Socrates does not take seriously the first definition,
while he focuses in great detail on the second. Before reporting Socrates' refutation,
Ficino contextualized this definition within a view that assumes a world in constant
transformation. He traced the genealogy of this worldview back to Thales of Miletus,
Homer, Epicharmus, Empedocles, Heraclitus and Protagoras himself. Then, Ficino linked
this view with Protagoras' definition of knowledge as sense-perception and his
conception of man as the measure of things:

According to Homer and Heraclitus, all things are in flux. According to
Protagoras, man is the measure of all things. According to Theaetetus,
knowledge is sense-perception. Against these men Socrates reasons as
follows. If sense perception be knowledge, then animals, having keener
senses than man, will excel in knowledge. Again, if whatever is seen is
true, then the thoughts of each and every man will be equally correct, and
no man will be wiser than another, and God will be no wiser than man.

(38)

In Socrates' refutation of Protagoras, Ficino detected an attack against rhetoric as
well as against its underlying cognitive process and its physical basis. Socrates is seen to
weigh Protagoras' definition of knowledge against experience and logic. Ficino argued
that Socrates demonstrates that the definition of knowledge as sense perception is ultimately untenable. Insane people and animals, Ficino's text sums up, have senses that are respectively more altered and keener than normal. None, however, would call their perceptions knowledge. Similarly, none would state that illiterate kids are aware of the meaning of the letters they see. Protagoras' view that every opinion is true is interpreted as in logical contradiction with his notion of man as the measure of all things.

As I have shown in the previous chapter, Pontano (and other rhetoricians of the time) had drawn from Cicero's works an argument in support of conjectural thinking. Whereas Aristotle's Rhetoric had presented conjecture (proeikazein) as a process for formulating likely judgments about the causes of a fact in judicial discourse, Cicero's Topica had extended the scope of conjecture to all kinds of questions. In De Divinatione, for example, Cicero compared the discourses of divination and judicial rhetoric based on an extended notion of the conjectural status (status coniecturalis) of an argument. Based on these premises, Pontano argued in support of astrology and poetry, two endeavors that he constantly envisioned as closely linked. In De Rebus Coelestibus, for example, Pontano used conjecture as the fundamental device of a theory of knowledge that explains the process by which the mind (mens) collects, compares and organizes sensorial perceptions in order to formulate a probable conjecture. Conjecture, in Pontano's De Rebus Coelestibus, is envisioned as the creation of mental images that reason (ratio) has to weigh, approve or reject. Based on Plato's Theaetetus, Ficino defined a mode of thinking that contrast with Pontano's claim.
Ficino summed up Socrates's refutation of Protagoras' definition of knowledge as an attack against conjectural thinking. According to Ficino, these opposite modes of thinking are based upon two distinct theories of being. More specifically, Ficino associated Socrates with Parmenides' view on the steadfastness of things, and Protagoras with Heraclitus' flux theory. Ficino explained that Parmenides' view leads Socrates to draw a distinction between the consciousness of sensorial perception (which he ascribes to a power of the soul and calls "common sense") and the senses themselves (which he distributes among five channels). He then continued by reporting Socrates' theory on how opinions are born, which he cross-referenced with Plato's Philebus, Sophist and Meno, and with the commentator Plotinus (45-46). Socrates's theory, as it can be inferred from the author's summary, ascribes three powers to the soul (common sense, conjecture and reasoning). It provides these powers with six functions (sense, imagination, memory, reminiscence, cogitation and opinion), whose interaction is seen to result into the construction of a sort of picture (phantasia):

For, subsequent to the common sense, when the soul, which also perceives the common senses, perceives by the power of conjecture, this first perception is called imagination. As it retains what has been apprehended, it is called memory. As it takes up once more what is has preserved, it is called reminiscence. When it takes up one thing after another, as if it were going through a process of reasoning, it is called cogitation. When this process is completed, and something is affirmed or denied, it is called opinion. When opinion has been perceived through sense and memory, and when soul, re-fashioning looks back upon these things from which the others have emanated and believes the things that are images to be real things, Plato calls this a kind of picture and phantasy.
This theory of how the soul produces an opinion by conjecture, however, does not explain how true or false opinions are born. This leads Socrates to refute the remaining five definitions of knowledge as a special kind of opinion.

In Plato's *Theaetetus*, Socrates refutes the knowledge that results from conjecture by drawing a distinction between signs and reason (*logos*). Inference, in this perspective, can help to create right opinions (*doxa*) but not knowledge (*episteme*). Ficino's interpretation of this difficult passage relies on a strong distinction between sense and mind. In Ficino's reading, Socrates initially concedes that false opinion stems from a disagreement between a sense impression retained in the memory and a new sense impression. Socrates, however, has to acknowledge that this conclusion is consistent with the opposing views of Thaetetus and the rhetoricians (knowledge is true opinion). Only a definition of knowledge, the author points out, can resolve this conundrum. At this point, Ficino's interpretation follows its own path.

Subsequently, Ficino's text brings forth an argument against discursive reasoning, that is, a mode of thinking that envisions language as a way for accessing knowledge. Ficino conceptualized Socrates' refutation of the remaining definitions of knowledge as reason by further analyzing the word “reason” and listing four of its possible meanings, which are "form of words," reason itself, consideration of the elements of a thing and definition. In the author's summary, Socrates refutes the first definition by means of an

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88 *Thaetetus* (summary) p.48: It therefore seems that our ignorance is due not to knowledge but to confusion, neglect and illusion, although these things cannot be judged absolutely before a definition of knowledge has been given. For we discern darkness through light, silence through sound, evil through good, false through true. It seems, therefore, that knowledge needs to be defined before an exposition of false opinion can be made, if we wish to gain a perfect understanding of false opinion."
example drawn from written language. Just like a syllable does not exist beyond its parts, and therefore cannot be known without knowing its parts; so reason cannot be thought as a form that exists beyond its parts. Hence, knowledge is not reason in the sense of a form of words.\textsuperscript{89} Consistent with the exegetical summary of Plato's \textit{Cratylus}, Ficino formulates an argument against discursive reasoning. If Ficino, in contrast with rhetoricians, deprived language of any kind of cognitive function, what did he propose in the conclusion of his exegetical summary?

At the end of this long refutation of seven definitions of knowledge, Plato's aporetic dialogue does not provide a solution. According to the same interpretive pattern observed in the \textit{Cratylus} summary, Ficino had to integrate Plato's \textit{Theaetetus} text with the \textit{Republic}. Ficino explained that Plato divided knowledge into two kinds (reason and sense) that underpin two ways of comprehension (intelligence and opinion). The author continued by reporting how Plato further analyzed each kind of knowledge into two parts. Intelligence, the text explains, was divided into intellect (awareness of ideas) and intellectual cogitation (awareness of numbers). Opinion was divided into belief (perception of bodies) and imagination (perception of shadows).\textsuperscript{90} The definition that

\textsuperscript{89} \textit{Ibidem} pp.48-49: “And, for the sake of the example, he takes the letters as the elements, and the syllable as the compound; but he intends his treatment of these to be applicable to everything. The first counter-argument is that just as compounds depend on elements, so the knowledge of compounds is perfected by the knowledge of their elements; for nothing that has a cause can be known in isolation from its cause. It is thus impossible to know compounds if their elements are unknown. Again, take any compound: for example S-O, the first syllable of Socrates' name. Is this syllable two elements, or is it something that has taken its birth from the conjoining elements?”

\textsuperscript{90} \textit{Ibidem} p.51: “The intelligible is steadfast and incorporeal, while the perceptible is changeable and corporeal. The way to a knowledge of the intelligible he calls reason; the way to the perceptible he calls sense. The general comprehension of the intelligible he calls intelligence; the general comprehension of the perceptible he calls opinion. But he divides each kind in two [...]. Awareness of ideas he calls intellect, but he describes awareness of numbers and shapes as intellectual cogitation. The perceptible is also divided into two. In the first perceptible he locates all bodies and things bodily. In the second he locates the
results from this summary, therefore, is that knowledge coincides with the intellectual awareness of divine things. In line with the notion of meaning outlined in *Cratylus*, knowledge is said to stem from God. The knowing subject, like the name-giver, receives knowledge from God through the intercession of the dialectician:

Knowledge is therefore the understanding of things divine by infallible reason. It abides in mind and flows forth into reason. It is put into mind by God, and it is brought to reason by a teacher of dialectic under the grace of God. It guides reason into mind and unites mind with divinity.

(52)

A reader acquainted with the intellectual context in which this dialogue was written would remark that Ficino tended to read *Theaetetus* as the source of an argument against rhetoric as a form of knowledge. In discussing how Socrates refutes Protagoras’ definition of knowledge as sense perception, the author drew a genealogy that on the one hand helps to call upon the reader’s erudition but on the other hand contributes to sharpen the division between the world of rhetoricians and that of Platonic philosophers. Ficino emphasized that at the heart of the split between rhetoricians and dialecticians there are two different philosophical strains and two conflicting world views. Consequently, Ficino presented non-discursive thinking as the only possible solution to an otherwise unresolved problem. In doing so, he remarked how Plato’s worldview does not stem neither from Heraclitus nor from Parmenides, but from Pythagoras:

Now that all these have at last been refuted, it is time to see what Plato teaches. In the sixth book of the *Republic* he follows two Pythagoreans, Brontinus and Archytas, in positing two kinds of things: the intelligible and the perceptible. The shadows and reflection of bodies, whether they appear in water or in other reflective surfaces; and he considers that they are bodies as numbers are to things divine. Perception of bodies he calls belief; perception of shadows he calls imagination."
intelligible is steadfast and incorporeal, while the perceptible is changeable and corporeal. The way to knowledge of the intelligible he calls reason; the way to the perceptible he calls sense. The general comprehension of the intelligible he calls intelligence; the general comprehension he calls opinion.

The context of Ficino’s praise of non-discursive thinking stemmed from a certain way of reading Plato in light of commentators of Late Antiquity, who integrated the text of the dialogues with external symbolic systems (Ahbel-Rappe 2000). As mentioned earlier, the most important feature in the reception of Plato during the second half of Quattrocento is the rediscovery not only of the dialogues but also of their late ancient commentators. Among the many characteristics of this exegetical tradition, there is a paradox that stemmed from Plato’s works themselves. Plato’s corpus consists of a group of texts which constantly support the view that writing is an inappropriate way for accessing and transmitting knowledge. Plato’s exegetes, therefore, were confronted with the problem of translating into discourse what is an argument in support of non-discursive thinking (Ahbel-Rappe 2000 pp. 4, 20-21). The first solution was a critique of discursive thinking that involved readers in a process of ascetical elevation that transcends the letter of the text. Externally, this response had its premises in the relationship between master and pupil that is characteristic of the Athenian Academy (Ahbel-Rappe 2000 pp.25-44). Internally, it resulted in Plotinus’ notion of “intellect” as a truthful intuition of things in themselves that is timeless and non-propositional (Emilsson 2007). The second solution, found in the works of Proclus and Iamblichus, stemmed from the problematic status of a corpus of writings that constantly refers to a message that is outside the text (Ahbel-Rappe 2000 pp.131-142). In her groundbreaking study on Plato’s
exegesis, Ahbel-Rappe has persuasively demonstrated how this problem is resolved by inventing a tradition whose mythical fathers are respectively Orpheus and Pythagoras (Ahbel-Rappe 2000 pp.143-166).

As it can be seen in the exegetical summary of Plato's *Theaetetus*, Ficino is particularly inclined to situate Plato in a genealogy that stems from Pythagoras. According to Celenza, Ficino's views on the relationship between Plato and Pythagoras stemmed from his knowledge of the works of the third century scholar Iamblichus, who deeply transformed the role of this legendary philosopher (Celenza 1999 p. 672). In particular, Iamblichus emphasized problems such as salvation and prophecy, which were particularly urgent for Ficino and his intellectual community (Celenza 1999 p. 674). Iamblichus' association between Plato and Pythagoras was meant to reinforce the view that Plato believed in the immortality of the souls, a theme whose resonance at Ficino's time was crucial (Celenza 1999 p. 676). In addition, Pythagoras was a model of moral purification and intellectual ascent. Therefore, Ficino found in this author the elements of a psychology that envisioned knowledge as linked with a process of purification of the soul and open to divine influence through dreams (Celenza 1999 pp. 695-696). In addition, I would suggest that Ficino perceived Pythagoras as a model of a philosophy that considered written texts as a misleading way of communicating and endorsed a form of knowledge that resulted in non-discursive thinking and divinely inspired knowledge.

To sum up, Ficino's exegetical summary of the dialogue *Theaetetus* envisioned a mode of thinking that rejects inference from signs (*coniectura*) as an inferior form of knowledge that is open to deception. This mode of thinking emphasized the limits of
rational discourse in accessing knowledge and promoted non-discursive thinking as a privileged form of knowledge. The author's summary draws from Plato's dialogue a sharp critique of rhetoric and rhetoricians. The context of this critique is the author's interpretation of Plato through Late Ancient Platonic commentators. This view is also closely intertwined with the author's rediscovery of Pythagoras and Iamblichus in a moment that assigned a particular importance to prophecy and religious inspiration.

If Ficino praised non-discursive thinking, denounced the pitfalls of language and questioned the ideas of rhetoricians, one may ask, what kind of poetry and poets could he envision in his writings? In the remainder of the chapter, I will focus on how Ficino's praise of non-discursive thinking and his emphasis on divine inspiration were applied to his mature views about poetry. In doing so, I will pay particular attention to Ficino's commentaries of Plato's dialogues Ion and Phaedrus.

**Ficino on Plato's Ion: poetic ignorance and divine inspiration**

Similarly to Theaetetus, Plato's Ion is a short dialogue that belongs to the so called "aporetic" period of the author's texts. The characters of this dialogue are Socrates and the rhapsode Ion. The problem at stake is whether, and what, Ion really knows. In the course of his poetic performances Ion discusses everything, so that one would think that he is the recipient of a universal kind of knowledge. However, daily life experience teaches that time is necessary to acquire even the most basic technical expertise. In resolving this puzzling contradiction, Socrates succeeds in persuading Ion that he does not know anything. In Socrates' perspective, Ion can talk about everything because of a kind of knowledge that comes from divine possession (enthusiasmos). As proof of the
divine origin of this inspiration (mantheia), Socrates remarks that the rhapsode cannot remember and explain what he utters during the performance. There are at least two diverging opinions about the meaning of this dialogue.

Based on a partial reading of Plato's corpus, scholars of aesthetics have traditionally interpreted Socrates' definition of Ion's divinely inspired omniscience as praise of poetic knowledge. In this perspective, Socrates distinguishes poetry from other forms of knowledge because Plato understood one of the basic principles of modern aesthetics, that is, the autonomy of artistic beauty (Stefanini 1951). Ion's omniscience, consequently, is perceived as foreshadowing the modern view that poetic discourse generates a form of knowledge that transcends rational standards of comprehension (Schaper 1968 pp.53-53). In other words, historians of aesthetics have turned Plato's aporetic dialogue into the precursor of a modern notion of art. However, this view is incompatible with Plato's ban of poets from the ideal city that is found in the Republic. Although this contradiction persists theoretically, it disappears once it is understood within the historical narrative proposed by scholars of aesthetics.

Based on a thorough knowledge of Plato's corpus along with the extensive study of the historical context of ancient Greece, classicists and historians agree that Socrates' description of poets as divinely inspired is ironic. Compared with its function in authors such as Homer and Hesiod, poetic inspiration does not provide Ion with additional authority but it rather denounces his lack of true knowledge. Therefore, Plato's attitude toward his predecessors is parodic (Murray 1981 pp. 90-92; Murray 1996 p.10). Moreover, the analysis of how the term art (techne) is used throughout Plato's corpus
demonstrates that the author does not intend to distinguish artistic beauty from other endeavors, but rather that he polemically assimilates art to many other crafts (Stern-Gillet 2004). In addition, the work of cultural historians has shown that Socrates' irony about poets and rhapsodes made perfect sense in the context of fourth century Greece, where singing, music, dancing and poetry were the dominant components of Athenian boys' curriculum of studies (Marrou 1982 pp.80-83). This interpretation is also consistent with the ban of poets from the ideal city in the Republic.

How did Ficino understand Plato's view on divine inspiration and poetry? Depending on what is assumed as the correct interpretation of Plato's Ion, scholars have proposed at least two opposite answers to this question. On the one hand, scholars who have read Plato from an aesthetic point of view have maintained that Ficino did not completely understand Ion because he did not grasp the concept of the autonomy of the artistic object. Nevertheless, Ficino did not neglect the creative power of the artist because he was a humanist and because he lived in an artistic century (Megna 1999 pp.129-130). On the other hand, scholars who have read Plato in light of the most recent contributions of Plato's scholarship have maintained that Ficino resolved the problematic function of divine inspiration in the Ion by integrating its aporetic conclusion with Plato's Phaedrus (Hankins 1990 p. 334; Allen 1993 p.140).

Both these interpretations have their merits but neither of them constitutes an answer to my question. The aesthetic reading needs to be refuted because it stems from an obsolete reading of Plato's text. However, it curiously tries to explain what role the context of humanism played within Ficino's exegetical summary. The historicist reading
can be accepted and helps to shed light on the actual focus of Ficino's reading, which is everything but literary and dependent on the theory of divine inspiration outlined in the *Phaedrus*. However, it does not try to understand whether this text was responding to alternative views on poetry available at the time.

Ficino's exegetical summary of Plato's *Ion* is situated between those of the dialogues *Theaetetus* and *Cratylus* since the first publication of the translations. This order may result from a coincidence (Kristeller 1973 p. cxlvii; Hankins 1990 p. 309-310). But it is at least a curious fact, given that Ficino's use of poetry as proof of divine frenzy (*furor*) follows his praise of non-discursive thinking and anticipates his praise of divinely inspired poets as the mentors of the name-giver. In the dialogue *Ion*, Socrates tries to persuade his interlocutor (which Ficino translates as "performer" of Homer's poetry), of the divine origin of his skills. This discursive situation is mirrored in Ficino's exegetical summary, which is presented as the work of a philosopher (Ficino himself) written for a poet (Lorenzo de Medici).91

The summary is organized around a definition of frenzy that the author extrapolates from Plato's dialogue *Phaedrus* and from the dialogue *Ion*. The author envisioned the relationship between the definition of frenzy found in *Phaedrus* (and in *Symposium*) and that found in *Ion* in terms of genus and species. In doing so, the author reported how Plato provides a twofold definition of frenzy (*furor*). The first kind of frenzy is called madness (*insania*) and stems from disease. The second kind is called

91 Some critics also suggested that Ficino mirrors the character Ion as they are both interpreters of divinely inspired poets. This is fascinating, but it should be noticed that Ficino does not translate "rhapsode" as "interpreter." In his translation, he uses the words "recitator," which means "performer."
divine frenzy and stems from God. The first kind turns human beings into brutes; the second kind lifts human beings above their nature toward God. It is on the second kind that the discussion follows.92

In explaining the causes and mechanisms of divine frenzy, Ficino integrated the text of Ion with an ontological hierarchy organized into six levels. The intermediate four levels of this hierarchy offer the epistemological/ontological foundation of Plato's quadripartite typology of divine frenzy. God, in Ficino's view, uses Divine frenzy for drawing the soul from the lower to the higher level. This hierarchy has six levels: One, Mind, Reason, Hypothesis, Nature and Body. However, since the first is the highest, the last is the lowest, the soul falls and rise only through the intermediate four. Divine frenzy is the means by which God makes the soul ascend through these four levels. Since the soul falls and ascends through four levels, there are four kinds of divine frenzy: poetic, mystic, prophetic and erotic.93

Ficino's exegetical summary further analyzes the soul's ascent by matching it first with a hierarchy drawn from the greco-roman pantheon, and second with the allegory of the charioteer found in Plato's Phaedrus. In Ficino's view, each frenzy corresponds to a god (Muses, Dionysus, Apollo and Venus) and causes the soul to ascend through the

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92 Argumentum Marsilii Ficini in Platonis Ionem: "Plato noster, optime Laurenti, furorem in Phaedro mentis alienationem definit. Alienationis autem duo genera tradit, unam ab humanis morbis, alteram a deo provenientem: insaniam illam, hanc divinum furorem nuncupat. Insania infra hominis speciem homo delicitur et ex homine brutum quodammodo redditur; divino furore supra hominis naturam erigitur et in deum transit." Differently from the other exegetical summaries, the Latin text of Ficino's interpretation of Plato's Ion is now available in Paola Megna's critical edition.

93 Ibidem: "Furor autem divinus est qui ad superna convertit, ut in eius definitione constitit. Quatuor ergo species divini furoris existunt, primus quidem poeticus furor, alter mysterialis, tertius vaticinium, quartus amatorius affectus. Est autem poesis a Musis, mysterium a Dionysio, vaticinium ab Apolline, amor a Venere."
spheres. Poetry tempers the soul’s discord and dissonance through harmony (*harmonia*). Mystery (*mysterium*) sums up these parts into one whole through religious ceremonies. Prophecy (*vaticinium*) elevates the whole above time, so that it can see into the future. Love (desire for divine beauty), changes the one into the One. Reframed within the allegory of the charioteer, the soul’s ascent is also described as a process in four steps: distinction between good and bad horse; subjection of the bad to the good horse, and the good horse to the charioteer; direction of the charioteer toward his master; and direction of the master of the charioteer toward the master of all things.

Ficino cross-referenced the definition of frenzy found in the dialogue *Ion* with that found in *Phaedrus* and framed it within the metaphysical framework set out in Plato’s *Laws*. Based on Plato’s definition of poetic frenzy as the possession by the Muses, Ficino claimed that poets without frenzy are empty. In explaining *Ion*, Ficino read Socrates as

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94 *Ibidem*: “Poetico ergo furore in primis opus est, qui per musicos tonos quae torpent suscitet, per harmoniacam suavitatem quae turbantur mulceat, per diversorum denique consonantiam dissonantem pelliat discordiam variasque partes animi temperet. Neque satis hoc est. Multitudo enim adhuc in animo restat: accedit ergo mysterium, quod expiationibus sacrisque et omni deorum cultu omnium partium intentionem in mentem, qua deus colitutur, diriget; unde cum singulae animi partes ad unam mentem redactae sint, iam totum quoddam unum ex pluribus factus est animus. Tertio vero adhuc opus est furore, qui mentem ad unitatem ipsam animae caput reducat: hoc Apollo per vaticinium efficit; nam cum anima supra mentem in unitatem surgit, futura praesagit. Demum cum anima unum facta est — unum, inquam, quod in ipsa essentia animae inest — restat ut illicio in unum quod est super essentiam convertatur: hoc caelestis ipsa Venus per amorem, hoc est divinae pulchritudinis desyderium bonique ardorem, explet.”

95 *Ibidem*: “Primus bonum equum, id est rationem opinionemque, a malo equo, id est a phantasia confusa et natura, distinguat; secundus malum equum bono, bonum aurigae, id est menti, subijcit; tertius aurigam in caput suum, id est in unitatem mentis acerum, dirigat; postremus caput aurigae in caput rerum omnium verit, ubi auriga beatus est et ad praesepe, id est divinam pulchritudinem, sistens equos obiciit illis ambrosiam et super ipsam nectar potandum, id est visionem pulchritudinis et ex visione laetitiam.” It should be noted that the hierarchy of frenzies used in the *Ion* exegetical summary (poetic, hieratic, prophetic and erotic) is different from that found in the 1457 letter (erotic, poetic, hieratic, prophetic). The difference can be explained by considering the new metaphysical framework that is at work in this text. The order is also different from that found in Ficino’s exegetical summary of Plato’s *Phaedrus* (prophetic, hieratic, poetic, amatory). This difference, however, does not stem from a shift in the metaphysical framework but from a different point of view. As Ficino himself explains, “In [commenting on] the Symposium and Ion, I arranged the four madnesses in the order pertaining to the soul’s restoration; here, I have arranged the order insofar as it looks to the actual origin of madness” (Allen 1981 p. 84).
testing the validity of this claim against the assumption (found in the *Laws*) that God, fortune and art rule upon all human affairs. Socrates' reasoning is summarized into two parts that deal respectively with the origin of poetic frenzy and the level to which poetic frenzy descends.

Ficino reused Plato's claim on the ignorance of poets to bring forth a religious argument in favor of God's power. In line with the pattern found in *Cratylus* and *Theaetetus*, Ficino shifted the discussion from dialectics to theology. The first argument is a *reductio ad absurdum*. Ion interpreted and sang perfectly only Homer. Were he to be doing this by chance, he would be able to sing or perform just a few words without continuity and order. Were he doing this by art, he would be able to sing and interpret also other poems written according to the principles of the same art. Therefore, Ion has to be acting under the influence of divine inspiration. The second argument is a syllogism. All poets, Socrates acknowledges, are conversant with many arts and sciences. However, learning them all is impossible for a human being. Therefore, their knowledge has to come from divine inspiration. The third argument belongs to the discourse of apologetics. Simple and untrained people often burst into divine poetry. By choosing them, God wants to manifest that poetic frenzy stems from him, not by human knowledge and skills:

Moreover, we often see a simple, untrained man suddenly emerge as a good poet and sing something magnificent and divine. To achieve great things in an instant is not the work of human ability but of one divinely inspired. In this matter God shows clearly that this intelligence is imparted by His will. To prove that this is so, He often seizes upon the untrained rather than the refined, the mad rather than the prudent, lest, if He were to use perceptive and prudent men for these purposes, it would be thought that such purposes were achieved through human perception and
toil. Therefore, since poetry is not from fortune and from art, it is bestowed by God and by the Muses.\textsuperscript{96}

Ficino’s argument might be understood as consistent with the traditional \textit{topos} of the omniscience and god-like creativity of poets. Indeed, some readers of the time interpreted his argument in this way and used it in their treatises of poetics. Cristoforo Landino, for example, in the introduction to his Dante commentary made reference to the dialogue \textit{Ion} in praise of poetic creativity. Niccolò Perotti, moreover, in a passage of his \textit{Cornucopiae}, devoted some space to the traditional \textit{topos} of poetic frenzy by building upon Landino’s text (D' Episcopo 1981 pp. 51-57). The same can be said about the role of inspiration in the narrative on the origin of poetry found in the first book of Polydor Virgil's \textit{De Inventoribus} (\textit{On Discovery}, first printed 1499).\textsuperscript{97} All these works, which were written by professional rhetoricians, used Ficino's text as a source for the fortunate metaphor of the poet as a creator (Tigerstedt 1968). However, these authors were not aware of Plato's puzzling reference to the poets' ignorance. They were all inclined to reframe these elements within Cicero's praise of poets as the recipient of a divinely imparted omniscience found in the oration \textit{Pro Archia Poeta} or the \textit{Tusculanae Disputationes}. Differently from his contemporaries, however, Ficino did not alter the

\textsuperscript{96} \textit{Ibidem}: “\textit{Praeberapa saepe videmus rudem hominem et ineptum subito in poetam bonum evadere et aliquid magnificum divinumque cantare; magna vero in momento assequi non humani ingenii est sed divinitus inspirati. Qua in re perspicue Deus ostendit nutu suo hanc infundi, utque ita esse demonstrat, saepe ineptos quosdam potius quam urbanos, insanos potius quam prudentes rapit, ne si acutis prudentibusque viris ad haec uteretur, humana subtilitate et industria fieri haec existimarentur. Cum ergo non sit a fortuna nec ab arte poesis, a Deo et a Musis tribuitur.” The passage is quoted in Farnell’s translation (p.57).

\textsuperscript{97} \textit{De inventoribus} I : viii.2 : “\textit{Nam poetae furore afflati res omni admiratione et stupore dignas canunt, sine quo, test Cicerone in primo De divinatione, Democritus negabat magnos esse poetas, quipped qui, ut idem quoque Democritus et Plato aiebant, non arte sed natura constant, tuncque very vates sunt cum insaniunt.”
meaning of Plato's claim about the poets' ignorance but he understood it within the evangelical ideal of learned ignorance (Allen 1993 pp.142-143), which is compatible with his view on knowledge and language as divinely inspired.

Ficino's hierarchy of frenzies draws a sharp distinction between the figures of the poet (poeta) and the prophet (vates), whom were generally handled as synonyms by contemporaries. Although they are perceived as involved in a similar kind of experience – they are both the recipients of divine frenzy – poetry and prophecy play different roles in the elevation of the soul. Also, they are granted a different degree of participation in divine contemplation. What are the premises and implications of this distinction? The answer can be found in Ficino's reading of Plato's Phaedrus. 

Poetry and Prophecy: Ficino on Phaedrus

The dialogue Phaedrus is a long text that belongs to the last part of Plato's career. Exceptionally well crafted, the text presents Socrates and his friend Phaedrus in a country scene, that is, the banks of the river Ilissus in the environs of Athens. The discussion deals with a speech conceived by the Sophist Lysias and transcribed by Phaedrus. Phaedrus reports this speech to Socrates to learn what he thinks about its literary quality and its meaning. Socrates' response, however, is not simply an exercise in literary analysis. Uncharacteristically, Socrates bursts into an inspired response and brings forth an ideal of contemplative knowledge embodied in the figure of the charioteer. Socrates further presents himself as acting and speaking under the influence of divine inspiration.
A reader of Iamblichus' commentary of Plato, Ficino's used *Phaedrus* to define a typology of prophecy that was in opposition with commonly accepted theories in Quattrocento Italy. This typology constitutes the bedrock of Ficino's theory of signification. In *Phaedrus*, Socrates uses sign (*semaino*) to refer to a divine manifestation, that is, the inner voice that causes Socrates to speak. In this context, Plato uses the term “sign” in relation to a communication that occurs directly between gods and humans (Manetti 1993 pp.53-54). Plato's Late Ancient interpreters had drawn from this passage a threefold typology of divination. In the third book of *De Mysteriis*, Iamblichus distinguished among divine, natural and artificial divination, and brought forth the former as the only reliable kind of divination. In doing so, he asserted that no one is naturally inclined to divination (*mantike*), because it comes from without, and not from within. In Iamblichus's view, divine inspiration is the sign (*semeion*) of this reliable kind of divination. This sign stems, according to Plato and his interpreter Iamblichus, from the divine imprinting of images, words and texts upon the soul of designated subjects.

Critics have often remarked upon the exceptional importance of this dialogue in Ficino's overall understanding of Plato's corpus. Ficino presumed that Plato had written

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98 *Phaedrus* 242 c: “My friend, just as I was about to cross the river, the familiar divine sign came to me which, whenever it occurs, holds me back from something I am about to do. I thought I heard a voice coming from this very spot, forbidding me to leave until I made atonement for some offense against the gods.” The text is quoted in the translation of Nehamas and Woodruff.

99 *De Mysteriis* III: 27: “Now certainly these (signs), when clearly seen, have derived a certain trace from divine divination in a greater or lesser degree. Indeed, it is not possible that any part be wholly bereft of it, but just as in all things an image of the good carries god in it, so also an image of divine divination appears in them, sometimes obscure and sometimes more clear. But none of these is such as the divine form of divination, nor may the one divine, unmingled form of it be characterized by the many phantasms that descend from it into the realms of becoming.” The text is quoted in the translation of Clarke, Dillon and Hershbell.
Phaedrus during his youth under divine inspiration, and proposed to read this dialogue as a sacred text. Ficino's interest in Phaedrus is illustrated by the massive exegetical apparatus he produced throughout his career of translator and exegete of Plato's texts. Differently from the exegetical works on Plato's dialogues Cratylus, Theaetetus and Ion, Ficino's work on Phaedrus includes an exegetical summary ("argumentum") organized into three chapters, a postscript to these first chapters, eight additional chapters followed by another postscript and a collection of fifty three short chapters called "summae" (Allen 1981 p.20).

In his translation and exegetical commentary of Plato's Phaedrus, as well as in his translation of Iamblichus De Mysteriis, Ficino translated Plato's notion of divine imprint as form (forma) or concept (conceptum). On this basis, I would argue, Ficino brought forth divinely inspired prophecy (vaticinium) as the theory of signification that supports his interpretations of Plato's Cratylus and Theaetetus. Ficino's distinction between poets and prophets is defined in the Phaedrus commentary. Whereas prophecy and hieratic art involved a process of knowledge and volition, Ficino's text explains, poetry and love stem only from hearing and sight. This cognitive pattern is then applied to the history of antiquity. In a line of argument that a modern reader may associate with a phenomenology of religion, the author asserts:

100 Commentarium IV (p.83): "Amplissima enim est poete provincial omniformisque material. Animus igitur se ipsum format facillimum formatori deo subicere debet. Quod quidem per mollem teneritudinem est expressum. At vero si ob eiusmodi facilitatem alienas iam formas maculasve susceperit, certe divinis interim formari non poterit; propter aperta subiunctum est a Socrate intactum id est immaculatum vacuumque prorsus esse debere." Summae XI (p. 139): "Sane vel conceptum imaginabilem efficaciter ad intimum propagat auditum, vel format ipse demon in suo corpore spiritali vocem motu quodam miro eodemque motu pulsat corpus Socratis spiritale (quasi voce quadam), quo quidem vibrato excitatur ad idem et auditus Socratis intimus." Ficino's exegetical texts of Plato's Phaedrus are reported in Allen's translation.
The ancient poets (poetae) did not compose divine hymns (hymnos) until, admonished by the prophets (vates) and priests (sacerdotes), they had first thought to celebrate the gods, to pray to them, to intercede, and to give thanks. The amatory madness, however, will be placed fourth; for it is usually excited through sight, which we naturally use after hearing. Besides, through prophecy and priestly mysteries we know God as the good, so we immediately worship divine things and sing of them poetically.¹⁰¹

Ficino subordinated the poets’ work to the action of prophetic and hieratic frenzies. In addition, Ficino extended the notion of poetic frenzy to songs and poems, which he saw as the results of the same process:

But no madness is content with simple speech (simplici sermone): he (i.e. the frenzied individual) bursts into clamoring and songs (cantus) and poems (carmina). Any madness, therefore, whether the prophetic (fatidicus), hieratic, or amatory, justly seems to be released as poetic madness when it proceeds to songs and poems. And since poetic song and verse demand concord and harmony and every harmony is included in the scale of nine (as I show in the Timaeus with music), the number nine seems rightly to have been consecrated to the Muses.¹⁰²

To sum up, Marsilio Ficino found in Plato's Cratylus a theory of language that assigns a pivotal role to divinely inspired poets in assessing the correctness of names. This view is substantiated by the theory of knowledge defined in the commentary to

¹⁰¹ Commentarium IV (pp. 83-84): “Neque prius antique poete divinos hymnos composuerunt quam per vates sacerdotesque admoniti celebreme deos, precari, deprecari, gratias agere coggitarent. Quartus vero gradus furoi dabitur amatorio. Hic enim per visum incitari solet, quo naturaliter utimur post auditum. Preterea per vaticinium mysteriaque deum agnoscimus tanquam bonum. Itaque mox divina colimus et poetica canimus.”

¹⁰² Ibidem III (p. 84): “Furens autem nullus est simplici sermone contentus, sed in clamorem prorumpit et cantus et carmina. Quamobrem furor quilibet, sive fatidicus sive mysterialis seu amatorius, dum in cantus procedit et carmina, merito in fureorem poeticum videtur absolvit. Quoniam vero poeticus cantus atque versus exiguit concentus armonicos, quod in Timei musica declarandas, merito novenarium Musis numerum consecravisse videntur.”
Plato's *Theaetetus* and further analyzed in the theory of poetry and the theory of signs defined respectively in the *Ion* and the *Phaedrus* commentary. This view is closely intertwined with Ficino's views on the link between poetry and prophecy, two activities that he perceived as closely related but chronologically distinct. Ficino's texts draw a sharp distinction between poetry, which is associated with divine inspiration, and rhetoric, which is related to the inferior form of knowledge that is conjectural thinking. How did Pontano and Ficino differ in their views on language and poetry?

*Poeta* and *vates* in Pontano and Ficino

Scholars have tried to set out a comparison between Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pontano by framing them within a historiographical schema that counters "Neoplatonism" and "humanism." The bedrock of this thesis is the work of Remigio Sabbadini, whose groundbreaking studies on humanistic philology represented Quattrocento scholars as the precursors of modern standards of historical objectivity and methodological rigor. Sabbadini's thesis has eventually influenced the work of Carlo Dionisotti and Vittore Branca, who assumed the existence of a humanistic and a neoplatonic front in Quattrocento Italy. Building on this thesis, Ferrau has proposed that Pontano's veiled critique of Ficino's theory of divine inspiration was generically addressed against contemporary theories of poetry that neglected the study of poetic craft (Ferrau 1983). Moreover, Ferrau has associated Pontano and the Roman writer Paolo Cortesi, and argued that these scholars were involved in an hypothetical anti-florentine front interested in
poetic technique, but skeptical about "irrational speculations" (Ferraù 1979 p.50n). Rather than focusing on Pontano's astrological writings that also deal with poetic inspiration as the context of the dialogue *Actius*, Ferraù has based his argument solely on Pontano's rhetorical treatises and poems, which he has perceived as the trademark of the author's "rational" humanism.

In the first chapter, however, I have illustrated that Pontano's identification of poets and diviners (*vates*) was more than a rhetorical flower the tribute that a classicist had to pay to his ancient sources. As a reader of the pseudo-Ptolemaic *Centiloquium* through a Ciceronian lens, Pontano had very clear ideas about the source of poetic inspiration and its meaning. Moreover, poetic inspiration (*adflatus*) and conjecture (*coniectura*) are the key terms of the author's mode of thinking. This mode of thinking, as I have argued, brings forth poets as the holders of a creative skill that is denied to most of people. In Pontano's view, this skill is astrologically determined by a positive configuration of

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103 In his dialogue *De Hominitibus Doctis* (*On Learned Men*, written 1489-1490; first printed 1734) dedicated to Lorenzo de Medici, Cortesi traced a history of literature and brought forth an ideal of what literature should be. The dialogue is set on the lake of Bolsena; the interlocutors are Paolo Cortesi himself, Alessandro Farnese, Antonio, who may refer to Antonio Augusto Baldo the follower of Pomponio Leto at the head of the University of Rome (Ferraù 1979 p. 9). Giorgio Merula, Pomponio Leto, Giovanni Pontano, Ermolao Barbaro are interpreted as the living embodiments of the conception of art that the dialogue seeks to outline. According to Ferraù, Cortesi's polemic target is Florentine culture as it was exemplified by Ficino's theory of poetic frenzy as the most important prerequisite of poetic craft as well as by Poliziano's theory of learned variety in poetic imitation. Against these tendencies, Cortesi indicates Cicero and Virgil as the unique models of literary writing; he also stresses the conception of craft as the true prerequisite of poetic creation as opposed to Ficino's attention for the moment of "inventio" and its metaphysical implications. Ferraù thinks that Cortesi's critical position toward Florentine Neoplatonism presents striking analogies with Pontano's *Actius* (Ferraù 1979 p.50n).

104 It would be interesting to inquire into what scholars mean by "irrationalism," "rationalism" and "occultism" in relation to Quattrocento culture. These are recent concepts that do not obviously belong to the historical agents' language. Ficino, for example, thinks of poetic frenzy as occurring outside of the mind's control, but in relation to what he calls reason (*ratio*). Are they really useful for the interpretation?
Venus and Mercury in an individual's natal chart. The act of finding likely words, in addition, as well as grouping stars into more and more accurate celestial signs is presented as conditioned by chance (fortuna).

Indeed, there was a disagreement between Ficino and Pontano on the problem of poetic inspiration. However, the context of this disagreement is not limited to Pontano's rhetorical and poetic writings as opposed to Ficino's philosophical treatises. Pontano's Actius responded to Ficino's 1474 letter to Antonio Pelotti and Baccio Ugolini on poetic frenzy. Both Pontano's Actius and Ficino's letter must be read in the context of their authors' metaphysical treatises in which poetry constitutes an important argument in support of two overarching and contrasting philosophical standpoints. These treatises are Ficino's Theologia Platonica (Platonic Theology, written 1474; first printed 1482) and Pontano's De Fortuna (On Fortune, written 1496-1499; first printed 1505).

Ficino's mature views on poetic inspiration circulated in the form of a letter written in 1474 to his friends Pelotti and Ugolini. Ficino and his friends, the letter starts, had agreed that poetry springs from a kind of frenzy and not from technique. In the letter, the author claims that poetic frenzy stems from God and proposes to interpret poetry in light of three signs (signa) of divine frenzy. In line with Plato's Phaedrus, these signs are the poets' acquaintance with every art, the fact that poets forget what they utter, and the poets' ignorance. In this way, Ficino presented true poetry as the sign (by which the author means, like Plato, "divine manifestation" or "epiphany") of divine providence, and distinguished poetic craft from the rhetorical notion of invention (inventio):
Plato adds that some very unskilled men are thus possessed by the Muses, because divine providence wants to show mankind that the great poems are not the invention of men but gifts from Heaven. He indicated this in *Phaedrus* when he says that no one, however diligent and learned in all the arts, has ever excelled in poetry unless to these other qualities has been added a fiery quickening of the soul.

(I: 98)

It would be misleading to read this letter independently from its original context and assimilate it with its use in rhetorical treatises of the time. This process of rhetorical assimilation of Plato's theories began with Leonardo Bruni and continued almost regardless of Ficino's discoveries. This quotation could be easily reframed within the *topos* of poetic frenzy as it appeared in Cicero's *De Oratore, Tusculanae Disputationes* and the oration *Pro Archia poeta*, all of which were standard readings among Quattrocento literary scholars. This rhetorical reading of Ficino's writings does not pay any attention to the author's acquaintance with the literature of Platonic exegesis. Although Pontano had a rhetorical culture, his lifelong studies in astrology and the metaphysical issues addressed in his treatise *De Fortuna* give evidence of a medially learned systematic thinker with clear philosophical views, and not of an easily pleased user of rhetorical *flores*. Presumably, Pontano responded to Ficino's ideas on poetic inspiration based on personal philosophical views that were more complex than those embraced by other rhetoricians of the time. The study of the context of Ficino's letter and a close reading of Pontano's response, therefore, can contribute to rethink the difference between these authors from a more complex perspective.

Ficino's letter to Pelotti and Ugolini is an abbreviated version of a passage taken from the thirteenth book of the the author's speculative masterpiece *Theologia Platonica*. 
Certainly the most ambitious metaphysical works composed in Quattrocento Italy, Ficino's *Theologia* constitutes an eighteen book long demonstration of a clearly stated thesis, that is, the immortality of human soul. The problem of inspiration and its annexed implications in the ambit of poetry and prophecy are examined in both book XIII and XIV. In this section, the author switches from a traditional pattern of demonstration based on proofs (*rationes*) to a kind of demonstration based on signs (*signa*). Along with demonstrations based on confirmations (*confirmationes*), these two argumentative typologies are displayed throughout the entire treatise. The notion of sign (by which Ficino means the manifestation of the divine) provides these two books with their formal structure. In books XIII and XIV, the author deals respectively with the signs which indicate how the soul governs the body (book XIII) and that the soul strives to be like God (book XIV).

The text of book XIII focuses on poetry in two contexts, which are respectively the manifestations of the soul's governance on the body by means of its effects upon the reason and the soul's actions upon material things. This distinction stems from the author's distinction of this sign into two classes, which are respectively the soul's effects (*affectus*) upon phantasy (*phantasia*) and reason (*ratio*), and the soul's action upon material things in the case of human art (*industria*) and miracles (*miracula*). In exploring the first category of effects, and more specifically the soul's effect upon reason, the author adopted the four-fold classification of frenzies found in Plato's *Phaedrus*. Therefore, he listed philosophers, poets, priests and prophets as *signs* used in his demonstration. In particular, he used the description of legendary cases of altered states (*vacationes*) as
signs of his main argument. In exploring the second class, and more specifically the soul's effect upon material things that manifest themselves in art and governance, the author listed a series of examples taken from human crafts that imitate God's creation such as buildings, paintings, machines (such as Archimedes' sphere), the governance of the state and the liberal arts (scientiae liberales). In listing these arts, the author provided the practical counterpart to several disciplines. Philosophy, for example, stems both from divine frenzy and the investigation into the nature of things. Astronomy is presented as an inspired representation of celestial motions by means of diagrams. Rhetoric is envisioned as the art of speaking well (facundia). Differently from a rhetorician like Landino, who would have continued this argument by presenting the poet as a creator of fictions that imitate God's creation (Tigerstedt 1968), Ficino concluded the passage by presenting poetry as frenzy (furor). Here, as elsewhere, Ficino did not associate poetry with Plato's notion of imitation (mimesis), which he reserved exclusively for plastic and visual arts (Allen 1989).

Ficino's Theologia Platonica must be taken as the context of the presentation of poetry as a sign of divine providence found in the letter to Pelotti and Ugolini. This is also the context that needs to be posited in order to understand the dialogue between Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pontano. Neither the discourse of aesthetics nor a

105 This is very different from what Cristoforo Landino does by using Ficino's text. Since he was a rhetorician and a poet, Landino does not hesitate to list poetry among the other plastic arts, thus associating poetry with human crafts that imitates God's creation (Tigerstedt 1968). This view, however, does not belong to Ficino who perceives poetry in the context of prophecy and does not associate any activity with the poet, whom he sees as nothing but God's trumpet (ceu tuba).
hypothetical struggle between humanism and Neoplatonism are appropriate analytical
grids to understand the authors’ disagreement on poetic inspiration.\footnote{Falco has recently discussed Ficino’s reuse of the vatic myth from the angle of modern theories on
tradition and mythology (Falco 2007). In general, I agree with Falco’s conclusion although I prefer to
emphasize on Ficino’s sources and on his disagreement with Pontano.}

Reading Ficino's letter to Pelotti and Ugolini out of its original context is
misleading. Likewise, it is shortsighted to interpret Pontano's views on poetic inspiration
uniquely in terms of the discussion found in the dialogue Actius. The context of the
argument found in Actius, I would argue, is Pontano's treatise De Fortuna, a text
organized into three books that was published only posthumously and heavily altered by
the author's pupil Pietro Summonte.\footnote{The text of De Fortuna is transmitted by two manuscripts. Pontano's autograph, which belonged to the
Roman humanist Angelo Colocci, is now available at the Vatican Library. Another copy, transcribed by
Pietro Bembo, is now at the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice. I address the problem of how this text was
altered by its posthumous editor at p.215. I suspect that many other parts of the printed edition are spurious.
The introduction, for example, makes reference to events (the battle of Cerisole or Francesco d’Avalos' entrance into Naples) that Pontano could not have witnessed because they occurred after his death.} In this text, Pontano set out to defend the thesis
that a certain margin of chance needs to be assumed for making sense of human
initiatives, whether they are successful or not. In doing so, Pontano had to struggle to
reconcile this thesis with his astrological views and his religious beliefs.

Some scholars have interpreted this work as an articulation of the humanistic genre
of the dignity of man. Consequently, De Fortuna has been interpreted within a
conventional Renaissance narrative as a declaration of secular entrepreneurship and faith
in human achievements (Cassirer 1963 p.76; Santoro 1967). Even a quick inquiry into the
sources of De Fortuna, however, gives evidence of a very different context. First,
Pontano's text presents his metaphysical view as stemming from Plato’s Timaeus and
Boethius' De Consolatione Philosophiae. In line with most of his predecessors, and
differently from Ficino, Pontano declared that he had read Plato at the light of Chalcidius' commentary.  

In *De Fortuna*, Pontano envisioned five forces at work in human destiny, that is, providence, fate, human will, fortune and chance. Consistent with Plato's view, Pontano asserted that God's law (*fatum*) acts upon three cosmic domains (sphere of errant stars, sphere of fixed stars, sublunar world), which are poetically indicated with the three Parchae Clotho, Lachesis and Athropos. Fate, therefore, is defined as an immutable and eternal cause: it acts upon terrestrial things in a mediated form. Therefore, it does not necessarily coincide with human will (*voluntas*), which chance (*casus*) can favor or oppose. Once chance intersects will, it is called fortune (*fortuna*), which Pontano defined as an efficient cause and defined as a kind of force (*impetus*).

**108** The problem of the sources of *De Fortuna* needs to be reexamined. While it has been said that Pontano uses a Scholastic framework borrowed from Saint Thomas Aquinas (Santoro 1963), the author actually makes reference to a pseudo-Thomistic work: a short treatise entitled *De Fortuna*. In addition, the text makes reference to Plato's *Timaeus*, which Pontano declares to be reading with Chalcidius' commentary. Which copy was he using and what did this choice -rather obsolete at the end of the century -mean is another problem that, sooner or later, will need to be resolved.

**109** *De Fortuna* I p.271 v: "Quinque ita sunt numero que Platonis in mentem veniant, providentia, fatum, hominis ipsius voluntas, ac tum fortuna, tum casus. Et divina quidem quae essent, atque intelligibilia, quaeque Diis ipsis cognata et proxima, ad providentiam ea solam unamque referenda quae vero naturalia, eademque corpora ex elementis constituia, quod constitutionis suae naturam sequuntur, ad fatum cuius ipsis munus sit, atque officium, singular quidem digerere, eamque pro motu, loco, forma, tempore distribuere, providentiae vero suum sic, ac proprium, cuncta quamvis diversa, quamvis alia atque alia pariter tame complecti."

**110** *Ibidem* 272 r-v: "De qua Poetae quoque locuti sunt, fatti ipsius vim, atque substantiam triplicem quasi personam partien tes, Atropon, Clothon, Lachesin. Et Atropon quidem orbec illum, utque Graece loquamur σφαραντί εσσε volunt, quae αυλάνες ab illis dicitur, quod non modo non erret, verum motum illum suum continet indesinenter, atque ex praescrito, nam neque ullam sentit agitationis suae obliquitatem, neque deflexionem omnino aliquam. Erraticam vero illam, ac divagantem sphaeram appellavere Clothon, ob tortuosam obliquantemque et tanquam deviam coeli vertiginem, perplexamque obliquitatem de qua scilicet provenient ea, quae diversi variantisque ut essent motus, nec idem quidem ipse motus, verum devius nec eadem, sed dissimilis progrediendi ratio praestaret."

**111** *Ibidem* p.273 r: "His itaque in actionibus quae voluntariae quidem sunt, quamquam etiam in voluntariis vim exercet suam fortuna, ut vel affluat quis prospero perducatur in portum, vel adverso iactetur in
Pontano applied this analytical framework to every kind of human endeavor, and above all to poetry. In general, the text sets out to understand the origin of poetic talent in a disposition imprinted by stars at birth, which chance can favor or oppose in the course of an individual's lifetime. More specifically, fortune is presented as acting upon the individual's external goods (*externa bona*), among which Pontano - differently from Ficino - tended to see the natural inclination to poetry. This is the theoretical context for Pontano's approach to poetic inspiration. It is within this framework that Pontano formulated his arguments against Ficino's view.

In the *Centiloquium* (and in *De Rebus Coelestibus*), Pontano presented poetic inspiration as a force that stems from a certain configuration of Venus and Mercury. In the first book of *De Fortuna*, poetic inspiration has the function of demonstrating the effects of fortune upon human life ("Similitudo de Sibyllis, vaticinantibus ac de poetis"). Most probably in reference to Ficino's works, Pontano's text refutes the views of contemporaries who claimed that inspiration necessarily stems from God. A rhetorician well versed in the art of dialogue rather than the practice of academic disputation, Pontano used rhetorical questions, reported direct speeches and constant expressions of doubt in his nuanced refutation. Based on the distinction between natural and artificial divination, he prudently brought forth poets, sibyls, diviners and prophets as the proof of Fortune's action upon humankind. In contrast with the book XIII of Ficino's *Theologia Platonica*, Pontano avoided religious discourse to discuss a category of

scopulum, aut exagitetur tempestatibus. Qui igitur fortunae campus sit, quae etiam palaestra, ludusque tam invertus, ac lubricus iam intelligis."
phenomena that he tried to explain by means of natural causes. In Pontano’s view, these natural causes act upon human endeavors with a wide margin of unpredictable chance:

The example of diviners, Sibyls and poets confirm what I have said about the force (impetus) of fortunate individuals. Diviners and Sibyls don't move by themselves and are not guided by reason. What kind of rational understanding of divination can be either in an unlearned country bumpkin or in a coarse and idiotic little girl?\(^\text{112}\) However, they do divine and often guess future events. That motion that some calls frenzy (furor) is what teaches diviners and Sibyls to be naturally carried away from any kind of thought, decision and reason; those who are carried away are named frenzied (furentes). Not only are they abandoned by reason, but also by their senses. They loose their pigment and their facial expression; their hair, as the poet witnesses, don't stay put. Their chest and their furious hearts swell of fury. And since some people think that this force or frenzy stems from God, who has the prerogative on future events, it is called divine because human reason has no control upon it. Once this frenzy and that force so far removed from human reason are gone, not only does the Sibyl ignore what she has just foretold but if you ask her about what she said, she will deny it. And how could she remember, when her mind and senses were shocked in the process of foretelling the future?\(^\text{113}\)

Although Ficino’s *Theologia Platonica* is not found in Pontano’s library, I am persuaded that Ficino’s text and argumentation must have been known to him. Ficino's

\(^{112}\) The image of the prophetess as an ignorant woman inspired by prophetic frenzy, the text probably makes reference to Plutarch's description of the Pythia at the Oracle of Delphi. On the ancient sources of this discussion see Dodds 1951 pp. 72-74.

\(^{113}\) De Fortuna lib. I pp. 280v-281r: “Nec vero comprobandis iis, quae de fortunati viri impetu dicimus, exempla desunt sive vaticinantium, Sibyllarumque, sive etiam poetarum. Et vaticinantes ipsi quidem, Sibyllaeque neque ex seipsis moventur nec ducentur ratione. Quae enim in homine indocto, et saepenumero rusticano, in muliercula autem praerudi et semifatua inesse potest divinandi ratio? Divinat tamen, et pluriorum simul seculos et futuras res annuntiant. Mveri autem et vaticinantes ipsos, et Sibyllas impetu illo naturali tantum procul ab omni pensitatione, consilio, rationeque, illud docet quod ille ipse motus, furor est appellatus, et qui eo correpti sunt furentes dicti. Quid quod non a ratione destituuntur solum, verum etiam a sensibus quippe quibus nec color, nec vultus illis suis est, non oculi, non comitae, ut Poeta testatur, mansere comae, sed pectus anhelum, et rable fera corda tument. Atque hic quidem sive impetus siver furor, quod ei præesse Deus putat, cuius est propria futurorum cognitio, cum ratio humana praestare nullo id possit modo divinus est vocatus. Quocirca furor ubi recessit, impetusque ille, tam humana ab ratione remotus, alienusque, non ignorat modo Sibylla, quod paulo ante de furore agitata praedixit, verum id se praefatam etiam si percutenter, negaverit quippe quomodo meminisse eius possit, quae sensibus omnino coniuncta et mente per id omne tempus fuerit, quo vaticinata est?”
works were easily accessible at the Aragonese library, which received prestigious illuminated copies of both the translation of Plato's dialogues and of the *Theologia Platonica*. Platonic ideas must have circulated at court thanks to the King's son, Cardinal Giovanni, who was personally acquainted with Ficino. In 1482, Giovanni received from Ficino a text that included a short introduction to Plato's theory of divine frenzy along with a prophecy addressed to the King himself (Rees 2002). Platonic themes, moreover, circulated among vernacular poets such as Cariteo and Sannazaro, who were acquainted with the poems collected in the *Raccolta Aragonese* and might have read Cristoforo Landino's translations commissioned by the king himself. While Pontano was finishing his treatise, moreover, Platonic themes were successfully spreading among the members of his intellectual community as a result of Giles of Viterbo's preachings and writings, which deeply influenced and changed the orientation of Pontano's enclave. Last, but not least, the text of Pontano's *De Fortuna* follows the argumentative structure, adopts a similar language and relies on the same quotations found in Ficino's text, which it amplifies and puts into doubt in light of the author's theory of fortune. The relationship is illustrated through a parallel reading of these two texts:

He (i.e. Plato) adds that certain wholly unskilled men are enraptured by the Muses precisely because divine providence wishes to declare to mankind that splendid poems are not men's inventions but the gifts of heaven. He gives evidence of this in the *Phaedrus* when he says that no man, however diligent and learned in all the arts, ever excelled in poetry unless to these accomplishments was added that quickening

The state of the body demonstrates that diviners were in a state of mental and sensorial shock while they were under the effect of frenzy. And then if this force, although it is not from fortune, move, incite and carry away Sibyls so that they foretell the future inasmuch as it is disposed to prognostication; is it really different from Fortune? It acts upon external goods and it will urge on nature, will ravage what depends on

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114 I will deal with Giles of Viterbo and his influence upon the members of Pontano's intellectual community in chapters III and IV, and more specifically on pp. 176, 220.
reason. Isn't it how Fortune will rule on external goods? [...] Homer and Virgil are two poetic stars in two languages: they achieved this because of an inborn force to write poetry as if the gods wanted them to sing in hexameters [...] In addition, constant studies and vigilant zeal has no access to something that only this natural or, as someone thinks, divine force is entitled and allowed to provide. Who should be trusted more than poets? Whose words should we rely on? Let's listen to Ovid:

“Est deus in nobis, agitante calescimus illo
Impetus ille Sacrae semina mentis habet.”

If Ficino saw poets, poetry and prophecy as a sign of the soul's immortality and as proceeding from a divinely triggered reason, Pontano emphasized the natural causes of this phenomenon. Differently from Ficino, Pontano did not say whether inspiration results from chance or divine prompt. In De Fortuna, he came to perceive the fact of

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115 Theologia Platonica XIII: 2.5 (p.126): “Addit ineptissimos quosdam homines a Musis ideo corripi, quia divina providentia declarare vult hominum generi non hominum inventa esse praeclara poemata, sed caelestia munera. Cuius illud affert signum in Phaedro, quod nullus unquam, licet diligentissimus et in omnibus artibus eruditus, excelluit in poesi, nisi ad haec accesserit ferventior illa animi concitatio, quam sentimus quando ‘est deus in nobis, agitante calescimus illo./ impetus ille Sacrae semina mentis habet. [...]”

Both Ficino and Pontano quote the definition of frenzy found in Ovid's Fasti (6: 5-6).

116 De Fortuna lib. I p. 281r: “Nam mente consternatos esse, ac sensibus vaticinantes, habitus ipse corporis quam diu fure re correpti sunt, docet, ac monstrat, Igitur si impetus, quanquam ab hoc ipso fortunae diversus, vates Sibyllasque ad futura praedicenda concitat, instigat, rapit ut pote praedicendis rum externarum dominam? Quae nostrae quidem iurisdictione minime subjecta sunt, quippe cum hominum ipsorum est proprium, nullum pactum, nunc esse conscripta ratione, ad fortunam propitiandum rerum externarum dominam? Quae nostrae quidem iurisdictione minime subjecta sunt, quippe cum hominum ipsorum est proprium, nullum pactum, nunc esse conscripta ratione, ad fortunam propitiandum rerum externarum dominam? Quae nostrae quidem iurisdictione minime subjecta sunt, quippe cum hominum ipsorum est proprium, nullum pactum, nunc esse conscripta ratione, ad fortunam propitiandum rerum externarum dominam?”
being a poet as stemming from a powerful and natural impulse (\textit{impetus ad poeticandam}), which he compared with phenomena like a storm or an earthquake. God, however, does not necessarily cause what Pontano’s text ascribes to the realm of fortune:

This force is called sacred, no matter if it is ascribed to a natural spirit or to a divine force. Hence, Ovid says:

\textit{“Spiritus ille sacer qui vaturn pectora versat.”}\textsuperscript{117}

This spirit is celestial, or rather natural, or both. It superceeds human forces and achieves what art cannot reach by means of even the most zealous devotion and efforts or even approximate from afar. Hence Democritus, concerning poetic endeavors, not unappropriately ascribes every gift to inborn disposition and says that all the fortune of poets, that is, dignity and excellence, stems from natural disposition. A natural force, I say, produces what is necessary for this divine and admirable endeavor (poetry was thus called by very ancient and wise men). Is it possible that the aid of fortune does not have any part in that disposition that is necessary for composing a poem, therefore acquiring praises and glory? Is it possible that the aid of such a great fortune does not act in starting and driving forward one, who owns material goods and servants?\textsuperscript{118}

\textsuperscript{117} Ovid. \textit{Epistulae ex Ponto.} 4:2. The verse also echoes (but this may be accidental, a verse from Naldo Naldi’s elegies (\textit{Elegiarum libri tres ad Laurentium Medicen I:} 8.21 "Spiritus ille sacer, vaturn qui pectora mulcet").

\textsuperscript{118} \textit{De Fortuna} lib. I p. 281v: “Cui quidem sive spiritui naturali, sive impetui quod divinum quiddam atque humano quidem esse videatur maius sacer is est vocatus unde idem hic ‘Spiritus ille sacer, qui vaturn pectora versat.’ Is itaque sive coeli, naturaeve sive utriusque impulsus visque humana maior id prorus praestat, atque efficit, quod ars praestare nullis studiis, nullis quamquam assiduis laboribus potest assequi, neque metae ipsi potest vel distantissimo etiam spatio propinquare. Unde Democrito non temere visum est, poeticis in rebus, ingenio tribuenda esse omnia, poetaeque fortunam omnem, hoc est dignitatem atque excellantiam ab inge et proificei. Quod igitur in divina atque admirabili re (sic enim ab antiquissimis ac sapientissimis viris habita est poetrica) quod — inquam — naturalis praestat impetus, in ea re, quae ad pangendum spectat carmen, atque ad comparandam inde laudem, ac gloriam, nunquid non praestare idem poterit, atque efficere in commovendo, ac propellendo eo, cui talis inesse fortunae consequendis bonis et famulius, et adminiculum?"
Virgil, *vates* and the Sybils

Different ideas concerning the origin and nature of poetic inspiration correspond to a different canon of "inspired" authors. Throughout his life, Giovanni Pontano brought forth Virgil and Homer as the quintessential examples of inspired poets (*vates*). If Ficino separated the conventional Roman identification of prophets and poets based on the theory of knowledge he found in Plato's dialogues, one may ask how he dealt with Virgil. Since the time of Augustus, Virgil had been considered as a prophet and the prophecies found in writings such as the fourth eclogue or the sixth book of the *Aeneid* had been handled as quasi-religious texts. Moreover, Early Christian Fathers and their followers were inclined to read these texts as Christian prophecies. Now, if one endorses Ficino's view that prophecy has to come before poetry and that poets must be informed by prophets, what can be said about Virgil? Ficino addressed this issue in his *De Religione*.

Ficino's *De Religione*, whose importance for the author's views on language has been noticed in discussing the exegetical summary of Plato's *Cratylus*, brings forth an argument against this conventional interpretation of Virgil. Differently from Pontano, who insisted on the analogy between astrological inspiration and poetry based on a mode of thinking drawn from the *Centiloquium*, Ficino argued against this view and explained the genesis of Virgil's fourth eclogue by means of an interesting anecdote.

Virgil's fourth eclogue praises the birth of a child, Pollio's son, as the sign of a new age of prosperity and peace. Traditionally, this text had been read as foreshadowing Christ's birth since Early Christian times. Conversely, Fathers of the Church such as Augustine had perceived Virgil as a Christian prophet. Moreover, Virgil's fourth eclogue
contributed to the creation of an enduring myth which presented the Mantuan poet as a
diviner and a magician who saved cities and lives from destruction. This myth, whose
most famous expressions are found in Dante's *Commedia* and Boccaccio's *Genealogiae
Deorum Gentilium*, was still at work in late Quattrocento as it can be seen in prophetic
pastoral works such as the *Eclogae Sacrae* of Giles of Viterbo, who was notably
acquainted with both Ficino and Pontano. This myth also played a pivotal role in the *De
Partu Virginis* of the Neapolitan poet (and Pontano's pupil) Jacopo Sannazaro. Moreover, this myth was used as a cliché among Quattrocento literary theorists who insisted on the omniscience of poets.

Consistent with the analytical and historical separation of poetry and prophecy outlined in the *Phaedrus* commentary, Ficino redefined this conventional interpretation of Virgil's eclogue by adjusting its genesis to this "phenomenological" schema. In chapters 24 and 25 of his *De Religione Christiana*, Ficino weighed Scriptural authority in light (or at least what he perceived as such) of the Sybillian Books, that is, a corpus of prophetic writings that the Romans consulted in times of trouble. In discussing the Sybillian books, Ficino was interested in finding out how these texts prophesize the birth of Christ if correctly interpreted. After a short doxographic paragraph, in which he

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119 Comparetti's seminal work is still a useful starting point to examine the problem of the Christian reception of Virgil (Comparetti 1997). Comparetti's approach, however, is outdated and his assumptions are obsolete. Although he has focused exclusively on the interpretive community of Early Modern Venice, Kallendorf has recently contributed to examine this problem from a new angle (intellectual history) and with a new methodology (Kallendorf 1999). Kallendorf's approach and results may be fruitfully applied to a case study focused on the reception of Virgil in Ficino's intellectual community.

120 I address the issue of what role the discussion on prophecy plays in Jacopo Sannazaro's poetry in chapter IV. More specifically, I discuss about the relationship between Giles of Viterbo's eclogues and Sannazaro's *De Partu Virginis* in the fourth chapter (p. 219).

121 At this stage of my research, I don't know what Ficino meant by Sybillian books and what kind of collection he owned. I plan to study the constitution and the reception of this corpus of writings in a future study.
ascribed his knowledge of the Sybillian books to the works of Varro (*Divinarum Rerum*) and Livy (most probably *Ab Urbe Condita* 7:27), Ficino asserted that two ancient authors had access to these texts: Virgil and Lactantius. Their level of understanding of these texts, however, was very different. Whereas Lactantius acknowledged the actual meaning of these texts, it is not certain how Virgil used them and whether he understood their meaning:

I believe that because of the friendship of Augustus and Constantine, emperors and priests allowed Virgil, Lactantius and other learned men to read these books. Lactantius, Constantine's intimate friend, could know the Sybillian witnesses about Christ found in those books, which were extant when Rome was not yet defeated. Lactantius described those witnesses to Constantine and he could not lie with that learned emperor and with those erudite individuals who crowded Italy and Greece, many of whom used to defame Christian writers on every kind of quibble. Although Virgil referred the oracles to Pollio's son, Salonino, who eventually did not excel in anything, did he not read what prophets and evangelists wrote on Christ in those Sybillian books? And above all, did he not know that the Cuman Sybils' text of prophecies referred to the times of Jesus' birth?

(107)

What follows is an unusual interpretation of the Fourth eclogue. Traditionally, exegetes such as Giovanni del Virgilio turned Virgil's text into a Christian prophecy by means of allegory. In this perspective, the eclogue was handled like a divinely inspired text that conveyed a hidden meaning organized into four layers (literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical). Ficino, instead, explained Virgil's text as an imitation of the Cuman Sybil's oracle. After an interpretation of the text of Virgil's Fourth eclogue in light of what Ficino considered its source, Ficino acknowledged that although he does not know "in which sense Virgil wrote what he did" it is a matter of fact that Virgil drew it "from
the Sibyls, whom he did not understand, thanks to Christ's intercession" (108). In a way that applied the mode of thinking outlined in the Phaedrus commentary to Virgil's hermeneutics, Ficino assumed that since prophecy (e.g. Sibyls) comes before poetry, Virgil has not written his prophetic works by divine inspiration. The content of his eclogue was taken from the text of the Sybillian books. In this perspective, and consistent with the view of the poet as unaware of his message, Ficino concluded his reading by asserting that at the end of the poem Virgil "exclaims, although he ignores what he asks, 'Then for me may the last part of a long life remain.' " In Ficino's view, however, this verse was not written by Virgil but was infact a quotation from the Sybillian books.

One may object that the use of Sybillian books or the Sybillian Oracles as a canonical text in the history of Christianity was an odd choice. Indeed, Sybillian books were a corpus of prophetic writings used in Ancient Rome and therefore they apparently belong to a pagan culture that has nothing in common with the Christian world. However, Quattrocento literature and figurative arts (one may think about Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel) ascribed a divinely inspired textuality to this corpus of writings, which were consequently read along with canonical Christian writings. Moreover, Quattrocento religious poetry such as Sannazaro's De Partu Virginis often drew images and language from this corpus of prophetic writings. Ficino's text, in this context, might have been a

122 In the passage, Ficino quotes Virgil. Bucolics. 4: 53-54: "O mihi tum longae maneat pars ultima vitae, spiritus et quantum sat erit tua dicere facta!"

123 Ficino’s position about Virgil is very close to that of Jerome. Ficino’s De Religione might be engaged in a dialogue with Filippo de Barbieri’s On the Discord between Jerome and Augustine, Settled Using Dicta of the Sibyls and of all the Gentiles, both Prophets and Ancient Poets who Prophesied Concerning Christ (1481). I discuss the difference between Ficino and Giles of Viterbo concerning the status of Virgil’s text is discussed in the fourth chapter (p. 232).
voice in an ongoing debate on the relationship between poetry and prophecy. What are the distinctive features of this voice?

**Non-discursive thinking**

It has been shown how the exegetical summaries of Plato's dialogues *Cratylus* and *Theaetetus* had defined a theory of meaning and knowledge that ascribes a pivotal role to divinely imparted ideas. The context of these theories, as it has been illustrated in discussing Ficino's exegetical summary and commentary of Plato's *Ion* and *Phaedrus*, is the author's interest for prophecy. Ficino’s interest in this theme stems from his tendency to read Plato's texts in light of late ancient Platonic commentators such as Iamblichus, as much as from his position as a priest. The second part of the *Phaedrus* commentary provides additional clues about Ficino's mature views on the relationship between prophecy, language and poetry. This sequence corresponds to and constitutes an amplification of the classification of frenzies found in the exegetical commentary. The first quotation provides the reader with a typology of Ficino's views on divination and poetry, which illustrates how the author used Plato as the source of an argument in support of divinely inspired divination and against artificial prediction:

We have discussed sufficiently the definition of frenzy and the order of the four frenzies in [the introduction to] the *Ion* and the [commentary on] the *Symposium*. And we have dealt sufficiently with prophecies, oracles, and the power of sacrifices in our work on Iamblichus and in the [Platonic] *Theology*. It must be enough at this point for us to understand that both Plato and the Platonists openly affirm prophecies, oracles, miracles and atonements (*expiationes*) for crimes. They also put the divine frenzy far before human wisdom (as the Apostle Paul also declares) and affirm that divine prophecy (*vaticinium divinum*) is to be wholly preferred to man's predictions (*artificiosum presagium*), which proceed from craft and skill.
In Ficino's perspective, the Apostle Paul is making a case for non-discursive thinking and divinely inspired prophecy. In linking the praise of non-discursive thinking and divinely inspired knowledge found in Iamblichus and the argument about its superiority found in Saint Paul, Ficino - as suggested by Allen (1981 p.246) - is most certainly thinking to his work *De Raptu Pauli*. What does this text teach about Ficino's mature views on language?

Ficino conceived this text as a letter addressed to his friend and correspondent Giovanni Cavalcanti during an epidemic. He invited his friend to seek heavenly refuge and escape the terror of the plague. The text is also presented as a follow up to a conversation that the author and his addressee had during a banquet with Bernardus Tenerius. As announced in the “salutatio” of the letter, the text sets out to gloss the passage found in the Second Letter to the Corinthians (12: 1-5), in which Paul recounts his ascension to the third sky.124

Rather than constructing his text as a running commentary, Ficino chose the dialogic form and presented himself as asking Paul’s persona how he succeeded in this

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ascension. Paul promptly answers his interlocutor's request and brings forth a complex critique of discursive thinking and a defense of a kind of theology that I would define as negative or apophatic. Ficino was well acquainted with this theological tradition that has its bedrock on the one hand in Paul the Apostle and the pseudo-Dionisyus the Aeropagite, and on the other hand in Platonists such as Plotinus (Celenza 2002; Celenza 2007 p. 87). Both these traditions focus on the idea human understanding is insufficient to understand the first principle (respectively, God and the One) because of its limited condition. This idea had epistemological but also linguistic ramifications, which stem from the problem of how one can speak about an entity that cannot be rationally grasped. Ficino's *De Raptu Pauli*, I would suggest, explores precisely this linguistic side of the problem.

As Ficino presents him in the dialogue, Paul explains that it is possible to talk about God only by negation, rather than by assertion. Every time - Paul's persona explains to a stupefied Ficino - one has to refer to God, he can only compare him to something else (e.g. beginning, end, life, intelligence). If someone asserts what God is, however, he can only say something that was already known, but this is a misleading trap. If human intellect is insufficient to understand God, then he can only have a sense of the One because of God's will, which Ficino conceptualized within the Christian notion of charity (*charitas*). Ficino's linguistic solution to this paradox recalls those proposed by his Neoplatonic predecessors. As Sarah Ahbel-Rappe has illustrated, Neoplatonic exegetes resolved the paradox of finding words about an unspeakable object

125 *Opera* p. 704: "Quotiens ad Deum alia refers ita comparans: Deus principium est, qua ab illo profluunt omnia; Deus est finis, quia ad illum omnia refluunt; Deus vita et intelligentia est, quoniam per illum vivuunt animae, ac mentes intelligent, vere quoque refers. At si affirmaveris "Deus ipse in se absolute est hoc ipsum," quod vel reperi, vel cogitavi, valde decipieris." (Punctuation is mine).
by developing a quasi-liturgical language that engages the reader as if he were involved in a process of initiation that transcends the text (Ahbel-Rappe 2000). Likewise, Ficino presented the mystical moment in which he understands this mystery in a sensual language that uses the Scriptural formula for miraculous events (Ecce) and echoes passages found in the dialogues of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. The figure of Hermes, however, is substituted by Saint Paul's persona whereas those of Tat or Asclepius are substituted by the authorial figure:

“And now I (i.e. Paul) see how my will supports me when my intellect is lacking. And now charity penetrates what even the highest knowledge (scientia) cannot. Although not very clearly, you (i.e. Ficino) now see this infinite charity, you now love it and you vehemently enjoy it. You now see and love all that is visible, and what you see as something that you cannot clearly see because of its abundance, and even what pleases you the most. For you will enjoy without anxiety that goodness that, having no end, infinitely supports and delights you.”126

The linguistic side of the problem posed by apophatic theologians and Neoplatonic commentators, I would suggest, is also the context of Ficino's refutation of writing as a reliable way for acquiring knowledge found in his glosses to the dialogue *Phaedrus*. Ficino's explanation of the enigmatic history of writing that Socrates tells in Plato's *Phaedrus* (274b-278b) is found in two parts of his exegetical works on this dialogue. The first part is found at the end of the third chapter of his exegetical

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126 *Opera* p. 704: “Ecce video ubi quodammodo deficit intellectus, sufficere voluntatem. Penetrat ecce charitas, quo non potest omnino scientia penetrare. Infinitum quidem prospicis, quamvis non clarissime, hanc ardentissime amas, hac gaudes vehementissime. Vides tu quidem quantum est tibi visible, amas et quantum vides ipsa, et quantum vides abs te, quia nimirum exuberat, non posse plane diversi, et hoc ipsum te iuvat maxime, quod sine ulla vel sollicitudine, vel satietate fruaris bono, quod quum sit infinitum, et infinite tibi suppetit, et infinite delectat.” This passage echoes Ficino's translation of the first fourteen dialogues of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. The dialogic form and the pupil's triumph at the end of the master's initiation to divine mysteries were Hermetic features that Ficino had certainly assimilated in his work of translator and now applied to his work in Scriptural hermeneutics.
commentary ("commentum"). In this passage, Ficino briefly summarized Socrates' story and phrased his conclusion in a way that responded to contemporary thinkers such as Lorenzo Valla (or Giovanni Pontano), who praised the study of language in order to understand antiquity and as a system for transmitting knowledge to posterity. As in the exegetical summary to Plato's *Theaetetus*, Ficino's praise of non-discursive thinking is supported by the authorities of Plato and Pythagoras:

Next Socrates compares the illegitimate orator to cooks and sycophants (as in the *Gorgias*) and the legitimate to a doctor. He tells us the rule by which to know the nature of both the soul and the body, or rather of everything, and then returns to the orator's function. On the function of writing, he adds that letters were invented in Egypt along with the other disciplines by a certain demon called Theuth. Socrates laughs at the person who studies writing in the belief that through letters he can reveal indubitable truth to posterity. In the manner of the Pythagoreans, he affirms that the contemplation and transmission of truth occurs in souls rather than in books. Plato also asserts this in his *Letters*.

(p.80)

The argument is amplified in the glosses to this passage of Plato's *Phaedrus* found in the last part of the running commentary. Ficino brought forth an allegorical and an anagogical reading of Socrates' story of the invention of writing. Mercury's invention of writing and his gift to the King Thamus, Ficino explains, is the story of an Egyptian person who, under the influence of Mercury donated writing to the king. Allegorically, the story refers to how a god (Theuth) by the intercession of a demon (Mercury) can act upon the soul (Mercurial soul) in order to produce an invention. Anagogically, Mercury's gift to king Thamus means that inferior beings have to rely on their superiors in judging
the result of an invention (209). This interpretation is then applied to interpret Socrates' view about the invention of writing:

Finally, Socrates concludes that we can either use the discipline of writing and any other discipline correctly or, likewise, misuse them; and thus that the practical knowledge of writing, which can help to serve memory and wisdom, sometimes also declines to the opposite because of human negligence or overconfidence in it.

(p.209)

In the following glosses, Ficino links Socrates' view on language with what he maintains is the correct process of learning. Rather than from written knowledge, Socrates says, one learns from the imprint of the teacher's words upon the soul (210). This is why cultivating writing is not necessarily wrong, but it is in the end useless: written knowledge gets progressively lost if its understanding is not impressed on souls that are able to understand. Philosophers, therefore, consider writing as nothing more than a game (212). Consequently, the last gloss (chapter 53) presents Socrates as engaged in addressing a prayer to Pan. In examining this prayer, Ficino adopts the language of rhetoric in order to reiterate the view that the quality of this speech does not stem from technical skills, but rather from intermediary gods:

As a man notable for his piety, Socrates, just as he had from the beginning and elsewhere throughout the dialogue, so here at the end likewise again attributes all the power of invention (inventionis) and eloquence (elocutio) to the kindness of the gods. Since the highest god often acts through intermediary gods and through those gods close to us, Socrates often mentions the local gods. Now, he finally addresses his speech to them, just as he had paid attention to them repeatedly.

(pp. 212-214)
Divine signs

This chapter has demonstrated how Ficino interpreted Plato's association of poetry and inspiration in light of late ancient Platonic exegetes. Differently from modern readers, who generally look for Plato's views on poetry in the text of the Republic, Ficino did not show any interest for the problem of imitation (mimesis). Differently from his contemporaries, in addition, Ficino did not show any interest for the craft of poetry and the explanation of what poets technically do. In the context of Plato's exegesis, Ficino ascribed a pivotal role to divinely inspired poets in understanding the theory of meaning and knowledge found in the dialogues Cratylus and Theaetetus. Poets are interpreted as signs of the soul's immortality in Ficino's Theologia Platonica and are closely linked with prophets in Christian history traced in the De Religione Christiana. The coordinates of Ficino's mode of thinking are synthesized in his personal way of using the traditional word "vates." Consequently, Pontano criticized Ficino from an astrological point of view, which assimilated poetry and prophecy as natural phenomena exposed to the unpredictable action (impulsus) of Fortune, and the predictable influx of celestial bodies. Ficino's mode of thinking refuted language as a way for accessing knowledge and posited divinely imparted ideas as the only source of knowledge. The author defined his mode of thinking in light of Christian negative theology and late ancient views of non-discursive thinking.
Once confronted with Plato's open condemnndation of poetry found in *Republic*, however, what did Ficino end up writing? If Plato's ambiguously ironic view of divine inspiration could be reframed within a religious and prophetic position, how did Ficino come to terms with the definitive ban of poets from the ideal city traced in the *Republic*?

Ficino's solution is consistent with what has been found throughout his writings while it is different from most of his contemporaries who perceived this passage of the *Republic* as problematic. Leonardo Bruni and Bessarion resolved this controversial passage with an *ad hoc hypothesis*. Plato, they wrote, bans poetry from the city for moral reasons. What he bans, Bessarion and Bruni thought, was not poetry in general but only obscene poetry. Therefore, when George of Trebizond, for example, had criticized Plato's prohibition of poetry from his ideal city, Bessarion could reply that only a person who is fond of obscenity can bring forth a similar charge. This is not, however, Ficino's solution to Plato's most controversial passage.

Ficino interpreted this passage in light of the theory of the four frenzies that he had found in Plato's dialogue *Phaedrus*. In Ficino's view, Plato thinks that prophecy and prayer are qualitatively superior to poetry although they are both signs of the soul's immortality (as explained in the *Theologia Platonica*) and are closely linked to the process by which the soul reaches true knowledge (as outlined in the *Ion* exegetical summary). From this argument, Ficino deduced that only a kind of poetry that is close to a form of prayer and that relies on prophecy is suitable for Plato's ideal city outlined in the *Republic*. In glossing upon the ban of poetry found in the *Republic*, Ficino wrote:
Finally, in us the understanding and the will are kin: prophecy (vaticinium) and poetry pertain to the former, but priestly prayer along with love to the latter. Accordingly, we often flee from prophecy (vaticinium) to prayers, and often from prayers we acquire prophecy (vaticinium). On the one hand we sing divine hymns with the Muse [that is, with poetry]; on the other we are incited to the love of divine things. In turn, by always loving such ardently, we prophecy (vaticinamur) many matters and perform mysteries effectively and sing hymns of admiration. Poetry of this last kind, which is poured into us from on high, Plato prefers even to philosophy, while the poetry of men he drives from the city.

(p.144)

In this perspective, poetry is not the discursive articulation of an invention that an author articulates in form of language and eventually turns into a written text. Actually, poetry has nothing to do with invention in the rhetorical sense of the term. Poetry is not the conjectural process by which the poet, like Pontano's star gazers, unpredictably succeeds in trapping a concept into a sign in order to preserve and circulate its memory among the members of a community of speakers. Like prophecies and miracles, rather, Ficino perceived poetry as the sign of an otherwise inexplicable God that the divinely inspired poet can experience, suggest and praise but never translate into a coherent discursive form. In doing so, Ficino assimilated Plato's ban of poets from the city within the cultural model of the orphic hymns and of Paul the Apostle's apophatic theology.\textsuperscript{127}

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\textsuperscript{127} I am not aware of studies that systematically explore the literary ramifications of this particular aspect of Ficino's views on language and poetry (and of his ultimate argument in support of apophasis) in Italian, or at least Florentine, poetry. I could not consult the most recent monographic book on the subject, that is, Huss 2007.
Rather than stemming from an opposition between humanism and neoplatonism as understood by previous scholars, Pontano and Ficino brought forth opposite views on poetic inspiration because of their interpretation and cultural translation of two ancient sources. An astrologer well versed in natural philosophy and rhetoric, Pontano translated the theory of inspiration and conjecture found in the pseudo-Ptolemaic Centiloquium in light of Cicero’s De Divinatione and Aristotle’s Rhetoric. As a result, Pontano conceived astrologers and poets as individuals who are astrologically disposed to formulate conjectures about the outcome of a future event or the origins of a celestial cluster. Ficino, on the other hand, translated the theory of inspiration and conjecture found in Plato’s Ion, Phaedrus and Theaetetus in light of late ancient commentators like Iamblichus. As a result, he conceived prophets and poets as signs of God’s design who are divinely chosen as the recipients of a form of knowledge that is superior to conjecture.

The disagreement between Pontano and Ficino is indicative of a polarization within the intellectual community of Naples. This group of scholars was divided between its teacher’s legacy and the influence of Florentine culture. Pontano’s pupils, as I will illustrate in the next chapters, will ultimately abandon Pontano’s legacy. Ficino’s views on inspiration and poetry, instead, will prevail. In 1499, the Augustinian Friar Giles of Viterbo arrived in Naples and began an intense pastoral activity. Among other things, Giles introduced many members of Pontano’s community to Ficino’s interpretation of Plato. Differently from his pupils, Pontano was rather critical of the Friar’s ideas, which he examined in his dialogue Aegidius. Far from being the simple consequence of the use
of different sources, I propose that Pontano’s critique of Ficino’s theories stemmed from a competition for intellectual legitimacy that takes place at the beginning of the sixteenth century in Naples. The public performance of *Urania* in 1501 epitomized this process.
Section 2

Encounters
Chapter 3

Hermes in Naples between Ludovico Lazzarelli and Giovanni Pontano

The result of the first two sections constitutes a useful starting point to investigate the problem of whether and in what ways Pontano responded to the theological discourse drawn from the *Corpus Hermeticum*, which scholars conventionally label “Hermeticism.” Just like in the case of Humanism, astrology and Neoplatonism, scholars use the term “Hermeticism” either in a positive and dogmatic way or as a loose and negative connotation of everything that has to do with esoteric knowledge in Quattrocento culture. The first approach stems from a rigid interpretation of Yate’s masterpiece *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic tradition* (first printed 1964). Scholars who work within the so-called Yates’ paradigm present Hermeticism as a method for explaining the world by means of a system of relationships among symbols and images that foreshadows modern philosophy. In my view, however, this interpretation relies heavily on Ernst Cassirer’s neo-Kantian philosophy of symbolic forms and turns what originally was a theological discourse drawn from the *Corpus Hermeticum* into a consistent philosophical movement that is hard to detect in Quattrocento Italy. In addition, Yates’ master narrative praises “Hermetic philosophers” for their interest in magic, that is, a technique for using occult relationships as a means for acting upon nature in a way that sets the stage for the

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128 For two examples of this approach in an Italian context, one may consider Rossi 1957 and Benassi 1992. Rossi, evidently, came to conceive Hermeticism as a precursor of modern science independently from Yates’ book. Most probably, both Yates and Rossi were building upon Garin’s thesis found in the introductory note to the collective volume *Testi Umanistici su l’Ermetismo* (Garin 1955 pp. 9-19). In reiterating this thesis, Benassi does not take into account that Garin eventually expressed a certain degree of skepticism about the very existence of a “Hermetic tradition” (Garin 1976).
scientific revolution. Recent studies on the reception of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, however, have demonstrated that magic was generally a marginal interest among Quattrocento interpreters such as Ludovico Lazzarelli, who happens to be the figure I discuss in this chapter (Hanegraaf 2001 p.13-18, 16). The case of the diffusion of the *Corpus Hermeticum* in Naples and Pontano’s reaction to it, once again, helps to revise common assumptions and terms about Quattrocento Italian culture.

The second approach, which is commonly found among literary historians, stems from a dogmatic interpretation of Dionisotti’s *Discurso sull’umanesimo italiano* (written 1956; first printed 1967) and *Gli Umanisti e il volgare tra Quattro e Cinquecento* (first printed 1968). In this scholarly tradition, Hermeticism (along with “neoplatonism” and orphism) came to be perceived as the antithesis of the philological rigor and historical awareness commonly ascribed to humanists, who were taken to foreshadow modern philology. Scholars working within Dionisotti’s paradigm came to present the interpreters of Hermetic writings as obscure and elitist thinkers who were reviving obsolete allegorical readings and metaphysical speculations. This approach was perceived as in sharp contrast with the sound study of manuscripts and the objective knowledge of antiquity ascribed to humanists. The case I investigate in this chapter, however, contributes to rethink this conventional dichotomy by reframing the disagreement.

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129 It would be interesting to understand, whence Dionisotti found this connotation of Hermeticism. Maybe, but this is a pure hypothesis, Dionisotti was aware of the polemical debate that surrounded the 20th century Italian literary trend harshly labeled as “ermetismo” by one of its first critics, Francesco Flora. In addition, Dionisotti might have perceived a link between Renaissance Hermeticism and ultraconservative occult thinkers of his time such as Julius Evola, whose personal and idiosyncratic interpretation of Hermeticism had some political resonance in the political debate of the Sixties. Both these connotations of Hermeticism, which might have contributed to create Dionisotti’s negative judgment, have nothing to do with Fifteenth century interpretations of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Rather, they are probably more misleading and anachronistic than Yates’ thesis.
between Giovanni Pontano and Ludovico Lazzarelli within a broader and more complex scenario.

Although these approaches and assumptions are still highly influential among literary historians, they are obsolete among classicists and historians of religion. Ficino’s “neoplatonism,” as I demonstrated in the second chapter, is an anachronistic label that does not help to start a dialogue with the author, whose voice is to be found in his exegetical summaries of Plato’s dialogues and his *Platonic Theology*. Likewise, Pontano’s attitude toward “Hermeticism” is to be sought in his writings on the subject and in their polemical targets, which are not the embodiment of philosophical movements but more plausibly other texts written by the author’s rivals and competitors. Therefore, the problem of Pontano’s attitude toward Hermeticism needs to be readdressed from a new angle. Again, the notions of inspiration and conjecture will prove useful heuristic tools for reducing the terms of the debate to two cognitive practices, rather than presenting them as the manifestations of abstract pre-packaged ideologies such as humanism, Neoplatonism or Hermeticism.

The problem addressed in this chapter stems from two texts that, as I will demonstrate, are solidly related: Ludovico Lazzarelli’s *Crater Hermetis* and Giovanni Pontano’s *Aegidius*. The first text stages King Ferrante’s conversion to the secrets of Hermes and the Holy Writings in the presence of his secretary Giovanni Pontano. The author, who fashions himself as a prophet acting under divine inspiration, invites his listeners to grasp intuitively an otherwise unspeakable mystery, that is, the active power or fecundity of words. In doing so, the author alternates arguments and hymns, which are
meant to raise his audience's minds to a higher level of understanding. He also harshly criticizes Pontano's views on poetry and knowledge, thus questioning his status of poet and political secretary. The second text stages the reception of Giles of Viterbo's theological discourse within Pontano's intellectual community. In this text, three characters also discuss Hermes' writings and criticize their diffusion among Neapolitan intellectuals. My argument is that this dialogue is meant to underline the dubious theological status and incompatibility with natural philosophy of Lazzarelli's message by means of a parody. Until now, scholars either read this text as evidence of Pontano's interest for Hermeticism (Sosti 1984) or as a generic humanistic critique of it (Fera 1987). Neither of these readings is completely persuasive. In my view, Pontano's Aegidius is responding to the Crater Hermetis and parodying Ludovico Lazzarelli's message in order to clarify the position of Pontano's intellectual community toward theological discourse in general, and toward the discourse developed by interpreters of the Corpus Hermeticum in particular.

Ludovico Lazzarelli and Naples

Ludovico Lazzarelli constitutes a challenge to traditional interpretations of Hermeticism. Born in San Severino, a small town in the Marche region, Lazzarelli's intellectual growth occurred outside of the University according to the methodologies and principles of the studia humanitatis. Well versed in Latin and Greek classics, he manifested an early disposition to composing Latin poetry and working within the expanding system of courtly patronage. Thanks to an epic poem dedicated to the Emperor
Henry IV, early in his life Lazzarelli was awarded the title of poet laureate in 1460. This event proved crucial for the development of his career.\textsuperscript{130}

The social significance of a “laurea poetica” is generally ignored or misunderstood by literary historians and handled exclusively as a literary theme or a generic literary prize. However, this title was not simply an award or a charming classical theme to translate into declaration of poetics such as those found in Petrarch’s \emph{Africa}. In the second half of the Quattrocento, when most of Italian universities were starting to offer positions in Rhetoric and Poetics, a poet laureate was the equivalent of a “bullatus,” that is, a scholar who did not achieve his degree through regular academic courses but became a doctor by papal or imperial mandate (Grendler 2002 pp. 180-186; 205-222). As such, a poet laureate could be hired as a teacher of Rhetoric and Poetics at the University in a period when the course of the \emph{studia humanitatis} was becoming more and more professionalized and institutionalized. After becoming a poet laureate Lazzarelli - just like Pontano in 1486 - was therefore eligible to work in Universities.

Unlike some of his contemporaries, however, Lazzarelli did not use his imperial title for starting an academic career as a professor of Rhetoric and Poetics. Rather, Lazzarelli preferred to take the path of princely patronage and began to devote himself to difficult and immensely erudite poetical endeavors dedicated to Quattrocento rulers and patrons such as Federigo of Urbino, who is the recipient of Lazzarelli’s mythological poem \emph{De Imaginibus Deorum Gentilium}. In addition, Lazzarelli became the poet and

\textsuperscript{130} In reporting biographical information, I rely on Saci 1999 and Hanegraaf 2005. Specific passages of their works will be indicated when relevant for or in contrast with my argument.
secretary of the Venetian aristocrat Lorenzo Zane, the future Patriarch of Antioch. Thanks to Zane’s protection, Lazzarelli succeeded in installing himself at the increasingly prestigious court of Rome in 1473.

Unlike the magicians and proto-scientists envisioned by scholars endorsing Yate’s narrative, in Rome Lazzarelli defined his authentic vocation of religious poet and prophet while distinguishing himself as an exegete of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Actively involved in the life of the newly reconstituted community of Pomponio Leto, Lazzarelli enthusiastically embraced the religious focus of this intellectual enclave and devoted himself to his most ambitious poetic endeavor, the *Fasti Christianae Religionis*, which is a sixteen books long Christianized version of Ovid’s *Fasti* (Miller 2003; Fritsen 2000). In Rome, Lazzarelli also met the prophet and charismatic leader Giovanni “Mercurio” da Correggio, the man who was destined to change his life. Already well versed in the exegesis of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, which Marsilio Ficino had translated in 1462 and Lazzarelli had widened by translating the newly found manuscript of the *Diffinitiones Asclepii*, Lazzarelli perceived Giovanni da Correggio as the modern equivalent of the Egyptian priest Hermes. In recounting Giovanni da Correggio’s spectacular arrival in Rome dressed up like Christ, riding a donkey and wearing a crown of thorns, Lazzarelli reinterpreted the Christian elements of Giovanni’s performance in the language of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. In particular, Lazzarelli thought to recognize a close correspondence between, on the one hand Hermes and his supernatural guide Poimander, and on the other hand Giovanni da Correggio and Jesus Christ. Hence, under the
nickname of the divinely inspired prophet Enoch, Lazzarelli embraced Giovanni’s cause and became his most active promoter within the erudite circles of Rome.

Scholars who loosely associate Neoplatonism and hermetism as forms of an aberrant and “medieval” infatuation with the classical world are drastically questioned by Lazzarelli’s writings. If one looks more closely at the works written by Marsilio Ficino and Ludovico Lazzarelli things are way more complicated and nuanced. After his encounter with Giovanni da Correggio, Lazzarelli began to fashion himself as a divinely inspired prophet completely devoted to the study of Hermes and the Bible. In the *Epistola Enoch* and in the *Fasti Christianae Religionis*, this new attitude is formulated as a clear cut rebuttal of Latin and Greek literature, which are substituted by the Bible and the *Corpus Hermeticum*. The complete identification of Christ and Hermes’ demon Pimander leads Lazzarelli to reject Plato and Socrates, thus presenting his own version of “Hermeticism” as intentionally opposed to other intellectual strains of his time. More specifically, Lazzarelli’s radical attitude drastically differs from Ficino’s view of ancient theology (*prisca theologia*) and thus constitutes one of the main elements of disagreement with Pontano. As such, these elements are found both in Pontano’s critique inscribed in the *Crater Hermetis* and Lazzarelli’s parody found in the dialogue *Aegidius*.

Obscured by the definitions of “Hermeticism” adopted by the followers of Yates’ and Dionisotti’s paradigms, Lazzarelli’s use of the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the religious significance of his works are perfectly understandable within the perspective of classical scholars and historians of religion. An expert of early Christian and medieval literature in Greek and Latin, Moreschini has persuasively presented Lazzarelli as a writer in the
tradition of Christian Hermeticism, which is a theological discourse that results from a process of syncretism started at the time of Lactantius in the IV century and continued throughout the middle ages (Moreschini 2000). In this perspective, Lazzarelli belongs to a discursive tradition that is only revived by the rediscovery of the Corpus Hermeticum in 1462 and is heavily conditioned by the environment of Pomponio Leto’s Rome. An historian of religion specialized in the study of esoteric writings and their contemporary reception, Hanegraaf has interpreted Lazzarelli as a religious activist well versed in Biblical exegesis and Hebrew literature. In Hanegraaf’s perspective, Lazzarelli contributes to the tradition of the Corpus Hermeticum by linking it to Hebrew writings and the Cabbala (Hanegraaf 2005).

Rather than relying on the existence of a hypothetical Hermetic ideology, Moreschini and Hanegraaf have tried to understand Lazzarelli’s thought as resulting from his work as an interpreter and cultural translator of the Corpus Hermeticum. These scholars’ results, however, can be implemented by looking outside of the contexts of the Corpus Hermeticum and Hebrew writings. In particular, I would suggest that Moreschini and Hanegraaf have not sufficiently taken into account the role that the Neapolitan context plays within Lazzarelli’s text. The Crater Hermetis was written for King Ferrante and it was engaged in a dialogue with Giovanni Pontano’s works. This finding, in my view, allows approaching this text from a new angle.\footnote{Of course, this approach does not explain Lazzarelli’s extremely complex text as a whole. It nevertheless sheds some light upon its significance within the context of Naples. This reading is therefore pertinent to the focus of this dissertation, but it cannot be taken as the last word on Lazzarelli’s Crater Hermetis, whose intertextuality and position within Greek and Hebrew esoteric traditions are accessible through and discussed in the annotated editions prepared by Moreschini and Hanegraaf.}
A text written for the Neapolitan court

Ludovico Lazzarelli’s *Crater Hermetis* was written in Naples and for the court of Naples. By this, I do not mean that this text’s history and meaning are simply determined by their original context. This would be a reductionist reading. Rather, I would like to argue that the text’s original context illuminates both the general trend of its textual history and its main literary features, such as the choice of genre, characters, topics and the author’s self-fashioning. Similar to most of the texts written at the end of the fifteenth century, Lazzarelli’s *Fasti Christianae Religionis* and *Crater Hermetis* are transmitted in several different versions that are the result, on the one hand, of the author’s constant revision of his works, on the other hand of his attempt at adjusting them to the expectations of different audiences and to the constraints of patronage.

In general, the philology of fifteenth century texts needs to take into account what Christopher Celenza has called the “epiphenomenon of writing,” by which he means the development of a written work after its initial composition in relation to the intellectual contexts in which it happens to circulate during its author’s lifetime (Celenza 2006 p119). The crucial importance of this process, as Celenza has explained, forces the scholar to rethink the method of Lachmann’s textual criticism. Lachman’s method stems from the assumption that every text is transmitted by different copies, which the philologist needs to cross reference and compare in order to reconstruct a hypothetical Ur-text. This hypothetical text is eventually reproduced in a critical edition. In fifteenth century textual criticism, however, all the copies of a text have the same importance and constitute a source of crucial evidence for reconstructing an author’s intellectual parable. This reading
hypothesis is the necessary basis for understanding Lazzarelli’s attitude toward the culture of Naples. Moreover, it sets the stage for interpreting Pontano’s critique of Hermeticism found in the dialogue *Aegidius*.

During Lazzarelli’s stay in Naples his project of gaining King Ferrante’s protection through his literary works failed because of some kind of harsh rejection that the author’s posthumous biographer censored. Most of the information about Lazzarelli’s life is found in the biography his brother Filippo wrote for the Roman erudite Angelo Colocci in the sixteenth century.\(^ {132} \) This text is clearly written to rehabilitate Lazzarelli’s intellectual legacy from any suspect or charge of heterodoxy. Although scholars generally used it as a documentary source, I would suggest that it might interestingly be compared with Giovanni Pico della Mirandola’s biography written by his nephew Giovan Francesco. Both these texts were addressed to the intellectual environment of the Roman Curia and were meant to present the legacy of two controversial thinkers in a positive light when their works began to be printed. If one also considers that Angelo Colocci, together with Pietro Summonte, are responsible for editing and cancelling the most religiously dangerous passages of Pontano’s dialogues and treatises, the suspicion may arise that the Roman Curia was actively engaged in a process of religious normalization of fifteenth-century literature in line with new and more rigid ideas of orthodoxy. Perhaps, this process was connected with the new printing technology, which tended to linguistic normalization and allowed new and still undefined forms of ideological control. All the same, these “apologetic” biographies, which are generally attached to an author’s *Opera*.

\(^ {132} \) The Latin text of Lazzarelli’s biography accompanied by an English translation is found in Hanegraaf (2005 pp. 285-309). Unfortunately, I was not able to find or understand exactly when this text was written.
*Omnia*, are usually more interesting for their omissions rather than for the facts they report.

Giovan Francesco’s biography of his uncle omits Giovanni Pico’s brush with the Inquisition after the attempted disputation of the 900 Theses in 1486 Rome. Likewise, Lazzarelli’s brother skipped on two important elements in the author’s life: Giovanni da Correggio’s everlasting influence on Lazzarelli after their encounter in Rome and the eight year long residence in Naples. As a result, the facts of the Neapolitan period need to be inferred from slippery and small pieces of evidence. As we know from Lazzarelli’s allegorical poem *Bombyx*, a text in Latin that offers an allegorical meditation on the cultivation of silkworms (Roellenbeck 1978), the author moved to Naples in 1486 and worked – interestingly enough - as the tutor of Angelo Colocci, a teenager at the time. However, the reasons why Lazzarelli moved to Naples are particularly hard to assess with sufficient degree of clarity. Lazzarelli’s *Fasti Christianae Religionis* and a rather obscure episode in the life of Giovanni da Correggio add more pieces to this puzzle.

Lazzarelli relocated to Naples because he hoped to acquire the protection of King Ferrante thanks to Giovanni Pontano’s intercession. Immediately before leaving for Naples, he decided to dedicate the presentation copy of his *Fasti Christianae Religionis* to the King and his household. In addition, he included Giovanni Pontano among the members of Pomponio Leto’s academy (Fritsen 2000 pp.123, 125-126, 130). Although there is no direct evidence of an encounter between Lazzarelli and Pontano, I would suggest that they might have met in Rome in 1486. While working on the negotiations for the 1486 peace treaty between Naples, Rome and Florence, Pontano left a rather
impressive mark upon local intellectuals such as Paolo Cortesi, who included him in his literary history *De Poetis Latinis* (Sabia 2000 pp.64-65) Also, a passage found in *De Rebus Coelestibus* gives evidence that Giovanni Pontano knew and praised Bartolomeo Platina, who was a member of Pomponio Leto’s circle and one of Lazzarelli’s best friends (Fritsen 2000 p.120, 123). Hence, it was probably during Pontano’s stay in Rome that Lazzarelli advanced his project to move to Naples.

Lazzarelli, in addition, might have conceived the project of relocating to Naples in concert with his master Giovanni da Correggio, thus combining his ambitions of man of letters and religious activist. In 1486, a few months after Lazzarelli’s arrival in Naples, Giovanni da Correggio was arrested and publicly lynched in Florence. The records of the event report that the prophet was headed to Naples and that he had a letter of recommendation signed by King Ferrante and his secretary Giovanni Pontano with him (Hanegraaf 2005 pp.33-35). Hanegraaf persuasively speculates that Giovanni da Correggio’s letter was the result of Ludovico Lazzarelli’s meeting with the King of Naples (Hanegraaf 2005 p. 51). I would also suggest that there is a striking analogy between Lazzarelli’s attitude toward Giovanni da Correggio and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola’s support of Savonarola. In my view, they were both translating their spiritual leaders’ prophetically inspired speeches addressed to the squares of Florence and Rome in the language of ancient theology, which was culturally more appealing for the elites of the time. In this perspective, Lazzarelli’s *Crater Hermetis* could be the result of a

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complex ideological operation that combines Lazzarelli’s career as a man of letters and Giovanni da Correggio’s agent.

Whether in search of patronage or in view of a religious agenda, Lazzarelli intended to address his *Crater Hermetis* to the King of Naples and the intellectual enclave headed by Giovanni Pontano. Lazzarelli personally transcribed the presentation copy of this book, which was meant as a gift for the King. This manuscript is an elegant illuminated manuscript found at the Biblioteca Nazionale of Naples and its preface is addressed to King Ferrante.¹³⁴ This copy, however, is heavily manipulated by its possessor. In particular, the names of the King and his secretary are cancelled and corrected in a way that tends to present the text as a generic philosophical message rather than as a product of the Neapolitan court (Sosti 1987 pp.116, 127). These corrections follow a pattern that also describes later versions of the *Crater Hermetis*, whose texts progressively tend to obscure the context of Naples and to erase Pontano’s parts in the dialogue (Sosti 1987 p.127). What are the causes of this editorial pattern?

According to Sosti, this pattern stems from the increasingly oppressive religious climate of late Quattrocento Italy and the defeat of the Aragonese court after Charles VIII’s descent (Sosti 1987 p.118). Saci has added that Lazzarelli might have been induced to change his book’s addressee after King Ferrante’s death in 1494 (Saci 1999 p.89; Hanegraaf 2005 p.58). Sosti has attributed the corrections found on the Neapolitan manuscript to a later possessor and has interpreted them as an attempt to adjust the

¹³⁴ Ms. XIII A a 34 of the Biblioteca Nazionale Napoletana. Sosti attributed and thoroughly described this manuscript (Sosti 1984 pp.101-104).
original text to its later versions (Sosti 1984 p.116). This editorial pattern, however, is strikingly similar to the textual history of Lazzarelli’s *Fasti Christianae Religionis*. After 1486, and immediately before relocating to Naples, Lazzarelli provided his poem with a preface and a dedication addressed to King Ferrante and his dynasty. In addition, Lazzarelli widened the canon of poets associated with Pomponio Leto’s intellectual community by adding Giovanni Pontano and some of his friends such as Gabriele Altilio and Michele Marullo. After 1494, that is, after completing the dedication copy of the *Crater Hermetis*, Lazzarelli canceled any reference to the Aragonese rulers as well as any praise of Pontano and his followers from his *Fasti Christianae Religionis* (Fritsen 2000 p.129). In my view, this analogy is not a coincidence.

Differently from Sosti, therefore, I propose that Lazzarelli canceled any reference to the Neapolitan context because his work was rejected by the King and his secretary’s intellectual community. In a poem written during his staying at Colocci’s house and discovered by Paola Saci, Lazzarelli complained that the King did not appreciate his *Fasti Christianae Religionis* while a group of unnamed Neapolitans were mocking his alleged powers as a healer and physician (Saci 1999 pp. 86-87; Hanegraaf 2005 pp. 50-1, 56). I suggest that the style of these slanders carries the mark of Pontano and his disciples. In a letter addressed to Giovanni Pontano and significantly left unanswered, for example, Angelo Poliziano had complained that one of Pontano’s followers—now identified with Jacopo Sannazaro—was spreading anonymous insults and injurious verses about the publication of the *Miscellanea* (Percopo 1907 pp.70-6, 72). Under Pontano’s invitation, Sannazaro had also written several epigrams in which he insulted local
grammarians and pedants while at the same time he praised Pontano’s intellectual community (Gualdo Rosa 2003). As I will illustrate later in this chapter, the slanders against Lazzarelli clearly echo in Pontano’s Aegidius, which pokes fun at the language of Hermes by presenting it as ridiculously incompatible with the work of physicians and natural philosophers.

Besides shedding some light upon the textual history of the Crater Hermetis, the context of Naples provides a frame of reference for better understanding the text’s genre. Recent interpreters of Lazzarelli’s Crater Hermetis have weighed its main features by accurately positing the texts collected in the Corpus Hermeticum and their medieval reception as its main context. Since it is a dialogue, Moreschini and Hanegraaf have agreed that its dialogic form must be linked to the texts of the Corpus Hermeticum, which generally report a discussion between Hermes and his pupils (Asclepius or Tat), or Hermes’s reception of divinely inspired messages such as those imparted by the supernatural being Poimander. The works of Moreschini and Hanegraaf, however, disagree in explaining why Lazzarelli’s Crater Hermetis is a mixed composition of prose and verses (prosimetrum). On the one hand, Moreschini has proposed that Lazzarelli’s dialogue is modeled upon Boethius’ De Consolatione Philosophiae and that it combines prose and poetic hymns for purely aesthetic reasons (Moreschini 1985 p.207n). Hanegraaf, on the other hand, has more persuasively claimed that the choice of writing a prosimetrum is closely tied with Lazzarelli’s background as a poet (Hanegraaf 2005

135 By saying this about Boethius’ De Consolatione Philosophiae, Moreschini also seems to rely on an interpretation of Boethius that is becoming obsolete among contemporary scholars. For a recent reassessment of Boethius’ use of poetry, one may fruitfully consider Relihan’s edition.
p.58). More interestingly, he has also added that Lazzarelli’s *Crater Hermetis* inscribes a form of demonstration that guides the author’s listeners to grasp intuitively otherwise unspeakable mysteries. The use of hymns, in this perspective, is meant to affect the audience in order to offer a living demonstration of how words can transform the souls in a way that replicates the moments of creation and redemption (Hanegraaf 2005 pp. 69-70).

Although extremely useful and impeccable from the methodological point of view, I would suggest that by interpreting the *Crater Hermetis* exclusively in the context of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, Moreschini and Hanegraaf have overlooked two important aspects. First, the combination of dialogue and poetic performances in the *Crater Hermetis* is found only in two texts of the *Corpus Hermeticum* (*Pimander* and *Asclepius*). Rather, Lazzarelli’s choice is best understood if framed within the rediscovery of philosophical rituals triggered by the study of late ancient Platonic exegetes started by Bessarion and Ficino. As I have explored in the second chapter, Sarah Ahbel-Rappe has demonstrated how Platonic commentators such as Iamblichus turned Plato’s dialogues into monologic commentaries by incorporating a kind of non-discursive thinking (Ahbel-Rappe 2000).  

This mode of thinking was originally meant to fill the gaps of a logical argumentation with the author’s exhortation to raise the reader’s mind to contemplation and ecstasy. In Quattrocento Italy, this mode of thinking began to circulate within religious communities thanks to Bessarion’s speech *Oratio Dogmatica* at the Council of Florence. In addition, there are references to these discursive practices in texts such as Marullus’ *Natural*  

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136 I discuss the function of rituals and non-discursive thinking in Plato’s late ancient exegetes in the second chapter (p.92).
Hymns and Giovanni Pico's Heptaplos, which respectively translate or invite to translate philosophical discussions into music and verses. This view of poetry as a divinely inspired access to truth, which in the second chapter I contrasted with Pontano's conjectural conception of writing, is also at the heart Lazzerelli's dialogue.

Second, and more importantly for my argument, Moreschini and Hanegraaf do not provide a persuasive explanation of why and with what kind of implications Lazzerelli decided to include King Ferrante and Giovanni Pontano as his interlocutors. Moreschini has elusively proposed that Lazzerelli's choice was dictated by the circumstances: since he was in search for patronage, Lazzerelli decided to celebrate his future patrons by turning them into his listeners and pupils (Moreschini 1985 pp.205-207). More interestingly, Hanegraaf has interpreted Lazzerelli's choice in relation to the Corpus Hermeticum. With the exception of the Diffinitiones Asclepii, Hanegraaf has reasoned, none of the texts collected in the Corpus are addressed to kings or set in a courtly environment. Lazzerelli, however, had recently discovered this text that is not found in Ficino's edition. Therefore, this choice was also dictated by Lazzerelli's personal understanding of the Hermetic canon (Hanegraaf 2005 p. 57). Both these explanations, however, are open to objection. If Lazzerelli wanted to praise the King and his secretary, one may ask, then why is his portrayal of Pontano less than flattering and sometimes harshly critical? This objection led me to reopen this case and formulate a personal hypothesis.

Princely wisdom in the Crater Hermetis
The textual history of Lazzarelli’s *Crater Hermetis* demonstrates that this text was composed in Naples and that its intended audience was King Ferrante’s court. The choice of a courtly setting, differently from what Moreschini and Hanegraaf have argued, is not simply a consequence of the author’s search for patronage and is not explained by his first-hand knowledge of the Hermetic dialogue *Diffinitiones Asclepii*. Moreschini’s use of the historical context as an explanatory matrix, in my view, constitutes an example of historical determinism. In LaCapra’s terms, this methodological pitfall consists in using the historical context as a cause of the text, the result of which is saturating the text’s meaning with historical information (LaCapra 1983 pp. 84-117, 99). Hanegraaf, on the other hand, has assumed that since Lazzarelli’s text belongs to the tradition of Hermeticism, it had to be written according to the standards of other texts that are part of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Although reasonable and persuasive, I would suggest, Hanegraaf’s hypothesis constitutes an example of what LaCapra calls genetic structuralism: it takes an individual text as the manifestation of an abstract discursive tradition and does not take into consideration other texts that might have been available at the court of Naples (LaCapra 1983 pp.72-83, 77; LaCapra 1985 pp. 34-35). As an antidote to these methodological pitfalls, LaCapra has proposed to envision the link between text and context in terms of a dialogic relation, rather than causation. Pertinently to my case, I will therefore explore what role the historical context of Naples plays within Lazzarelli’s text.

Lazzarelli’s choice to write his book in the form of a direct address to the King of Naples was a difficult and problematic one. Since the time of his early works written for
King Henry IV and Federigo of Urbino, Lazzarelli's writings were conceived and addressed to Pomponio Leto's academy and in relation to the prophet Giovanni da Correggio. During his Roman years Lazzarelli had not delivered his Hermetic studies to a princely audience and had not written them for a courtly setting. In order to present himself both as a princely advisor and as an expert in Hermetic writings, therefore, Lazzarelli had to find a genre that a local audience would consider appropriate for instructing the King. At the same time, this genre had to be suitable for translating the novelty of the author's message in terms that local readers could understand. During Lazzarelli's stay in Naples, local intellectuals were already well aware of what could be written for and about the King thanks to the works produced within Pontano's intellectual community. What kind of genre did Lazzarelli choose in order to mold the results of his Hermetic studies?

In my view, Lazzarelli chose the genre of the book for the prince in order to adjust his message to the Neapolitan audience. In Naples, this genre was the most appropriate form for addressing a King and instructing him on ethical and literary subjects. This local tradition started in 1455, when Antonio Panormita translated some episodes in the life of King Alfonso into the language of Roman moral philosophy, thus contributing to the construction of an Aragonese myth based on this dynasty's devotion to classical scholarship. This tradition was revived in 1468 by Giovanni Pontano, who wrote a short treatise entitled De Principe (written 1468; first printed 1490), in which he instructed the young prince Alfonso on how to behave according to a set of rules and values drawn from Roman literature. Pontano's book became a mandatory model for local writers of
advice books in Latin and in the vernacular. In 1490, for example, Giuniano Maio provided the members of his intellectual community with the first Neapolitan advice book in vernacular, *De Maiestate* (1490). This short treatise competed with the products of Pontano’s community by praising and instructing King Ferrante about the virtues of the perfect ruler in the language that Maio constantly recommended to his pupils. The book for the prince, therefore, was the most appropriate genre for gaining the King’s attention along with the approval of the intellectual communities gathered around Giovanni Pontano and Giuniano Maio. A skilled rhetorician well versed in the dynamics of courtly patronage, Lazzarelli chose to pour his esoteric ideas into this popular mould. However, why should a prince be interested to know about the forgotten lore of the *Corpus Hermeticum*? How could these writings contribute to princely education?

As Lazzarelli chose to rethink his theological discourse for a princely audience, he probably knew that the genre he adopted had two intrinsic problems whose bedrock is the first advice book ever written: Petrarch’s 1373 letter to Francesco da Carrara. Petrarch’s book was as groundbreaking as it was contradictory. Based on Cicero’s idea that goodness and justice coincide, Petrarch found a way to praise Francesco da Carrara’s goodness while at the same time persuading him to adopt particular policies in the administration of Padua and its environs. Moreover, thanks to Cicero’s praise of political glory and religious happiness found in the *Somnium Scipionis*, Petrarch exhorted his addressee to devote his entire life to the exercise of power. Impeccable from a rhetorical perspective, Petrarch’s argument had two major lacunae. First, Petrarch did not consider the case in which a state is ruled by a bad king, thus implicitly endorsing the right to
revolt. Second, while he presented political and religious glory as equivalent, he also maintained that ruling is a source of pain and those who are really interested in gaining true happiness should avoid engagement in political endeavors. Petrarch's followers, therefore, had to come to terms with these lacunae (Nelson 2007 pp. 319-324).

Conventional narratives in the history of political thought maintain that these lacunae are perceived only in the XVI century and filled by scholars who belong to the traditions of republicanism and absolutism (Nelson 2007 pp. 324-335). However, I would suggest that Quattrocento advice book writers did perceive these problems and tried to resolve them by working on the pivotal notion of wisdom. In particular, writers who were formally trained in the course of the *studia humanitatis* like Giovanni Pontano tried to come to terms with the problem of the prince's happiness by exhorting their pupils to pursue wisdom (*sapientia*). In Pontano's *De Principe*, ruling is presented neither as a source of happiness nor as a burden. Rather, Alfonso is encouraged to accept his dynastic duties in order to gain wisdom by knowing himself through experience. Pontano's solution was solidly grounded in Latin philosophical literature. However, it was open to a major religious objection that Lazzarelli astutely decided to explore in his *Crater Hermetis*.

Pontano's definition of wisdom would have been particularly appropriate for the years of Coluccio Salutati and Leonardo Bruni. These authors, as I have illustrated in chapter two, were characterized by a rhetorical style of reading that allowed them to approach Greek philosophical authors such as Plato as sources of *topoi* that were
appropriate for exhorting their readers to pursue of civic virtues.\textsuperscript{137} However, as I have argued in the first and the second chapters, the last half of the century was marked by a flood of Greek texts that exposed Italian writers to different philosophical systems and, I would add, to new conceptions of wisdom. In particular, scholars like Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola found that Plato’s writings interpreted by late ancient commentators brought forth alternative definitions of wisdom. No more a simple civic virtue, wisdom came to be associated with the practice of noetic contemplation and the mystical understanding of divine mysteries. Texts addressed to the prince such as Giovanni Pico’s \textit{Heptaplos} and most of Ficino’s exegetical summaries analyzed in the second chapter presented this mystical version of self-knowledge as the most appropriate for a ruler. Coherently, they began to exhort Lorenzo de Medici to meditate on Scriptures and to devote himself to contemplative endeavors such as poetry. Lazzarelli, in my opinion, probably saw a book such as Pontano’s \textit{De Principe} as an obsolete product of another age in need to be updated according to new philosophical discoveries. Therefore, he decided to rethink his Hermetic knowledge in the language of princely education and wisdom.

Rather than refuting point by point Pontano’s idea of princely wisdom, Lazzarelli chose to turn Pontano himself into a character of his dialogue and carefully represented his language and ideas in order to refute them. Along with the adoption of the advice book, this choice was also astutely designed for meeting the expectations of the author’s intended audience. Instead of cultivating argumentative practices such as the disputation

\textsuperscript{137} I discuss the humanistic reading of Plato in the second chapter (p.73).
or devoting their ingenuity to the compositions of systematic treatises, the members of Pontano’s intellectual community were trained in a dialogic way of thinking that Pontano himself inscribed in his dialogues. Rhetorical devices such as the imitation of someone’s language (*sermocinatio*) and more sophisticated forms of intertextuality such as the parody are the main features of the dialogue both as a mode of thinking and a literary genre. These features can be seen at work not only in Pontano’s dialogues but also in his poetry and, as I will discuss in the fourth chapter, in literary texts such as Sannazaro’s *Arcadia*. In his *Crater Hermetis* Lazzarelli fought Pontano with his own weapons. Lazzarelli’s polemical target was precisely Pontano’s notion of wisdom.

Pontano’s notion of wisdom as it is found in *De Principe* results from a superficial reading of Plato’s dialogues through the works of Cicero and is solidly related to the author’s views on conjecture. Pontano’s wisdom is based on self-knowledge as it stems from experience and the attentive knowledge of classical texts. Literary learning, in Pontano’s advice book, is conceived not only as a source of edifying moral examples, but also as an exercise in conjectural thinking whose goal is an improvement of the King’s decision making process. In order to become a good literary scholar, Pontano’s text assert, one needs to read, learn and memorize many things. Likewise, the prince needs to extrapolate his decision from the voices of a large number of people. This practical

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138 *De Principe* p.24: 20 “Beatum illum – Plato dicit et Cicero refert – cui etiam in senectute contigerit ut *sapiensiam* verasque opiniones assequi possit”. Praecclare quidem, sed ut in senectute valeamus assequi, iacienda sunt fundamenta ab adolescentia, quibus bene iactis, tanquam in domo bene aedificata non est verendum ut corruamus.”

139 *De Principe* p. 70-72: 61: “Lodovici Pontani, gravissimi viri et sua aetate iurisconsultorum principis, nobilis sententia est, neminem posse in litteris clarum evadere nisi qui plurima legerit, audierit, memoriae mandaverit. Quam si subtilius intueri velimus, intelligemus regem etiam bonum esse nequaquam posse nisi saepe et multum legat, multos multa referentes audiat, lecta audita memoriae mandet. Quod etiam Homerus
view of wisdom is perfectly consistent with Pontano’s mode of thinking that I investigated in chapter one, because it turns the act of conjecturing into a useful ruling device. Differently from most of the scholars writing in the second half of the century, however, Pontano envisioned wisdom as a practical virtue disconnected from religion. In Pontano’s De Principe, the prince’s religion is presented as a mean by which to earn the citizens’ respect, but it is not explored as a way for accessing self-knowledge and wisdom. This notion was completely different from that found in Lazzarelli’s book.

In order to adjust his Crater Hermetis to the constraints of the advice book, Lazzarelli rephrased the obscure notion of Hermetic wisdom (gnosis) in the more familiar language of self-knowledge. Whereas Ficino had prudently translated the word gnos in “knowledge,” Lazzarelli — who is usually rather respectful of Ficino’s translations – intended this word as wisdom (sapientia), thus establishing a solid link between self-knowledge and mystical understanding of Christian mysteries. According to Moreschini, this choice stemmed from Lazzarelli’s views on the role of divine inspiration in Hermes’ writings (Moreschini 2005 pp. 46, 57). Differently from Ficino, Lazzarelli thought that Hermes had written under divine inspiration and had instructed Moses about the secret lore embedded in the Pentateuch. Rather than as an ancient theologian, therefore, Lazzarelli envisioned Hermes as a biblical prophet. Consequently, Hermes’ writings could be read like any other Holy Writing. In this perspective, the kind of self-knowledge discussed in the Corpus Hermeticum coincides with the knowledge of God.

comprobare videtur, qui Ulixem, quem sapientem effigere volebat, ab ipso statim operis initio his laudibus tanquam circumscripserit: «Qui mores hominum multorum vidit et urbes.”

Crater Hermetis 3.2.
Lazzarelli’s identification of *gnosis* and wisdom, in addition, led him to manipulate the original meaning of Hermetic dialogues such as the *Pimander* in order to adjust them to the needs of princely instruction. In order to question Pontano’s idea of princely wisdom and to present his book as bringing forth a superior form of wisdom, for example, Lazzarelli’s text addresses the first point of his discussion by representing King Ferdinand in the act of asking how self-knowledge can be acquired. Lazzarelli’s persona responds to the King by quoting from Hermes’ *Pimander*:

Ferd. Let us come right to the point and leave aside what is superfluous. So tell me, please, how would I be able to know myself? Lazz. When he was asked that question, Pimander answered Hermes: “Embrace me with your mind, and I will teach you everything you wish to know.”

In order to adjust the language of the *Pimander* to the needs of the advice book, Lazzarelli did not hesitate to alter his original source. The opening dialogue of the *Corpus Hermeticum* entitled *Pimander* consists of Hermes’ testimony of a conversation he allegedly had with a supernatural being who presents himself as the “mind of sovereignty.” This entity kindly agrees to answer Hermes’ questions. In the original text, however, Hermes’ question had nothing to do with self knowledge but only with the knowledge of God:


“I am Poimandres,” he said, “mind of sovereignty; I know what you want, and I am with you everywhere.”

[3] I said, “I wish to learn about the things that are, to understand their nature and to know god. How much I want to hear!” I said.

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Then he said to me: “Keep in mind all that you wish to learn, and I will teach you.”

(Hermetica I: 2-3)

Therefore, I propose that since Lazzarelli was addressing his complex text to an audience that was not necessarily aware of Hermetic writings, he had to reframe his reading of the Corpus Hermeticum in the language of the advice book. My hypothesis is that the constraints imposed by the genre brought Lazzarelli to rethink the theological purpose of Hermes’ Pimander in the more familiar language of princely wisdom. To achieve this task, Lazzarelli did not hesitate to alter and force the literal meaning of his most important source.

Framed within the context of Naples, in addition, this choice could have had a polemical implication directed against Pontano and his writings. Pontano’s exclusion of religious counseling from his project of princely education inscribes an organization of competences that was characteristic of the Neapolitan court. In a tradition that started with Antonio Panormita and continued with Pontano, the Aragonese rulers were surrounded by learned individuals devoted to diplomacy, political counseling and Latin literature. None of them, however, addressed religious advice to the King. Since the time of Alfonso the Magnanimous, spiritual counseling was the work of professional theologians such as the Catalan Narciso Verdún. As the King’s theological consultant, Narciso sent a short theological meditation (lucubratio uncula) to King Ferrante in 1474 (De Marinis 1947 vol. I pp. 48-49). Pontano praised Narciso in opening the fifth book of his De Obedientia and in a passage of his advice book De Principe. Pontano, however,
never supported either his philosophical arguments or his political requests based on Scriptural authority nor any of Narciso’s works.

Moreover, Pontano’s prudence in dealing with religious topics was consistent with the mode of thinking that I have analyzed in the first chapter. In the last part of the first book of *Urania*, for example, the author ventures into a discussion of the problem of creation. Based on the definition of conjecture as a process by which human mind approximates truth by means of useful fictions, *Urania* presents creation as something that cannot be known, but about which one can only find appropriate arguments. After this caveat, the poet ventures into constructing a myth in which an allegorical representation of the trinity causes the planets and their respective constellations to generate the sublunary sphere.\(^{142}\) In addition, in the second chapter I have demonstrated how Pontano was rather doubtful about those individuals who were claiming to speak under the influence of divine inspiration. A reader of Latin authors such as Seneca, Pontano was inclined to hold a rather agnostic philosophical viewpoint in dealing with religious problems.\(^{143}\) As an object of inquiry that cannot be rationally discussed, theological speculation was thus theoretically excluded from Pontano’s research agenda.

In constructing Pontano’s character, Lazzarelli astutely worked upon these characteristics of the Neapolitan culture and of Pontano’s mode of thinking in particular. Rather than a point by point refutation of his adversary’s ideology, Lazzarelli tried to convey his opinion about the discourse cultivated within Pontano’s community by

\(^{142}\) This passage from the first book of *Urania* is analyzed in the first chapter (p.47).

\(^{143}\) I discuss the differences between Ficino and Pontano concerning the source of poetic inspiration in the second chapter (p.106).
mimicking its language and constructing a character whose word choice can be conceptualized within Bakhtin’s concept of ideologeme. By ideologeme, Bakhtin meant the word or discourse that individuates one character’s ideology within a narrative text (Bakhtin 2002 p. 333). Based on his view of the novel as a network of different discourses (Bakhtin 2002 p. 262), Bakhtin proposed that each discourse is signaled by a specific language and, sometimes, by the voice of a specific character that is different from the narrator and whose distance is suggested by brackets and stylistically individualized (Bakhtin 2002 p. 330). In this perspective, the text does not reflect but more precisely diffracts the authorial voice into many different discourses whose individualization and functions are signs for understanding the author’s overall ideology in response to and in dialogue with other options available in his time. This concept is particularly useful if applied to understanding Lazzarelli’s attitude toward Pontano.

Prompted by the King’s persona, whose main feature is the eagerness to acquire self-knowledge, Lazzarelli’s persona explains that since humans were made in the image and likeness of God, self-knowledge and knowledge of God perfectly coincide. In the dialogic frame of the Crater Hermetis, Lazzarelli’s claim puzzles Pontano’s persona, who objects that God cannot be rationally known and that everyone who thinks otherwise is to be considered superstitious. This lexical choice, in my view, is an ideologeme that is clearly meant to echo Pontano’s position on the religious excesses of his time found in

144 Crater Hermetis 19.1 “Pont. Superstitiosa mihi et supervacanea haec ferme videtur disputatio. Quare aequum exstimo quae notissima sunt transigere et ad id reverti potius de qua regis interrogation fuerat: difficile enim videtur et supra humanae mentis esse vires Deum posse cognoscere, cum dicit ipsa veritas: “Nemo novit Filium nisi Pater et nemo novit Patre nisi Filius et cui voluerit Filius revelare.” Hanegraaf translates “superstitious” with “superfluous.” As suggested earlier, however, “superstition” is a key word in Pontano’s dialogues Charon and Asinus. Therefore, I think that Lazzarelli’s choice responds to the needs of representing Pontano’s thought by imitating his language.
his early dialogues *Antonius* and *Charon*. These dialogues, in particular, outlined an ideal figure of wise man devoted to the knowledge of nature, who understands and accepts natural laws without cultivating the hope of altering them. This figure is constantly juxtaposed to the superstition of the populace, which is characterized by the false hope of altering natural necessity by means of prayers and spells. These dialogues, for example, represented a crowd of people asking for miracles in Prato (*Antonius* p. 86) or terrorized by the advent of an eclipse (*Charon* p. 41) as negative examples of superstitious frenzy.

Lazzarelli’s accurate description of Pontano’s arguments and language sets the stage for a harsh refutation of his ideas. After having listened to his interlocutor’s objections, Lazzarelli’s persona proudly declares his own view of wisdom against Pontano’s ideas. In doing so, he sharply distinguishes himself from whatever Pontano represents for the culture of Naples and rejects his combination of literary and natural philosophical studies as a pointless waste of time. In addition, he questions Pontano’s authority within this community in a way that must have been rather remarkable at the time:

Lazzarelli: what you are saying there, Pontano, is just a partial response to what I have said earlier: that is, that if we do not know God, we cannot know ourselves. You on the other hand affirm, supported by the Holy Writ, that God cannot be known. 19.2 But I am not sitting here, my dear Pontano, as a poet, on the tripod of the Muse, half-wittedly pouring out whatever comes to my mind; no, I strolled every day through the woods and shades of Mount Zion and the flowering meadows of the Tempe valley, as befits a Christian, and was instructed in these divine precepts, so that I have come to know everything that I will tell you here, first by reason, and then by manifest experience as well. I am well aware that nothing of the things we experience through our senses can be positively said
about God. For everything that human intelligence knows by making things definite, is infinite God.  

*(Crater Hermetis* 19.1-2)*

Lazzarelli’s strategically adopted the genre of the advice book in order to belittle Pontano’s authority as a princely advisor and as a man of letters. He conducted his critique by constructing three characters who progressively receive the author’s divinely inspired teachings. These teachings, as I have demonstrated, are meant to rethink Pontano’s conventional view of wisdom by establishing a solid link between self-knowledge and religious learning. These teachings, in addition, are meant to reject Pontano’s rhetorical learning and literary expertise. How does Lazzarelli try to adjust this part of his message to the Neapolitan audience?

**On the active power of words**

Lazzarelli’s insulting portrait of Pontano as a puffed up authority who benefits from the advantages of useless knowledge functions to redefine wisdom as it is inscribed in the *Crater Hermetis*. It further reiterates the anticlassical agenda Lazzarelli had outlined in his *Fasti Christianae Religionis* and in his prophetic letters written under the pseudonym of Enoch. It has been claimed that this agenda made perfectly sense within Pomponio Leto’s intellectual community after its reopening and in the context of

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145 *Ibidem* 19.1-2: “Septemped.: Hic tuus sermo, Pontane, quaedam responsio est ad id quod superius dixi: nisi Deum videlicet noveris, nos ipsos cognoscere non possumus. Tu vero contra, sacra firmatus auctoritate, Deum asseveras non posse cognosci. Ego vero nunc, o Pontane, non tamquam poet in Musae tripode sedeo, ut mentis impos quae cumque fluat licentem effundam, at ut Christianum decet per montis Sion nemora et umbras perque aprica Tempe quotidie spatians divinis istis praeceptis sum instititus ut quae cumque hic vobis coram enarraturus sum, ratione prius et experientia simul aperta cognoverim. Non enim me latet nihil ex iis quae sensu percipimus de Deo absolute affirmari posse. Quicquid namque humana diffinitive intelligentia <ait> infra Deum infinitum esse oportet.”
Giovanni da Correggio’s prophetic activity. Moreover, Lazzarelli’s rebuttal of classical learning drastically differed from the ideas of *concordia* cultivated by Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico. In particular, Lazzarelli’s praise of Hermes as opposed to Plato was an eccentric standpoint in the culture of late fifteenth century Italy and inconceivable outside of Rome. What about Naples?

Lazzarelli’s attempt at adjusting his Hermetic message to the language of princely wisdom and to the constraints of the advice book was a problematic experiment. His anticlassical message, however, was most definitely an unheard oddity for his Neapolitan audience. Since the time of Antonio Beccadelli the Aragonese rulers presented themselves as devoted to classical learning and well versed in literary interpretation. According to an anecdote formulated by Beccadelli himself and proudly reused in Pontano’s *De Principe*, Alfonso the magnanimous used to spend his leisure time in the company of ancient authors, which he read and discussed with a learned tutor (*De Dictis* II 13 p.144; *De Principe* 26 p. 28). Moreover, both Beccadelli and Pontano were well known poets whose distinctive features were the use of Latin and the thorough knowledge of Virgil, which Pontano’s *Actius* presents as a model of formal perfection along with his Virgilian poem *Urania*. How did Lazzarelli try to make a case for his anticlassical agenda?

In the same way that wisdom was the common ground of discussion for infiltrating his Neapolitan audience, language, in my view, was the way by which Lazzarelli tried to bring forth his openly anticlassical project. From the beginning of the *Crater Hermetis*, Lazzarelli’s persona tries to marginalize Pontano’s authority by belittling his skills as a
rhetorician. In order to present himself as the person that the King needs, the author reminds his interlocutor that his secretary may know his secrets (secreta), but not the kind of secrets (arcana) that he masters. The King’s persona immediately praises the author for his elegant use of words and his skills as a rhetorician. Lazzarelli’s persona, however, intelligently designates Pontano as the most appropriate recipient for this kind of compliment. It is not as a rhetorician, the author’s persona adds, that he hopes to gain the King’s attention. In order to raise the expectations of an audience well versed in the study of rhetoric and literature, Lazzarelli’s text makes reference to another way of using language whose goal is not to persuade but rather to act upon the listeners. Consistently, the entire *Crater Hermetis* is presented as a living demonstration of the active power of words.

Lazzarelli’s text strategically juxtaposes Pontano’s rhetorical learning and expertise in classical authors to his own knowledge of Egyptian language and its active power. In doing so, Lazzarelli was adjusting the topos of the superiority of Egyptian over Greek language found in the *Diffinitiones Asclepii* to his intended audience. In this ancient dialogue, the Egyptian author had presented the Greek language as a useful analytical tool deprived of any kind of power, as opposed to the energy ascribed to his own native language:

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146 *Ibidem* 2.1: “Otiosus enim videris et huic de qua nunc tecum acturus sum perscrutationi idoneus, nec a nostro praesenti Pontanum, si lubet, sermon exclude. Quem enim inter eos, qui a secretis sunt, supremum assumsti, ab arcanis meis excipiendum non extimo."

Therefore, my king, in so far as you have the power (who are all powerful), keep the discourse uninterpreted, lest mysteries of such greatness come to the Greeks, lest the extravagant, flaccid and (as it were) dandified Greek idiom extinguish stately and concise, the energetic idiom of <Egyptian> usage. For the Greeks have empty speeches, o King, that are energetic only in what they demonstrate, and this is the philosophy of the Greeks, an inane foolosophy of speeches. We, by contrast, use not speeches but sounds that are full of action.

(Hermetica XVI p.58: 2)

Similar to his translation of the Hermetic notion of gnosis into the more familiar language of self knowledge, Lazzarelli adjusted this ancient topos for the sake of his own argument. The original function of this topos needs to be framed in the context of Hellenistic Egypt. Since most of the authors gathered in the Corpus Hermeticum were Egyptians who lived during the years of Greek domination, they had come to juxtapose their own native language and culture to Greek language and philosophy (Copenhaver 202-203; Fowden 1986 pp. 37-39). What was probably the result of a cultural reaction to a foreign domination had crystallized into a distinction between Egyptian hieroglyphs and Greek logos. In particular, Greek language was perceived as a useful analytical tool deprived of any form of power. On the other hand, Egyptian language was thought to be superior because of a form of active power that allowed those who mastered it to produce physical effects upon the natural world. Quattrocento commentators of the Corpus Hermeticum such as Ficino and Lazzarelli, of course, were not aware of the original context and motivations of Hermetic writers and tried to translate this theory of language into the terms of their own culture. This theory of language was moreover problematic as it touched upon issues of creation and theory of matter in a way that openly contradicted a passage found in Augustine’s De Civitate Dei.
Differently from Lazzarelli, Marsilio Ficino incorporated the Hermetic theory on the active power of language in his exegetical summaries of Plato’s dialogues, based on his assumption that these authors’ works were mutually consistent. Marsilio Ficino found Hermes’ theory of language in the dialogue *Asclepius*, which does not juxtapose Egyptian and Greek as the *Diffinitiones Asclepii* but only praises Egyptian language for its power of collecting divine inspiration into statues and talismans. As it has been discussed in chapter two, Ficino assimilated the theory of the active power of words found in the *Corpus Hermeticum* to his interpretation of Plato’s *Cratylus*. In approaching this dialogue, Ficino came to terms with the notion of *dynamis* by envisioning meaning (*significatio*) as resulting from an active power (*viva virtus*) that is like a form of life.\(^{148}\) Differently from Lazzarelli, however, Ficino was rather prudent in proposing that this active power can be considered as a way for creating things and tried to understand it within his theory of matter as produced by the action of creative seeds (*semina rerum*). Just like things are produced by these creative seeds, Ficino explained, so do spoken words result from the action of these seeds upon the mind. This translation of Plato’s notion of *dynamis* needs to be understood within Ficino’s highly influential theory of matter, which Hiro Hirai has recently discussed in its Early Modern development (Hirai 2005). Ficino’s translation, moreover, might have been dictated by religious prudence.

As opposed to Ficino’s irenic attitude toward antiquity and its intellectual strains, Lazzarelli’s interpretation of the active power of words is characterized by a dogmatic use of Hermetic writings. More specifically, Lazzarelli’s polemical target was the

\(^{148}\) I discuss Ficino’s exegetical summary of Plato’s *Cratylus*, and in particular his explanation of the notion of *dynamis* in the second chapter (p.79).
rhetorical view of language cultivated within the course of the *studia humanitatis*. Moreschini and Hanegraaf have attentively investigated what Lazzarelli means by this theory of language. Consistent with their method of work, these scholars have looked for precedents within the tradition of Hermeticism. Moreschini, in particular, has shown that this theory comes from a passage found in the dialogue *Asclepius* in which the author had maintained that Egyptian language could be used for collecting gods within statues (Moreschini 1985 pp.215-216). In line with Walker, Moreschini has proposed that Lazzarelli’s is close to Ficino’s theories on demonic magic and the construction of talismans (Walker 1958 p.68). Hanegraaf, on the other hand, has explored Lazzarelli’s knowledge of Hebrew literature and in particular of the works of Giovanni Alemanno (Hanegraaf 2005 pp.87-95). In Hanegraaf’s perspective, Lazzarelli’s interest in this complex theory needs to be linked to the tradition of magical and Platonic interpretations of the Cabbala that marks the last years of the fifteenth century. According to Moshe Idel, the most eminent scholar of this body of literature, Lazzarelli’s text stages a magic ritual in which a demon is evoked and imprisoned within the King’s body by means of a spell (Idel 1988 p.68). Differently from Idel, however, Hanegraaf claims that Lazzarelli’s interest in Hebrew literature was not connected with magic, but rather with a tradition in cabbalistic thought that was inclined to interpret texts such as those dealing with the creation of the Golem as allegories of a spiritual transformation (Hanegraaf 2005 p.94).

149 More recently, Moreschini has demonstrated a certain propensity to interpreting Lazzarelli’s theory of language in allegorical terms. Differently from Hanegraaf, however, Moreschini’s position is rather nuanced (Moreschini 2005 p.57).

150 Idel has thoroughly investigated the reception of Hebrew theories of language along with their Neoplatonic and magic ramifications in Quattrocento Italy (Idel 1983; Idel 1990).
In opposition to these scholars, I would suggest Lazzarelli might have chosen this theory of language as the core of his *Crater Hermetis* in order to bring forth his anticlassical agenda against Pontano. Pontano's views on conjecture are consistent with a view of language that corresponds to that found in Lorenzo Valla and that Nash has classified as a form of empirical inductivism. In Pontano's perspective words, much like poetic fictions, are the result of an agreement among the members of a community, but they are nothing more than useful tools used for designating an object with a certain name. Words, therefore, are the result of a conjecture by which an individual approximates, but never reaches, the truth about something.\textsuperscript{151} This approach to language is consistent with Pontano's intellectual agenda, which was meant to contribute to the work of astrologers and natural philosophers by means of an attentive study of the technical lexicon of these disciplines. Differently from Ficino and Lazzarelli, however, Pontano saw names as human fabrications imposed by usage (*usus*) and resulting from experience and observation. As in the study of wisdom, then, linguistic inquiries were disconnected from any kind of metaphysical speculation.

In the same manner that he chose to present his teachings in the language of the advice book by questioning Pontano's definition of wisdom, Lazzarelli also used the theory of the active power of words in order to question Pontano's view of language. Lazzarelli's view of language was functional to bring forth an intellectual project based on the rebuttal of classical learning and the complete conversion of individuals to the pursuit of religious subjects. However, this theory was problematic. In the dramatic frame

\textsuperscript{151} I discuss this theme in the first chapter.
of the *Crater Hermetis*, Pontano is turned into the author’s polemical straw man and his character’s progressive conversion to the author’s Hermetic message becomes a living demonstration of Lazzarelli’s triumph over the culture of Naples. The linguistic core of his argument, however, was open to a major objection based on a well known authority. In his *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine had discussed the theme of the active power of Egyptian language in the context of a very harsh refutation of the dialogue *Asclepius*. Hence, one wonders whether Lazzarelli’s audience aware of this pitfall and whether Pontano responded to his adversary’s attack. The answer is to be found in Pontano’s *Aegidius*, whose refutation of Lazzarelli’s text builds exactly upon this controversial theory of language and its anticlassical implications.

**Pontano’s Aegidius and Hermes**

Lazzarelli’s attempt at installing himself in Naples did not succeed: in 1494, after Ferrante’s death and on the backdrop of the social turmoil caused by Charles VIII’s descent into Italy, Lazzarelli went back to Rome. Ferrante, as Lazzarelli complained in the aforementioned poem, never read his *Fasti Christianae Religionis* and most probably did not live long enough to receive the presentation copy of the *Crater Hermetis*. The object of slanders and puns most probably inflicted by Pontano’s followers, Lazzarelli left after living on the fringes of Neapolitan society while being. These puns attacked Lazzarelli’s alleged skills as a healer and a physician, a “gift” he apparently shared with his master Giovanni da Correggio. This negative portrait of Lazzarelli’s stay in Naples sharply contrasts with the triumphant tone of the last and unforgettable lines of the *Crater*
Hermetis, in which the author describes himself as disappearing in the night after having successfully delivered his message to the King and his secretary:

When this effusion of praise had been concluded the king withdrew into the royal chambers, more cheerful and happy due to the discussion; and he prayed that another sun might give him another day like this. But Lazzarelli, having reverently greeted the king (as good manners demand), promised his assistance for another occasion, and left deep in the night.

(Crater Hermetis 30.6 p.269)

Differently from what he wrote in his Crater Hermetis, therefore, Lazzarelli disappeared from Naples apparently without leaving any trace of his thought or legacy. Seven years after Lazzarelli’s departure, Pontano finished his dialogue Aegidius (written 1501; first printed 1515), a text entitled after the Augustinian father Giles (Aegidius) of Viterbo that examines the impact of this friar upon Pontano’s intellectual community. Among other things, this text inscribes a rather harsh discussion between two personalities well known in the context of Naples, that is, the poet Benit Gareth (Cariteo) and the natural philosopher Johannes Pardo (Pardo). In this dialogue, Cariteo presents himself as holding a book from the Corpus Hermeticum and bursts into a monologue on the doctrines of Creation and Redemption based on Hermes’ authority. In response, Pardo demonstrates the linguistic and natural philosophical mistakes implicit in Cariteo’s profession of Hermetic belief. The author’s persona, in the meantime, plays the role of the mediator who slightly criticizes Cariteo with puns and jokes.

Scholarly interpretations of this passage can be grouped into two categories, neither of which is satisfactory. The first category includes Stefano Sosti, Paola Maria Saci and Beatrice Barbiellini Amidei. These critics have unanimously interpreted Pontano’s
mention of Hermeticism as evidence of the enthusiastic reception of the *Corpus Hermeticum* among Neapolitan authors (Sosti 1987 pp.104-105; Saci 1999 p.85; Barbiellini Amidei 1999). Their opinion stems from Garin’s hypothesis that an intellectual friendship did exist between Pontano and Lazzarelli, given that both these writers’ participates in a small community of scholars gathered around a Neapolitan patron and editor, Matteo Acquaviva (Garin 1942). The second category includes Vincenzo Fera, Claudio Moreschini and Wouter Hanegraaf. Vincenzo Fera has questioned Moreschini, who had initially endorsed the conventional view of Pontano’s *Aegidius* as evidence of a positive reception of Hermetic ideas in the context of Naples (Fera 1987 p. 169; Moreschini 1985 pp. 205-207). In Fera’s perspective, Pontano was probably uninterested, and even critical, of Quattrocento interpretations of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Ignored by Barbiellini Amidei’s monograph on the poet Cariteo, Fera’s objection was more recently examined and partially accepted by Moreschini and Hanegraaf, who have suggested that there may be a link between Pontano’s treatment of Hermeticism and Lazzarelli’s *Crater Hermetis* (Moreschini 2000 pp.216-221; Hanegraaf 2005 pp.59-60).

Now, the first category of interpretations needs to be refuted because it stems from a documentary misunderstanding. When Garin suggested that Lazzarelli and Pontano were good friends based on their common patron Matteo Acquaviva, he was relying on a biography written by the eighteenth century historian Lancillotti, who had confused Matteo Acquaviva and Matteo di Capua (Hanegraaf 2005 p.10n). Besides the fact that being under the same patron does not constitute a proof of intellectual affinity, this
common patronage did not exist. This first group of interpretations, consequently, does not explain why Lazzarelli’s *Crater Hermetis* is so harshly polemical with Pontano and his intellectual legacy, and why Pontano’s *Aegidius* – as I will demonstrate – represents Hermetic philosophy in a negative, if not parodic, light. The second category, instead, correctly presents Pontano’s attitude toward Hermeticism as a problem in need of further investigation, thus constituting the starting point of my hypothesis. The interpreters of this second category, however, were only tangentially interested in Pontano’s dialogue *Aegidius*, so that their suggestions need to be followed up by a close reading of this dialogue.

Pontano’s dialogue criticizes the discourse of Hermetic theology by constructing a character (Cariteo) who suddenly bursts into a profession of Hermetic belief. Considering the way Cariteo’s persona interacts with Pontano’s character, I would infer that the author’s attitude is critical from the beginning. Differently from the other characters, who politely take turns by talking to each other and by inviting their fellow speakers to address a new issue, Cariteo is portrayed in the act of muttering some undecipherable words while his friend Pietro Summonte describes the glorious death of a Neapolitan citizen. Pontano’s persona, with a considerable dose of humor, tries to distract Cariteo from his strange attitude by addressing him a witty joke about his notoriously problematic wife Petronilla. Cariteo initially gets Pontano’s wit and replies with a witty remark. Suddenly, however, he dismisses his hilarious tone and starts explaining what he was muttering by addressing the entire group with unexpected and inappropriate solemnity:
But I will now stop trying to look witty (*facetus*) in this meeting and in these issues. You, then, great men who are here, learn how that Hermes, who antiquity called *Termaximus* because of his excellent mind, these days provided me with his weapons and arrows so that now I swear on his cause. Therefore from now on, having dismissed Plato, I am following his army. And the things that you saw me muttering about the reading of him, if only Hermes is the author of the book I am now holding in my hands, are the following.\(^{152}\)

\[\text{\textit{(Aegidius p. 268: 30-37)}}\]

The language of Cariteo’s profession of Hermetic belief betrays on the one hand a violation of Pontano’s ideal of urban conversation, and on the other hand the first allusion to Ludovico Lazzarelli. In the same dialogic way encountered in Lazzarelli’s *Crater Hermetis*, Pontano’s dialogue makes reference to the interlocutors’ ideologies by means of words that can be conceptualized within Bakhtin’s notion of ideologemes. By stating that he does not want to be witty (*facetus*), Cariteo is using an ideologeme that betrays the ideal of societal nicety that Pontano’s *De Sermone* systematically posited as the cement of urban conversation. Based on the assumption that conversation has to be a moment of relief from the burdens of public life, in Pontano’s perspective jokes and puns are a fundamental element of the dialogic ideal outlined in *De Sermone* and inscribed in the dialogues. Moreover, Cariteo’s persona openly embraces Hermes’ words after having rejected Plato, thus associating his belief with an anticlassical intellectual standpoint. Now, if one considers that Ficino’s translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* insisted on the agreement, rather than the difference, between Hermes and Plato, this lexical choice can be read as an ideologeme that is meant to evoke the memory of Lazzarelli’s anticlassical

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\(^{152}\) *Aegidius* p.268: 29-37: “Sed desinam hac nunc in consessione hisque in quaestionibus velle videri facetus. Vos igitur qui hic adeitis, viri optimi, sic accipite: Hermetem illum, quem vetustas ob ingenii divinitatem agnominavit Termaximum, his ipsis diebus suis me armis, suis item telis instruxisse meque illius iurasse in verba; itaque Platone relicito ex hoc die militiam eius sequor. Quae autem, Ioviane, mussitatem me de eius lectione animadvertisti, haec quidem sunt, si modo eius libri qui nunc versatur in manibus, Hermes ipse est auctor.”
agenda in Pontano’s audience. It has also been shown how this anticlassical agenda constitutes the core of Lazzarelli’s attack against Pontano inscribed in the *Crater Hermetis*. By modeling Cariteo’s language upon Lazzarelli’s texts, therefore, Pontano is presenting the discourse of Hermetic theology as the product of an asocial fanatic whose behavior openly violates the norms of his intellectual community, and whose traits recall Lazzarelli.

Pontano constructed Cariteo’s persona as engaged in explaining, and refuting, the doctrine of creation and the mystery of redemption as the result of the fecundity of God’s word. In order to defend his view on God’s word, Cariteo’s language echoes on the one hand the core of Lazzarelli’s *Crater Hermetis* and on the other hand a passage from Pontano’s *De Rebus Coelestibus*. Cariteo’s persona argues that creation is nothing but the result of a verbal inspiration (*adflatus verbalis*) and he reinforces this thesis with the words of *Genesis* as interpreted by Saint John’s Gospel. Based on this theory, Cariteo is then represented as venturing into an apostrophe against both Pontano and other natural philosophers whose views, he says, stem from taking as a cause of creation what is actually the mental representation of a spoken sound. More specifically, in order to support his theory on the active power of words, Cariteo refutes Pontano’s translation of

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153 I prefer to quote this passage in the version of the manuscript Corsiniano Rossi 78 (36 F 16), which differs from Summonte’s printing reproduced in Previtera’s edition. For reasons that I ignore, the differences between these two versions are not reproduced in Previtera’s apparatus, although Summonte evidently changed the construct “verbali ex illo afflatu” into “divino ex ipso verbo.” Corsiniano Rossi 78 (36 F 16) c. 96 r: “Igitur creationem ipsam provenisse crediderim ex verbo tantum dei dictante sapientia quo statim memento enuntiavit deus ipse dixitque “fiat lux fiat terra fiat coelum” quaeque coetera *verbali ex illo afflatu* provenerunt omnia.” Italic and the resolution of the abbreviations are mine.

154 Aegidius p.269: 21-29: “At dixerit quispiam: «Quoniam modo Deus e nihilo haec ipsa eduxerit?» At quonam hic ipse consilio aut fiducia haec dixerit? Cume audieat Aristoteles profferi causam illam tertiam generationis esse carentiam, quam Latini quidam eius sectatores vocant forse minus propriam privationem; quae quidem ipsa nihil prorsus est, cum tamen ex material et forma res quidem ipsae sint privatio vero re ipsa nihil omnino in se habeat, praeter quam cogitatione tautum concepta post voce enuntietur.”
Aristotle’s notion of *steresis* as the lack (*carentia*) of form that disposes human mind to learn as well as shapeless matter to come into being. Pontano’s view was meant to correct a mistake that was widespread among some natural philosophers of the time, who translated *steresis* as privation (*privatio*). This translation, in Pontano’s perspective, caused natural philosophers to conceive human mind as a blank slate and matter as a static uncreated thing.\footnote{I discuss this point in further details in the first chapter.} The language in which Pontano and Pardo respond to Cariteo betrays both another allusion to Lazzarelli, as well as a philosophical proposition associated with Pontano and shared within the intellectual community of Naples.

Following Cariteo’s spirited revelation of how creation is the direct result of God’s word along with his attack against natural philosophers, Pontano’s persona replies with a joke that pokes fun at his friend’s physical condition thus echoing the rumors surrounding Lazzarelli during his stay in Naples. Cariteo, Pontano’s persona points out, suffers from gout and thus should be a little bit more respectful of those scholars who devote their work to the study of matter.\footnote{Aegidius p.270: 25-28: “Tibi quidem, Charitee, videndum est quanam via progrediare, cum podager ipse sis medicorumque maxime indigae opera, quorum officium est ad materiam potissimum studia curationesque suas referre.”} Humorously stuck within his prophetic persona and blinded by his Hermetic faith, however, Cariteo replies that even his gout is the result of a rational design that provided him with louder voice for better bearing his pain.\footnote{Aegidius p.270: 29-: “Ista quidem perinde dicuntur a te, Pontane, ac si ignores naturam ipsam ea ratione podagris consuluisse, quo dolorem minus sentiant, lingua ut uterentur loquaciere. Quodque tu ipse factus es iam surdaster, voce etiam clariore, magisque a magis plena; quamobrem reliqua quae sunt, quaeo, animadvertire.”}

What appears to be a simple joke is, in my view, is actually a parody of a passage from a commonly known source of Hermetic lore, the Emerald Tablet or *Tabula*
Smaradgina, which emphasized the complete analogy between the world above and the world below. This text, which was translated from the Arabic in the thirteenth century and circulated under the title of Secretum Secretorum, came to be perceived as an epitome of Hermetic doctrine. In this context, its parody also echoes the puns and slanders that, according to Lazzarelli’s lament, a group of unnamed Neapolitans reserved for his alleged virtues as a healer and a physician. If these rumors carry the mark of Pontano’s intellectual community, then echoes can be read in the language of Pontano’s Aegidius.

Pardo’s persona is characterized by a certain degree of gravity and his exhaustive response is meant to be on the one hand the last word on Cariteo’s argument, and on the other hand a general statement on how knowledge should be organized within Pontano’s community. After having replied to Pontano’s joke, Cariteo ventures into the second part of his argument, which touches upon the problem of Redemption. In Cariteo’s view, this event parallels the moment of creation because it results from the action of God’s words upon the Virgin Mary’s womb. Consistent with an ideal of knowledge that was disinclined to confuse theological and philosophical discourses, Pardo politely refuses to build upon his interlocutor’s religious speculation and modestly narrows his reply to a linguistic inquiry into the translation of Aristotle’s term steresis. In Pardo’s view, Cariteo’s mistake stems first of all from linguistic ignorance, and only eventually from a reckless attitude toward religious discussion. Pardo’s refutation stems from a distinction between how the word privatio produces its meaning (vis) and what this word actually refers to (significatio). Based on an approach to the study of language that coincides with
that outlined by Lorenzo Valla, Pardo rejects his interlocutor's dangerous speculation on the active power of God's word. I propose that this definition of the field of inquiry responds to Lazzarelli's polemical use of the active power of words against Pontano's approach to language:

Actually, Cariteo, if your speech were not dealing with religion and Christianity I would have laughed about you even while you were speaking because you are provoking against you the physicians so imprudently, not to say completely without prudence. However, let's concede this in consideration of your gout and your articular pains, which so often keep you in bed. And since you mentioned the word *privatio* I will talk about its force (*vis*), so that it won't look as if I were trying to venture into religion by discussing its signification (*significatio*).\(^{158}\)

(Aegidius p. 271: 20-27)

Cariteo's profession of Hermetic belief, to sum up, makes reference to Lazzarelli's radical interpretation of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Its function is that of sharpening its contrast with the rules, research focus and organization of Pontano's intellectual community. In my view, the critique of Hermeticism found in Pontano's *Aegidius* specifically attacks Lazzarelli's *Crater Hermetis* by bringing forth classical scholarship and the separation between religious and philosophical discussion as the pillars, rather than the limits, of the Neapolitan enclave. This dialogue, however, was written seven years after Lazzarelli's departure from Naples and this author's name is not directly mentioned. Additionally, the critique of Hermeticism is only a part of a long and complex dialogue whose focus is not Hermetic discourse in itself, but rather a general examination

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\(^{158}\) *Aegidius* p.271: 20-27: "Equidem ego te vel inter loquendum risissem, CHaritee, nisi de religione deque republica Christiana sermo esset habitus, dum physicoms tam imprudenter, ne parum prudenter dicam, ipse in te provocas. Concedatur tamen hoc podagrae articularibusque doloribus, de quibus tam saepe quidem iaces ; et quoniam a te de privatione facta est mentio, dicam de vi verbi, ne de rei significacione loquens videar adversus religionem irumpere."
of a complex intellectual encounter between Pontano’s community and Giles of Viterbo. Why, one may ask, did Pontano decide to recall Lazzarelli’s memory in a dialogue titled *Aegidius*? What is the function of a critique of Hermetic belief within the overall structure of the dialogue?

**The Role of Giles of Viterbo**

Although it is always difficult, if not misleading, to extrapolate one single meaning from a dialogic work, my hypothesis builds upon an internal correspondence between Cariteo’s profession of Hermetic belief and Giles’ sermon as it is reported by Pontano’s persona at the beginning of the dialogue. Both these passages are written according to the genre of the religious sermon. They address a generically wide audience, and they build upon Scriptural authority which addresses, among other things, one common religious problem, that is, whether ancient writers really had access to the meaning of Christ’s Redemption. Giles and Cariteo, however, provide two opposite solutions that, consequently, are received in two opposite ways by the group of bystanders.

Pontano’s persona, who reports Giles’ speech, enthusiastically praises the Augustinian Friar for having denied that divine inspiration provided ancient writers with the understanding of Christian doctrines. Giles’ reported sermon starts by claiming that antiquity did not know Christ, and was therefore living in a state of darkness and ignorance:

> Those who were not christened by any wisdom could not see the image of true Goodness or, rather, Goodness itself in its highness and perfection, because ancient philosophers have not seen, heard or known Christ, for He is Goodness,
and from Him and in Him goodness itself exists, and from His source every Goodness springs and Goodness’ rivers flow. And it (i.e. “antiquity”) could not know Truth, because Christ is truth and Goodness cannot be seen but through Truth. Therefore, Christ himself is Truth and Goodness, and from him Truth and Goodness flow. Through him Truth itself is known, and the nature of Goodness, its species and idea. Antiquity, since it was covered in darkness, could not be invested by the Light.\(^{159}\)

As discovered by Francesco Tateo, Pontano constructed Giles’ speech by means of a series of selected passages taken from Augustine’s works. In particular, Pontano borrowed the opening passage of Giles’ sermon from Augustine’s *De Trinitate* (Tateo 2000 pp.20-23), which examined the problem of the Trinity and questioned the widespread belief that some ancient writers could have a complete understanding of this mystery even though they were not Christians and were unaware of the Gospel. Pontano was particularly sensitive to this point, which was especially crucial for a scholar devoted to the study of Greek and Latin literature. Pontano owned a personal copy of Augustine’s *De Trinitate*, which he closely read and filled with marginal annotations (Tateo 2000 pp.11-12). Pontano’s work upon Augustine’s text gives evidence of the author’s interest for religious questions in the late years of his intellectual career. In addition, the marginalia found on Pontano’s own copy of Augustine’s *De Trinitate* now found at the Biblioteca Nazionale of Naples constitute the bedrock of the sermon reported in the dialogue *Aegidius*.

\(^{159}\) *Aegidius* p.249 : 9-21 : “Nequit, o viri Christiani, vetus ilia philosophia boni ipsius speciem intueri vel bonum ipsum potius et summum et consummatum, quippe cum Christus esset neque ab antiquis philosophis visus neque ab illis aut auditus aut cognitus. Ille nanque ipse, ex illoque, perque illum, bonum existis ipsum, deque illius fonte bonitas omnis mana defluatque bonorum omnium rivi. Multo autem minus potuit veritatem agnosce, quando idem ipse Christus veritas est, nec bonum aut videri aut intelligi nisi per veritatem potest. Idem ipse igitur Christus et veritas est et bonum, in eoque utriusque, et veri et boni collocata est species, ex eoque et verum demanat et bonum, ac per eum et veritas ipsa agnoscitur et boni ipsius natura qualis sit quaeque etiam sive species eius sive idea. Minime vero omnium vetustas illa in tenebris constituta cum esset, versari in luce potuit.”
Although Tateo maintains that Pontano’s approach to Augustine betrays a rhetorical way of reading whose ultimate goal is the literary construction of Giles’ speech, I would suggest that the choice of this passage from Augustine’s *De Trinitate* is meant to create a contrast with Cariteo’s sermon. This contrast, in my view, constitutes the theological counterpart of Cariteo’s portrait as a character who violates the ideal of civic conversation and counters the natural philosophical ideas found in Pontano’s *De Sermone* and *De Rebus Coelestibus*. Against Augustine’s standpoint, Cariteo constructs his theological argument exclusively upon Hermes’ authority. This ancient writer, in Cariteo’s view, has the same status of a biblical prophet and his words are to be interpreted as foreshadowing the pillars of Christianity: Creation and Redemption. His view, then, contrasts with what needs to be taken as Pontano’s opinion, which Giles’ sermon implicitly conveys. Again, Pontano constructs his negative portrait of the Hermetic thinker by means of an allusion to Lazzarelli’s profession of Hermetic belief based on the complete agreement of the Scriptures and the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Is this contrast a clue to the text’s meaning? Does it help to illuminate Pontano’s criticism of Hermetic discourse? The history of this theological problem may shed light on this last puzzle.

Whether ancient writers and Hermes in particular could foreshadow Christian doctrines in their writings was a hot topic among the Church fathers since the beginning of Christianity. The most influential opinions were those of Lactantius and Augustine. In his fourth century *Divine Institutes*, a book written under the threat of Diocletian’s persecutions, Lactantius tried to emphasize all the available analogies between Christian
doctrines and non-Christian thought. His audience, at the time, was not composed of Christians but rather of highly educated Roman citizens well read in late ancient Platonic exegesis as well as in Hermetic literature. Since these readers already cultivated a form of monotheism that Digeser defines as "philosophical piety," Lactantius reasonably hoped to guide his readers to embrace Christianity through learning. In the *Divine Institutes*, therefore, Christ is not understood as a redeemer but rather as a wise teacher embedded in a lineage of masters and pupils beginning in the ancient world and reaching Lactantius' time (Digeser 2000 pp. 46-90). Hermes, in Lactantius' perspective, is an illustrious precursor of Christ. The dialogue *Asclepius*, according to Lactantius perfectly grasps the doctrine of creation and the mystery of the Trinity (Van der Broek 2000 pp. 115-144).

Written in a time when Christians were no longer persecuted, Augustine's fifth century *De Civitate Dei* approaches the problem in a way that is far more complex than Lactantius' *Divine Institutes*, and certainly far less with regard to Hermes' writings. Well read in everything produced by ancient writers and animated by a more systematic purpose, Augustine devoted books 6-8 of his *De Civitate Dei* to examining, refuting and endorsing words and ideas of ancient writers about theology. In Augustine's perspective, Christ's redemption marked a turning point in history and this event coincided with a new age. Based on this assumption, Augustine's approach to antiquity was critical. For example, Augustine praised and assimilated Plato as a natural theologian, whose discoveries could be fruitfully studied by Christian readers, but whose message needed to
be interpreted in light of Christian faith. On the other hand, Augustine refuted Hermes’ *Asclepius* as a document of reckless pagan idolatry precisely because of its views on the active power of language. Augustine consistently applied this approach in other works dealing with specific theological problems such as the Trinity. In the passage of his *De Trinitate* that Pontano reused in writing Giles’ sermon, in particular, Augustine denied that ancient writers could have full understanding of this Christian mystery by means of reason or some kind of divine inspiration.

This theological problem, as well as these opposite positions on the authority of Hermes’ writings, played a pivotal role during the Middle Ages and acquired broader intellectual ramifications. Whereas Lactantius and Augustine had focused on the problem of Hermes in the ambit of Christian apologetics, Scholastic theologians shifted the discussion to the level of epistemology. More specifically, Lactantius’ view of Hermes as an ancient theologian who had access to the perfect understanding of Christian doctrines came to constitute important evidence for theologians such as Alan of Lille, whose writings advanced the thesis that Christian mysteries were accessible by reason alone.

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160 *De Civitate Dei* 8:10: “Quamuis enim homo Christianus litteris tantum ecclesiasticis eruditus Platonicorum forte nomen ignoret, nec utrum duo genera philosophorum exitterint in Graeca lingua, Ioniorum et Italicorum, sciat: non tamen ita surdus est in rebus humanis, ut nesciat philosophos uel studium sapientiae uel ipsam sapientiam profiteri. Cauet eos tamen, qui secundum elementa huius mundi philosophantur, non secundum Deum, a quo ipse factus est mundus.”

161 *Ibidem* 8 : 23 : “Nam diuersa de illis Hermes Aegyptius, quem Trismegiston uocant, sensit et scripsit. Apuleius enim deos quidem illos negat; sed cum dicit ita inter deos et homines quadam medietate uersari, ut hominibus apud ipsos deos necessarii uideantur, cultum eorum a supernorum deorum religione non separat. Ille autem Aegyptius alios deos esse dicit a summo Deo factos, alios ab hominibus. Hoc qui audit, sicut a me positum est, putat dici de simulacris, quia opera sunt manuum hominum; at ille uisibilia et contractabilia simulacra uelut corpora deorum esse asserit; inesse autem his quosdam spiritus inuitatos, qui ualeant aliquid siue ad nocendum siue ad desideria nonnulla complenda eorum, a quibus eis diuini honores et cultus obsequia deferuntur. Hos ergo spiritus inuisibles per artem quandam usibilibus rebus corporalis materiae copulare, ut sint quasi animata corpora illis spiritibus dicata et subdicta simulacra, hoc esse dicit deos facere eamque magnam et mirabilem deos faciendi accepisse homines potestatem. Huius Aegyptii uerba, sicut in nostram linguam interpretata sunt, ponam.”
Augustine’s critical view, on the other hand, came to constitute an argument in defense of the opposite thesis found, for example, in Albertus Magnus and his pupil Saint Thomas, who conceded that Hermes’ *Asclepius* might give evidence of a certain understanding of Creation, but denied that it could have grasped the Trinity (Ven der Broek 2000 pp. 115-144). Should one conclude, then, that Pontano’s *Aegidius* was meant to present an accurate report of Giles of Viterbo’s view on Hermetic theology based on Augustine and his Scholastic followers? Does Pontano’s persona construct Giles’ sermon simply as an enthusiastic tribute to the Augustinian Father’s rhetorical skills? This may be so. There is, however, a problem.

Giles of Viterbo, much like Ficino and Lazzarelli, was actually a firm believer in the existence of ancient theology, and he was an avid reader of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. During his formative years at the Augustinian Congregation gathering in Padua, Giles audited local professors of natural philosophy lecturing on Aristotle to an audience of aspiring physicians and developed a lifelong distrust for the religious indifference of these teachers. This experience gave him the impetus to pursue his studies in theology and to incorporate the ideas on the immortality of the soul developed by Marsilio Ficino, whom he met, studied and translated for an audience of students of theology. While in Naples, Giles finished his *Sententiae ad Mentem Platonis*, which was conceived as a new commentary of a theology schoolbook - Peter Lombard’s *Sententiae* - updated with Ficinian themes.¹⁶² In this text, whose impact upon the literary culture of Naples has

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¹⁶² Giles of Viterbo's platonizing commentary of Peter Lombard's *Sententiae* was not the only attempt to update this common textbook to a new set of values. For example, Pietro Cortesi wrote and published in 1504 his own annotated edition of Peter Lombard's book, which he interpreted in the light of his rhetorical
never been thoroughly examined by literary historians, Giles endorsed Ficino’s view of poetry as a divinely inspired form of knowledge, which Pontano had criticized in his *De Fortuna*. In addition, Giles’ text brings forth Ficino’s idea of ancient theology and presents Hermes as a divinely inspired prophet, whose writings are consistent with Christian doctrines. Consistent with this view of antiquity as illuminated by divine inspiration, Giles set out an allegorical method for interpreting ancient mythology and the poetry of Virgil.

As a consequence of his collaboration with Marsilio Ficino and based on the arguments exposed in his *Sententiae ad Mentem Platonis*, Giles also cultivated a curiosity for the *Corpus Hermeticum* as it was interpreted by Ludovico Lazzarelli. Giles thought that Hermes, along with the Sybils and Virgil, was a divinely inspired author whose writings belonged to the esoteric sources of Christian doctrine that he called oracles, and whose usage and knowledge he recommended exclusively to expert scholars (O’Malley 1968 pp.29-34, 55-56). Consistent with these premises, he constantly devoted his exegetical acumen to the study and interpretation of these texts and he planned his book purchases accordingly. Giles’s personal collection of books preserved by the Augustinian Fathers of Viterbo included an autograph written by Ludovico Lazzarelli for his master Giovanni da Correggio. Giles, who might have heard of Lazzarelli during his years in Naples, bought this rare book from a book hunter named Aleandro from Venice, who had found this text in France where Giovanni da Correggio had brought it and donated to an ambassador at the court of Louis XII in 1503 (Saci 1999 pp.71-72; Hanegraaf 2005 and encyclopedic culture. A study of the reception of the *Sententiae* between fifteenth and sixteenth century, I would suggest, could produce interesting results.
This manuscript consists of Lazzarelli’s prophetic letters and a translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* accompanied by the *Diffinitiones Asclepii*.

O’Malley has claimed that Pontano’s *Aegidius* gives simply evidence of the complete endorsement of Giles of Viterbo’s teachings within the intellectual community of Naples (O’Malley 1968 pp.7-8). In contrast with O’Malley, Tateo has more persuasively argued that this text more exactly gives evidence of a critical and highly selective endorsement of Giles’ ideas (Tateo 2002). However, I am not convinced that this dialogue gives evidence of a critical scrutiny of Giles’ teachings in light of the values shared by Pontano and his followers. In particular, I am not persuaded that this critical attitude stems generically from Pontano’s Aristotelian and Ptolemaic culture, which was uninterested in theological matters. Moreover, I don’t think that Pontano’s representation of Giles of Viterbo was simply dictated by these authors’ affinity in the pursuit of eloquence and rhetorical studies. In contrast with O’Malley and Tateo, I propose that the parody of Hermetic discourse inscribed in Pontano’s *Aegidius* is to be read as a critique of an aspect of Giles of Viterbo’s culture that was considered unacceptable in Pontano’s intellectual community.

Pontano’s critique of the *Corpus Hermeticum* as an aspect of Giles of Viterbo’s culture that is unacceptable within his intellectual community is encapsulated within the broader discussion on conjecture and inspiration. Implicitly, the dialogue *Aegidius* posits Cariteo’s use of divinely inspired sources for constructing a religious argument in contrast with Giles of Viterbo’s sermon, thus suggesting its dubious theological status. Explicitly, Pardo refutes Cariteo’s abuse of an alleged divine source based on his
expertise in natural philosophy and the sound use of Latin language. These claims are connected with a defense of astrological conjectures found in the following pages of the dialogue. After having discussed with Cariteo and Pardo, Pontano’s persona turns toward his friend Puderico and ironically asks him whether he now wants to continue Cariteo’s speech with an attack against astrology. Puderico, however, politely recalls Giovanni Pontano’s expertise on this subject as well as Giovanni Pico’s attack against this discipline. Consistent with Pontano’s ideas on astrological conjectures as being the result of an association of images by which human mind approximates a future event in its general features, Puderico refutes Giovanni Pico’s writings against astrology as an attack addressed against a wrong target. Rather, Puderico ventures into an apology of those astrologers who consider their readings as conjectures, while he condemns the work of those who use their readings as the source of exact prognostications of a future event. Urania presents Creation as an unreachable object of inquiry, which can be approximated by means of conjecture but never entirely known. Likewise, Pontano’s Aegidius constructs Giles as holding a religious position that is compatible with Augustine’s De Trinitate and Pontano’s own views on astrological conjectures. Pontano’s portrait of Giles is, however, inconsistent with Giles’ own ideas.

Furthermore, Pontano’s critique of Hermeticism might betray his critical attitude toward the religious trend taken by some of his pupils in response to Giles of Viterbo’s preaching at the beginning of the sixteenth century. In 1501 Cariteo, whose name is used for embodying Hermetic discourse, had just begun to revise his collection of poetry entitled Endymion. His revision followed an editorial pattern that, as demonstrated by
Barbiellini Amidei, went from an initial deference for the ideology of Latin elegy to the endorsement of Plato’s theory of love as it was divulged by Ficino’s *De Amore* (Barbiellini Amidei 1999). Also, Cariteo had recently composed a collection of poems that, likened to his profession of Hermetic belief found in Pontano’s *Aegidius*, dealt with the Virgin Mary and addressed theological issues such as whether Christian mysteries could be expressed in words. In addition, in 1490 Cariteo wrote a letter to Jacopo Sannazaro in which he exhorted his friend to pursue his religious studies and convert his literary production to Christian topics (Deramaix 1990 pp. 179, 275). Eventually, this is exactly what Sannazaro would have done. As I will illustrate in the next chapter, Sannazaro, upon finishing his *Piscatorial Eclogues*, devoted himself entirely to the *De Partu Virginis*.

At the end of Giles’s years in Naples, therefore, Pontano had very good reasons to detect a growing lack of interest for classical and natural philosophical studies among his pupils, who were increasingly inclined to venture into religious topics. His highly selective endorsement of Giles’ teachings, carefully weighed in the light of his personal knowledge of Augustine and encapsulated within the epistemology he developed in his astrological writings, was characterized by a degree of distrust for the radical religious experiences such as those of Giovanni da Correggio and his spokesperson Ludovico Lazzarelli. The endorsement of Giles of Viterbo within the Neapolitan intellectual community, Pontano’s *Aegidius* says, could occur only through a careful process of examination and selection based on ethical and philosophical rules theorized in Pontano’s writings. In particular, *Aegidius* constructs an argument against the esoteric aspects of
Giles' intellectual agenda, because they were inconsistent with Pontano's ideas. Pontano recalled Lazzarelli's legacy in order to warn against ideas on wisdom and language as well as behaviors that Giles' preaching risked to revive among the members of his intellectual community.
Chapter 4

From Astrology to Prophecy:
Jacopo Sannazaro between Giovanni Pontano and Giles of Viterbo

In the first two chapters I have distinguished the astrological and theological approaches to poetry formulated by Giovanni Pontano and Marsilio Ficino, and I have advanced the hypothesis that Pontano's late writings were a response to Ficino and aimed at criticizing the diffusion of Florentine ideas among the members of his intellectual community. In the third chapter I have investigated the encounter between Ludovico Lazzarelli and Giovanni Pontano in order to further illustrate the diffusion of theological approaches to poetry in the context of Naples. I have also advanced the hypothesis that Pontano's use of Lazzarelli's language in his critique of Hermeticism found in his dialogue Aegidius might constitute a response to the intellectual agenda of the Augustinian Friar Giles of Viterbo, whose works and ideas were successfully spreading among the members of Pontano's intellectual community. In this chapter, I will explore the extent to which the debate about astrology, prophecy and poetry is inscribed in the works of Giovanni Pontano's favorite pupil, and Giles of Viterbo's disciple, Jacopo Sannazaro.

Scholars have seldom interpreted Jacopo Sannazaro's works in their intellectual context and the author's conventional portrait is based almost exclusively on his few works written in vernacular, that is, Arcadia (written 1486-1501; first printed 1504) and other poems. Italianists have approached Sannazaro as a member of the Italian poetic canon, thus excluding the possibility of his knowledge either of philosophical texts or
texts written in Latin. This assumption marks the works of stylistic critics from the disciplines of romance philology and linguistic structuralism. Folena, for example, has analyzed *Arcadia* as an example of the linguistic crisis that marks Quattrocento Italian literature (Folena 1952). Mengaldo, on the other hand, has emphasized Sannazaro's intuitive knowledge of a norm before Pietro Bembo's linguistic reform and codification of literary Italian (Mengaldo 1962). Corti, in a series of groundbreaking essays, has persuasively interpreted Sannazaro's usage of literary Italian as a projection of social dynamics at work in the context of Naples (Corti 1967-71). Santagata has contributed to understanding Sannazaro's position in the history of Aragonese literature by investigating his relationship with Petrarch's *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta* and its language (Santagata 1976). Thanks to an elegant combination of stylistic and textual criticism, Velli has inferred from the study of variants of *Arcadia*'s different versions important elements of the author's aesthetics and views on poetic creativity (Velli 1983). Although extremely rich in hermeneutic insights and impeccable from a methodological point of view, these studies are shortsighted in that they isolate *Arcadia* from the intellectual context of Quattrocento Naples and from the rest of Sannazaro's corpus of writings. Therefore, they are incompatible with the approach adopted in this dissertation and only partially useful for my inquiry.

In contrast with this scholarly tradition, and because Sannazaro played a pivotal role in the life of Giovanni Pontano's intellectual community, I will interpret his texts in their original context. Pontano's dialogue *Actius* constructs Sannazaro as the embodiment of the combination of astrology and rhetoric that is at the heart of Pontano's mode of
thinking. Sannazaro’s Latin elegies and epigrams, moreover, are constantly addressed to members of Pontano’s community and give evidence of the author’s profound involvement in the intellectual life of Naples. In addition, Sannazaro composed his neo-Latin poem *De Partu Virginis* while in correspondence with Giles of Viterbo; a correspondance which presumably led to Sannazaro’s conversion to Giles’ interpretation and translation of Ficino’s ideas. Therefore, Sannazaro’s career mirrors the historical process that I have investigated throughout this dissertation. Since Giovanni Pontano and Giles of Viterbo constantly advised Sannazaro throughout the long writing process of his books, I decided to investigate the extent to which *Arcadia* and *De Partu Virginis* inscribe the ideas of Sannazaro’s mentors.

My argument is that the two versions of Sannazaro’s *Arcadia* give evidence of the author’s transition from the intellectual community gathered around Ippolita Sforza and Giuniano Maio to the community headed by Giovanni Pontano. Sannazaro initially endorsed Pontano’s mode of thinking in its general terms. He adopted his mentor’s central ideas in order to construct a literary portrait that is in contrast with the previous phase of his intellectual itinerary. Giles of Viterbo’s stay in Naples between 1498 and 1501, however, was to influence Sannazaro’s eventual endorsement of Florentine Platonism. Sannazaro occasionally used Ficinian ideas in his *Piscatorial Eclogues*, and in a more pronounced manner in the construction of his authorial figure in *De Partu Virginis*. The premises for this final intellectual and literary conversion, I will illustrate, are Giles of Viterbo’s eclogues, a short collection written within the framework of Ficino’s interpretation of Plato which were to challenge Sannazaro’s espousal of
Pontano’s legacy.\textsuperscript{163} Pontano and Giles’ notions of conjecture and inspiration, as well as their views on astrology and prophecy, profoundly shaped Sannazaro’s self-fashioning as a poet.

\textit{Giovanni Pontano and Arcadia}

\textit{Sincero’s last six days in Arcadia}

Similarly to what I have written in regard to Ludovico Lazzarelli’s \textit{Crater Hermetis} Jacopo Sannazaro’s \textit{Arcadia} circulated in different versions during the author’s lifetime. This editorial pattern, which Christopher Celenza calls “epiphenomenon of writing,” is the result of a process of revision and negotiation between the author and his intended audiences. In general, this approach provides the reader with evidence for understanding the relationship between a text and its intellectual context. Specific to \textit{Arcadia’s} case, the study of the epiphenomenon of its writing is the necessary step to understand how this text was related to other texts that were circulating in Quattrocento Naples. In particular, the comparison of its two versions reveals the author’s affiliation with two intellectual communities that used to gather in Naples in the last years of the fifteenth century, and whose key figures were Giuniano Maio and Giovanni Pontano.

These two Neapolitan communities were distinct for their linguistic choice and intellectual orientation. The first community gathered around Giuniano Maio, professor

\textsuperscript{163} The argument I have brought forth in this chapter stems from the reading of what I consider the most original scholarship on Sannazaro’s production, that is, the work by Marc Deramaix. Deramaix has approached Sannazaro in the framework of the development of the mannerist poetics of Rome at the time of Leo X, hence his emphasis upon the late work \textit{De Partu Virginis}. Differently from Deramaix, I take \textit{De Partu Virginis} as the emblematic close of Pontano’s inheritance, rather than the beginning of a new legacy. However, I believe that beyond the differences in scope and method my argument is generally consistent with Deramaix’s groundbreaking thesis.
of Rhetoric and Poetics at the University of Naples, who was a Latinist with a strong interest in Florentine poetic production in Tuscan vernacular. Maio was himself a vernacular writer, who composed an advice book for King Ferrante, *De Maiestate* (Tile 1905 p.38; Ricciardi 1968).\(^{164}\) This book adjusted a local tradition of princely advice books to the needs and audience of this new language, which was spreading in Naples thanks to the patronage of Queen Ippolita Sforza, who cultivated close diplomatic ties with Lorenzo il Magnifico and whose daughter Isabella was educated in literature by Giuniano Maio himself (Bryce 2007). In addition, Maio participated in the process of rehabilitation of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. He received a copy of his Giovanni Pico’s *Heptaplos* and his thank you note to the promoter of this editorial initiative reveals his acquaintance with the Florentine intelligentsia.\(^{165}\) Sannazaro, who was one of Maio’s pupils, was therefore encouraged to pursue the composition of poetry in Tuscan vernacular and was introduced to the court of Ippolita Sforza, a centre of aggregation and a source of income for those poets who cultivated the vernacular Muses.

The product of Sannazaro’s affiliation with Giuniano Maio and Ippolita Sforza is the first version of *Arcadia*. This version is entitled *Libro Pastorale Intitolato Archadio* and circulated in a presentation copy accompanied by a dedicatory letter addressed to Ippolita Sforza. This first version was comprehensive of the first ten chapters of what was to become the vulgate of Sannazaro’s text and was written before 1486 (Marconi 1997; Riccucci 2001 pp.190-191). *Libro Pastorale*, therefore, was addressed to and circulated

\(^{164}\) I discuss Giuniano Maio’s *De Maiestate* in the third chapter (p.150).
\(^{165}\) The letter can be read in *Opera Omnia* I pp.408-410. I plan to study the meaning and context of this document in a future study.
within a cultural community whose distinctive features were the use of the vernacular as its official literary language, an interest in Florentine ideas and literature, and Giuniano Maio’s leadership.

After Giuniano Maio’s death in 1493, Sannazaro was noticed by Pontano and welcome within his intellectual community. Differently from Maio, Pontano discouraged his pupils from pursuing literature in vernacular and steered their studies in the direction of Latin literature, poetry and philosophy. Sannazaro followed his new mentor’s directions. For example, he joined Pontano’s enclave by writing a group of epigrams against local grammarians, whose way of approaching antiquity was constantly the object of Pontano’s puns and jokes. This literary rivalry, which is examined in Pontano’s early dialogue Antonius, is the context for Sannazaro’s early epigrams (Gualdo Rosa 2003). In 1499, Pontano officially christened Sannazaro as a new member of his entourage by choosing him as the protagonist of the dialogue Actius. Under the nickname of Actius, Pontano’s dialogue constructs Sannazaro’s persona as the result of an astrological disposition (contagio), which allows him and a few particularly gifted individuals to recognize patterns of sounds and words in Virgil’s Aeneid. Actius, in Pontano’s dialogue, is also portrayed in the act of celebrating Pontano’s masterpiece Urania as the last member of a literary lineage of Greek and Latin poems including Hesiod’s Theogony and Lucretius’ De Rerum Natura.

While affiliated with Pontano’s community, Sannazaro finished the second version of Arcadia, which was his last work in vernacular written before his complete conversion to neo-Latin poetry. This second version of Arcadia was finalized around 1496, but the
author had to abandon this project when he left for France along with the Aragonese King Federico during the French occupation of Naples. Arcadia, which was already circulating in pirated editions printed in Venice, was edited upon Sannazaro’s request by Pietro Summonte and printed by Sigismondo Mayr in 1504 (Marconi 1997). Pietro Summonte, himself one of Pontano’s followers, decided to dedicate the 1504 edition to the Cardinal Luigi d’Aragona, natural son of King Ferrante, who was in Paris along with Sannazaro at the time of the publication. Differently from the first version, the printed edition of Arcadia consists of twelve chapters and an epilogue, which is a nostalgic refutation of pastoral poetry in vernacular due to the death of the author’s beloved. What are the main differences between these two versions? Do these differences mirror Sannazaro’s transition from Maio’s to Pontano’s intellectual community?

Pertinent to the focus of this chapter, the most important difference between these two versions is that they inscribe the author’s transition from Giuniano Maio to Giovanni Pontano in the narrative. By this, I do not mean that Arcadia is simply an allegory of the author’s biography or that Sannazaro’s literary text simply reflects the author’s life. This form of historical determinism, which I have refuted while discussing Moreschini’s explanation of the courtly setting in Lazzarelli’s Crater Hermetis, would be a reductionist reading of Sannzaro’s text. What I mean, however, is that there is a strong analogy between the author’s intellectual biography and the conclusions of the two versions of his book. In the first version, the protagonist Sincero relates to a group of shepherds guided by a wizard named Enareto, whose language matches an elegy Sannazaro wrote for his teacher Giuniano Maio. This version ends with a praise of Pontano and his followers,
who are recalled by a shepherd named Selvaggio on his way back from Naples. Selvaggio’s testimony includes a gloomy astrological prognostication casted by Caracciolo, a member of Pontano’s community, whose words Selvaggio reports in the closing lines of the book. Pontano’s intellectual community, however, is praised from the distant landscape of Arcadia, and the book ends with Sincero staying with the group of shepherds.

In the two additional chapters included in the second version, the protagonist Sincero abandons Arcadia and its shepherds, and returns to his native town, Naples. His return is made possible by an ominous dream, which leads the protagonist to a cave where, thanks to the intercession of two water nymphs, he finds his way back home. The text invites the reader to match Sincero’s return to Naples and Selvaggio’s return to Arcadia by presenting Pontano’s enclave as the destination of Sincero’s trip. After a travel to the underworld, Sincero finds a forest where he meets two shepherds named Barcinio and Summonzio. These shepherds are reporting the mourning verses of Meliseus, whose voice is reported at the end of the book. The mourning shepherd, as it can be inferred from Pontano’s eclogue entitled Meliseus, is Pontano himself, whose hexameters are translated in the last lines of the text. Differently from the first version, the second version of Arcadia presents Sincero as being involved within Pontano’s intellectual community. In its final version, therefore, Sannazaro’s Arcadia is rethought in view of Pontano’s audience. Further to which, Sincero’s refutation of vernacular pastoral poetry found in the twelfth chapter and in the epilogue can be read as the author’s rebuttal of the poetics cultivated within Ippolita Sforza’s entourage.
The textual history of Sannazaro's *Arcadia* demonstrates that the second version of this text was addressed to the audience of Pontano’s intellectual community, whose members are turned into the characters of the narrative. It is plausible to think, then, that Sannazaro’s text incorporates other aspects of the culture shared by his intended audience. By this, I do not mean that Sannazaro’s *Arcadia* is simply the application of Pontano’s philosophical views to a narrative. This would be another example of reductionist reading that would not take into account that the evidence I am analyzing is a literary text engaged in a dialogue with and not determined by its intellectual context. Rather, I think that it is worth asking what role Pontano’s ideology plays within Sannazaro’s text. This reading contributes to the historical understanding of *Arcadia* and more generally illustrates the relationship between astrology and prophecy in Quattrocento Naples.

Story and Plot

In its second and final version, the text of *Arcadia* tells the story of a young boy (Sincero) of decayed aristocratic stock, born under a negative astrological configuration. Sincero leaves his native town (Naples) and his father’s house because of an unrequited love that led him to consider suicide. Instead, Sincero goes to Arcadia, where he joins a community of shepherds for an imprecise number of days. On April 20th, the day before the Feast of Pales, Sincero starts an adventure that last six days, in which he witnesses poetic competitions (day I, chapters 2), he joins religious rituals such as the Feast of Pales (day II, chapters 3 and 4), the commemoration of the shepherd Androgeo (day III,
chapters 5 and 8), the magic ritual for liberating the lovesick shepherd Clonico (day IV, chapters 9, 10 and part of 11), and the commemorative games in honor of Ergasto’s mother’s Massilia (day V, chapters 11 and 12). At the end of the games and after Ergasto’s poetic performance, Sincero receives an ominous dream that leaves him uneasy. While walking astray, he comes to a water source that gives access to the underworld. In the morning (day VI), under the guidance of a water nymph, Sincero descends to the underworld. He follows the course of the Neapolitan river Sebethus and returns to Naples. Transfigured and unrecognized, Sincero meets the shepherds Barcinio, Summonzio and Meliseus, who are mourning the recent death of Meliseus’ wife.

The story of Arcadia is told by a first person narrator who coincides with Sincero (Genette would call him an “autodiegetic narrator”) but is older and more intellectually aware (again, Genette would call this an “external focalization”) than his younger double (Genette 1980). The narrator tells most of the story by following a chronologically ordered structure articulated into six days. The only exception is Sincero’s confession to the shepherd Carino (day III), which constitutes a flashback in relation to the story line. In this confession, Sincero recounts his past life and explains the reasons for his trip to Arcadia.

Recent interpreters of Sannazaro’s Arcadia have acknowledged its autobiographic elements and have correctly maintained that its significance resides in Sannazaro’s

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166 The regular organization into days contrasts with the irregular division into chapters, which seems to respond only to textual length. However, I am persuaded that the second version of Arcadia is structurally modeled on Virgil’s Aeneid. More specifically, I think that Sincero’s six days long adventure is modeled on an allegorical reading of the first six books of Virgil’s text. In this case, the organization in twelve chapters may be modeled on the twelve books of the Aeneid. Since this problem is beyond this chapter’s focus, I plan to address it elsewhere.
transposition of his life and intellectual career into a first person narrative. Gajetti, for example, has approached *Arcadia* from a Freudian psychoanalytical perspective and conceptualized his findings within Freud’s notion of Oedipus’ complex. According to Gajetti, Sannazaro has projected upon his text an unconscious experience of repressed love for his mother (Gajetti 1977). Caracciolo Aricò, on the other hand, has used thematic analysis to argue that Sannazaro’s *Arcadia* is the result of the author’s sadness caused by the loss of his mother and the end of humanism (Caracciolo Aricò 1995). Although different in their scope and method, these two readings stem from an incorrect assumption about the mechanism of a narrative. They both confuse the distinct figures of the narrator and the empirical author, thus overlapping biographical data and textual inferences without taking into consideration the complex discourse of Sannazaro’s text.

In addition, these readings take *Arcadia* as the conclusion of Sannazaro’s career and do not pay enough attention to this text’s intellectual context. *Arcadia*, however, is only the product of a distinct phase in Sannazaro’s career. Immediately after its publication, the author started to work on his *Piscatorial Eclogues* and *De Partu Virginis*, two works whose language and themes, as I will demonstrate, betray the author’s dialogue with the Platonic ideas cultivated by Giles of Viterbo.

Rather than speculating on arbitrary thematic patterns alternatively taken to communicate the hidden or actual meaning of the text, I would suggest that *Arcadia’s* plot and characterization are consistent with the views on astrology, Fortune and Fate

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167 Caracciolo Arico’s use of “humanism” is never clarified. Considering the zeitgeist argument found in the last chapter of her book, I would say that she takes this label in the ideological sense defined by Eugenio Garin. The problem of whether this label applies or not to Giovanni Pico della Mirandola is not addressed.
found in Pontano’s treatise De Fortuna. Based on the authority of Plato’s Timaeus (which Pontano always quoted along with Chalcidius’ commentary) and Boethius’ De Consolatione Philosophiae, the first book of Pontano’s treatise outlines a metaphysical view that is consistent with Arcadia’s plot. Pontano’s treatise asserts that human life is remotely ruled by an unforeseeable fate directly dependent on God’s providence. Although they are consistent with Fate, some aspects of one’s life, such as his success in politics or the experience of love, can be extrapolated from a knowable astrological configuration that determines the disposition of external goods. The knowledge based on a natal chart, however, is a conjecture and is subject to a wide margin of chance (casus). Fortune, in Pontano’s perspective, results from the encounter between a human undertaking and chance. Fortune’s irresistible force (impetus) determines the positive or negative outcome of every human undertaking, which is unpredictable and can only be conjectured. Exceptionally, however, Pontano’s text concedes that particularly gifted individuals such as prophets, Sybils, poets and lunatics (lymphati) have access to the actual outcome of a specific event by means of an unpredictable inspiration (adflatus).

Does this theory of causality shed light on the overall ideology of Sannazaro’s Arcadia? And if so, how can the reader detect the presence of this ideology within Sannazaro’s text without taking it as its strict application?

Although it would be very useful in terms of clarity, it is not my intention to read Sannazaro’s Arcadia as a direct application of Pontano’s theory of causality into a narrative text. Rather, I envision this relationship as a dialogue that is signaled by a series of key words and syntactic devices that can be fruitfully conceptualized within Bakhtin’s
notion of *ideologeme*. The author’s understanding and attitude toward a specific discourse inscribed in his text can be inferred from how he constructs characters whose language betray an ideology, which is indicative of the status assigned to this ideology within the author’s intellectual community.

*Sincero*

Sannazaro constructs the narrator/protagonist Sincero in a language that betrays a view of astrology, Fortune and Fate that is engaged in a dialogue with Pontano’s *De Fortuna*. The narrator adopts the language of astrology in order to explain the remote cause of the protagonist’s unrequited love. In Sincero’s words, his inclination to love is ascribed to a series of nefarious signs and, above all, to a specific astrological configuration that caused him to fall in love at the age of eight:

Vegno a me adunque, il quale in quelli estremi anni che la recolenda memoria del vittorioso Re Alfonso di Aragona passò da le cose mortali a più tranquilli secoli, sotto infelice prodigio di comete, di terremoto, di pestilenza, di sanguinose battaglie nato et in povertà, o vero, secondo i savii, in modesta fortuna nudritto; *si come la mia stella e i fatti volsono, appena avea otto anni forniti, che le forze di Amore a sentire incominciai; e de la vaghezza di una picciola fanciulla, ma bella e leggiadra più che altra che vedere mi paresse giamai, e da alto sangue discesa, inamorato, con più diligenzia che ai puerili anni non si conviene, questo mio desiderio teneva occolto.*

*(Arcadia VII:9)*

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168 The connection with Dante’s *Vita Nuova* is briefly discussed in Erspamer’s edition (p.119n). What the editor calls “obvious” is, I would suggest, rather problematic. What are the implications of this number in Sannazaro’s text? Is he making reference to a natal chart or an existing prognostication about his life? Is the difference with *Vita Nuova*—Dante falls in love at the age of 9—intentional?
Consistent with Pontano’s views found in *De Fortuna*, therefore, Sincero’s love is perceived as one of those external goods that are subject to the influx of an astrological configuration. The use of this language in constructing Sincero’s persona, in addition, creates a correspondence between the protagonist and the ideology that the text ascribes to Pontano’s intellectual community. Whereas the shepherds are constructed as if they were unaware of astrology, the shepherd Selvaggio ascribes the knowledge of stars to Pontano and his follower Caracciolo, whose astrological prognostication he reports in his testimony. At the end of chapter X, the shepherd Selvaggio recounts his visit to Naples and the time spent among Pontano’s followers. In the form of reported direct speech, Selvaggio quotes from a political prognostication formulated by the Neapolitan poet Caracciolo, which encodes a worldview that combines astrology, Fortune and Fate in a way that is consistent with Pontano’s metaphysical views.

The language of astrology, in my view, invites the reader to perceive a connection between Sincero’s story and the rhetorical and astrological theories analyzed in chapter one. In inscribing Pontano’s mode of thinking, Sannazaro’s text links one episode to the other according to the protagonist’s focalization and to a regular linguistic pattern. This pattern is signaled by means of a syntactic construction called “cum inversum,” a

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169 Francesco Tateo has brilliantly acknowledged the thematic relationship between Selvaggio and Sincero (Tateo 1967 p. 49-52). Although he has understood the divinatory implications of this passage, Tateo has not completely pursued this line of inquiry; rather, he has elaborated upon its literary implications and its Virgilian subtext.

170 *Arcadia* X: 79-82: “e[...] Lasso, che’n un momento io sudo e tremo/ e veramente temo d’altro male:che si de aver del sale in questo stato,/perché'l comanda il fato e la fortuna./ Non vedete la luna inecissata?/ La fera stella armata di Orione?/Mutata è la stagione e 'l tempo è duro,/e già s'attuffa Arcturo in mezzo l'onde;/e 'l sol, c'a noi s'asconde, ha i raggi spenti,/e van per l'aria i vênti mormorando,/né so pur come o quando torne estate [...].”
locution ("non so come") and the use of a cause ("fortuna") for linking episodes and actions. In Bakhtin's terms, these lexical, syntactic and conceptual features are ideologemes of the narrator's ideology. Their function is to construct Sincero's adventure in Arcadia as a series of events whose remote cause is the character's disposition to unhappy love found in his natal chart and whose undertakings are dominated by unpredictability. Sincero, consistent with Pontano's ideal figure of the poet and astrologer, is portrayed as if he were formulating conjectures to make sense of an apparently chaotic series of events. Only by means of inspiration, that is, an ominous dream, Sincero begins to understand his Fate and to make sense of the apparently random events that mark his life. The study of this linguistic pattern, therefore, allows the reader to understand what role the metaphysical views outlined in Pontano's De Fortuna play within Arcadia's text.

"Cum inversum" is a syntactic construct that consists in the logical inversion of the two parts of a temporal clause: what is the logically main action is found in the subordinate clause whereas the logically secondary action is reported in the main clause. Stylistically, the "cum inversum" communicates the unpredictability of an action which occurs in a way that the characters (and the reader) cannot explain. As such, it is used very often in Virgil's texts.\(^{171}\) The first example is found exactly at the beginning of Sincero's six days in Arcadia. The unpredictability suggested syntactically is reinforced

\(^{171}\) The usage and function of the "cum inversum" construction in Virgil is thoroughly discussed in a study by Adelaide Hahn (Hahn 1956 pp.161-165).
by the locution “per aventura,” which belongs to the language of chivalresque stories and thus adds a “romanesque” tone to Sincero’s encounter with the shepherd Montano: 172

Ma passando in cotal guisa piu e piu giorni, advenne che un matino fra gli altri, avendo io, si come e costume de pastori, pasciute le mie pecorelle per le rogiadose erbette, e parendomi omai per lo sopravegnente caldo ora di menarle a le piacevoli ombre, ove col fresco fiato de' venticelli potesse me e loro insieme recreare, mi pusi in camino verso una valle ombrosa e piacevole che men di un mezzo miglio vicina mi stava [...] Ne guari era ancora dal primo luogo dilungato, quando per aventura trovai in via un pastore che Montano avea nome, il quale similmente cercava di fuggire il fastidioso caldo;

(Arcadia II: 5)

Another example is found further in the text in the form of a confession, when the narrator’s focus on Sincero provides the reader with details about his life and origins. Sincero’s confession is caused by Carino’s unexpected arrival, which is uttered in an almost epiphanic fashion. The periphrasis (a un tratto di pietra) is meant to suggest the ideological distance between the narrator and Sincero, who occasionally adopts the language and focalization of the shepherds:

Finalmente io (al quale e per la allontananza de la cara patria e per altri giusti accidenti ogni allegrezza era cagione di infinito dolore) mi era gittato appie d’un albero, doloroso e scontentissimo oltra modo, quando vidi discosto da noi forse a un tratto di pietra, venire con frettolosi passi un pastore ne l’aspetto giovenissimo, advolto in un mantarro di quel colore che sogliono essere le grue, al sinestro lato del quale pendea una bella tasca d’un picciolo cuoio di abortivo vitello [...] 

(Arcadia VI: 4)

172 One may recognize a striking analogy between Sannazaro and Hellenistic novels such as Heliodorus’ Aethiopica. This hypothesis is fascinating and it perfectly applies to an episode in the XVI century reception of Sannazaro’s Arcadia, that is, Sydney’s pastoral novel Arcadia (1590). A copy of Heliodorus’ novel was found at the library of Matthias Corvinus in Buda, Hungary. However, there is no evidence that Sannazaro was familiar with this copy of Heliodorus’s book, whose rediscovery is generally thought to have occurred in 1526.
This syntactic device communicates the protagonist’s lack of perception of any kind of causal link between the plot’s frames. This happens, for example, on the fourth day during the encounter with Enareto, who is asked to help the lovesick shepherd Clonico. The sequence is suddenly interrupted by the episode of the shepherd Elenco. There is no apparent logical link in this transition:

Il vecchio sacerdote, parlando Opico, riguardava il barbuto pastore e, mosso a pietà de la sua pallidezza, si apparecchiava di rispondere, quando a le orecchie da le prossimane selve un dolcissimo suono con suave voce ne pervenne; e a quella rivolti da traverso, vedemmo in una picciola acquetta appie d'un salce sedere un solo capraio, che sonando dilettava la sua mandra. E veduto, subitamente a trovar lo andammo.

(Arcadia IX: 42)

Not only the “cum inversum,” but also locutions and adverbs are used to convey the protagonist’s lack of understanding of what is happening to him in Arcadia. In general, the narrator explicitly characterizes Sincero’s unawareness. Finding the tomb of Ergasto’s mother, a crucial event in the overall narrative modeled on Aeneas’ arrival at Anchises’ tomb, is inexplicable for the protagonist:

E stando costui (i.e. Selvaggio) gia per cominciare, rivolse, non so come, gli occhi in un picciolo colle che da man dextra gli stava, e vide l'altro sepolcro ove le riverende ossa di Massilia si riposano con eterna quiete; Massilia, madre di Ergasto, la quale fu, mentre visse, da' pastori quasi divina sibilla reputata. Onde drizzatosi in piedi disse: - Andiamo colà, pastori [...] 

(Arcadia X: 47-8)

Along with syntax and locutions, the text signals the unpredictable causality that animates the plot’s development by the concept of Fortune ("fortuna"). As Pontano’s De Fortuna explains, “fortune” originates from the encounter of human undertaking and
chance. When an individual follows the brute and irrational force (*impetus*) of chance, then his fortune is good. When human initiative goes against this force, fortune is negative. In recounting his sad story to the shepherd Carino, Sincero uses the concept of fortune to explain the series of nefarious events that brought his Neapolitan family to lose its aristocratic status, which left him in a modest condition. Analogously, the narrator uses the same method for emplotting the apparently accidental connections between the events of Sincero’s six days in Arcadia. The encounter with the wizard Enareto, for example, is explained as caused by fortune. Fortune, in addition, is used to explain the direction of Sincero’s wanderings on the night of the fifth day reported in chapter 12. The narrator tells how Sincero, after the ominous dream, walks to the cave where he will start his descent to the underworld under the guidance of fortune.

Consistent with Pontano’s theory on divination analyzed in the first chapter, Sincero’s unawareness of the design that organizes his experience in *Arcadia* is illuminated by an inspired dream. Similar to the Sybils, prophets, poets and lunatics theorized in the *Centiloquium* commentary and envisioned in *De Fortuna*, Sincero has a glimpse of his fate by means of a vision, whose source is unpredictable. In *Arcadia*, this

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173 *Arcadia* VII: 7: “Ma la fortuna, via piú liberale in donare che sollicita in conservare le mondane prosperità, volse che in discorso di tempo, morto il Re Carlo e 'l suo legittimo successore Lanzilao, rimanesse il vedovo regno in man di femina.”

174 *Arcadia* IX: 35: “Così di una cosa in un'altra saltando, prima appie de l'altro monte giungemmo che di averne dopo le spalle lasciato il piano ne fussero adveduti. Ove, poi che arrivati fummo, cessando Opico dal suo ragionare, *si come la fortuna volse*, trovammo il santo vecchio che appie' di uno albero si riposava.”

175 *Arcadia* XII: 10: “Così di passo in passo, non sapendo io stesso dove andare mi dovesse, *guidandomi la fortuna*, pervenni finalmente a la falda di un monte, onde un gran fiume si movea con un ruggito e mormorio mirabile, massimamente in quella ora che altro romore non si sentiva.”
dream marks a transition in the protagonist, which is constructed as progressively aware of the fate that underpins his actions. The dream that comes to him is again conveyed in the language of uncertainty generally used in the characterization of Sincero, who does not know from whence this omen originates.\(^{176}\)

Sincero’s *catabasis*, consistent with the conventional features of this literary *topos*, coincides with the hero’s understanding of his mission and the higher goals that animate his wanderings. Like Ulysses and Aeneas, Sincero’s descent to the underworld is constructed as a moment of self-discovery that occurs thanks to the intervention of a female guide. Initially, Sincero is represented as unaware of the identity and the purpose of the water nymph that shows up at the end of his wanderings in the morning of his sixth and last day in Arcadia.\(^{177}\) In the course of Sincero’s descent to the underworld, however, the text signals the protagonist’s transformation by representing how he becomes increasingly aware of the true causality that animates his adventure. For Sincero, in other words, the *catabasis* coincides with the acquisition of a growing sense of causality and

\(^{176}\) *Arcadia* XII: 4: “Ma venuta la oscura notte, pietosa de le mondane fatiche, a dar riposo agli animali, le quiete selve tacevano, non si sentivano più voci di cani né di fiere né di ucelli, le foglie sovra gli alberi non si moveano, non spirava vento alcuno; solamente nel cielo in quel silenzio si potea vedere alcuna stella o scintillare o cadere. Quando io (non so se per le cose vedute il giorno o che che se ne fusse cagione), dopo molti pensieri, sovrappeso da grave sonno, varie passioni e dolori sentiva ne l’animo.”

\(^{177}\) *Arcadia* X: 12: “Ma dal vicino fiume, *senza advedermi io come*, in un punto mi si offerse avanti una giovane doncella, ne l’aspetto bellissima e nei gesti e ne l’andare veramente divina; la cui veste era di un drappo sottilissimo e si rilucente che, se non che morbido il vedea, avrei per certo detto che di cristallo fusse; con una nova ravolgetura di capelli, sovra i cali una verde ghirlanda portava, e in mano un vasel di marmo bianchissimo.”
the discovery of what his Fate is. In one of his exchanges with his female guide, Sincero comes to know that a design underpins his apparently random wanderings.\(^\text{178}\)

Sincero's descent to the underworld and his growing awareness of his Fate coincide with the character's reconciliation with Fortune. In line with Pontano's *De Fortuna*, the protagonist perceives Fate as the result of God's will, which is necessarily consistent with an individual's astrological disposition and the action of Fortune. Fortune is ultimately the result of human limited understanding of life's true causality. Whereas normal individuals cannot understand Fate and are forced to make sense of their life by means of conjecture, exceptionally gifted individuals are occasionally given a glimpse of their Fate. Having followed the course of the river Sebethus, the protagonist launches into a prayer in which he presents his past life as a struggle with Fortune that he hopes has finally come to an end.\(^\text{179}\)

The language of astrology and Fortune, syntactic devices and lexical choices, therefore, are ideologemes that betray an ideology that is consistent with Pontano's *De

\(^{178}\) *Arcadia* XII: 22: "Di che la mia ninfa accorgendosi: -Lascia- mi disse- cotesti pensieri, e ogni timore da te discaccia, che non senza volunta del cielo fai ora questo camino. I fiumi che tante fiate udtiti hai nominare, voglio che ora vedi da che principio nascano. Quello che corre si lontano di qui e' il freddo Tanai, quel altro e' il gran Danubio, questo e' il famoso Meandro, questo altro e' il vecchio Peneo; vedi Caistro, vedi Acheloo, vedi il beato Eurota, a cui tante volte fu lecito ascoltare il cantante Apollo."

\(^{179}\) *Arcadia* XII:39-40: "E gia fra me cominci ai a conoscere per qual cagione inanzi tempo la mia guida abandonato mi avea; ma trovandomi ivi condotto, ne confidandomi di tornare piu indietro, senza altro consiglio prendere, tutto doloroso e pien di sospetto mi inclinai a basciar prima la terra, e poi cominciav queste parole: - O liquidissimo fiume, o re del mio paese, o piacevole e grazioso Sebeto che con le tue chiare e freddissime acque irighi la mia bella patria, Dio ti exalte! Dio vi exalte, o ninfe, generosa progenie del vostro padre! Siate, prego, propizie al mio venire, e benign e umane tra le vostre selve mi ricevete. Baste fin qui a la mia dura fortuna avermi per diversi casi menato; ormai, o reconciliata o sazia de le mie fatiche, deponga le arme.-"
Fortuna. In addition, the second version of Arcadia constructs the protagonist in a way that corresponds with Pontano’s representation of Sannazaro’s persona in the dialogue Actius. As Pontano repeatedly stated in his gloss to the pseudo-Ptolemaic Centiloquium as well as in De Rebus Coelestibus, poems and astrological prognostications result from a combination of conjecture and inspiration. Conjecture, in Pontano’s view, allows one to predict a general event by means of a fiction that is useful for approximating an otherwise unknowable reality. Inspiration, which Pontano ascribes to the action of stars (contagio) on the mind of the diviner, allows him to guess particular events in a way that is unpredictable. In Pontano’s Actius the natural philosopher Johannes Pardo, as I have illustrated in the first chapter, ascribes these faculties to Sannazaro himself. Therefore, I propose that the second version of Arcadia was conceived as Sannazaro’s endorsement of his portrait cultivated within Pontano’s enclave.¹⁸⁰

Conversely, the second version of Sannazaro’s Arcadia inscribes an implicit rebuttal of Giuniano Maio, whose philosophical ideas and skills are associated with the naivete of the shepherds and used to construct Enareto’s character. The wizard Enareto enters the scene on the fourth day of Sincero’s adventure in Arcadia. Recent interpreters agree that Enareto refers to Sannazaro’s old teacher Giuniano Maio (Corti 1969 p.300; Riccucci 2001 p.182). Based on a wide knowledge of Quattrocento Neapolitan literature in vernacular and a study of the first version of Sannazaro’s Arcadia, Riccucci has

¹⁸⁰ The connection between Arcadia and Actius in relation to the problem of prophecy and magic has been acknowledged by Tateo (1967 pp.58, 70). In general, Tateo’s reading remains acceptable. However, Tateo does not draw a distinction between the religiosity of the shepherds and the philosophy of the Neapolitans; rather, he tends to identify Enareto’s magic and Sincero’s catabasis. This element of his interpretation, in my view, contradicts the text’s plot and the construction of its characters.
interpreted Enareto’s role in the text as Sannazaro’s praise of his old teacher (Riccucci 2001 pp.180-190). Riccucci has supported her thesis by linking Sannazaro’s *Arcadia* with an elegy written for Giuniano Maio that builds upon a verse of the seventh eclogue collected in both versions of *Arcadia*. I do not agree with Riccucci’s view, which may be valid for the 1486 version of Sannazaro’s text but is completely reversed by the plot found in the 1504 edition of *Arcadia*.

First of all, Enareto belongs to the constellation of characters that are represented as living in Arcadia. Therefore, the text presents him as one of the characters that Sincero is going to leave behind once he returns to Naples to join Meliseus’ intellectual community. Also, the wizard Enareto has two functions in the narrative. First, he is in charge of retelling the history of pastoral poetry from its origins to the time of Virgil, and is therefore unaware of what the conclusion of *Arcadia* presents as the new leader of Neapolitan pastoral poetry (Meliseus). Second, Enareto promises to magically heal Clonico from his frustrated love passion. Through the voice of the shepherd Opico, the text ascribes to him an encyclopedic knowledge of nature, a thorough acquaintance with natural magic, and the art of interpreting ominous dreams. In the story, however, his skills are only referred to but their effects are never represented. Also, they have no consequence upon the development of the plot, which leads to Sincero’s return to Naples and his abjure of pastoral poetry.

The narrator brings Enareto into play on what corresponds to Sincero’s fourth day in Arcadia, and this choice has at least two main consequences. First, Enareto does not interact directly with the protagonist and his role constitutes a deviation from the main
plot. He does not help Sincero in his quest for his far away lady and his return to Naples. Enareto’s magic ritual for exorcising the lovesick Clonico, in this perspective, can be read as a solution to Sincero’s problem that the rest of the text refutes. The construction of Enareto’s character, if one gives credit to Arcadia’s plot, makes of him what Propp would call a false hero. If Sincero would have followed Clonico’s example, one may speculate, his growth would have ended in Arcadia by means of a magic ritual (Propp 1968 p.60). However, this does not occur. Sincero resolves his quest with the catabasis and eventual return to Naples.

Enareto’s function within the second version of Sannazaro’s Arcadia acquires further significance if linked to Sannazaro’s poem addressed to Giuniano Maio found in the second book of his collection of elegies. As many other Quattrocento writers, Sannazaro worked for his entire life on a book of elegies in which he framed his biography within the ideology of Latin Augustan poetry. This genre originated in early Quattrocento Siena within the intellectual community gathered around the Sienese University along with the efforts of Antonio Panormita and Giovanni Marrasio. Eventually, it became mandatory writing for the writers of the time, who collected their elegies in small collections that were meant to circulate among their friends. In his three book long collection of elegies, Sannazaro included an elegy addressed to Giuniano Maio. Ricucci has correctly pointed out that this elegy is the subtext of Arcadia’s characterization of Enareto (Ricucci 2001 p.183). While I agree that this is a case of intertextuality, I propose to reverse Ricucci’s argument based on chronological and textual evidence.
Sannazaro’s elegy begins with the author’s self presentation as a young boy enslaved to a cruel mistress, who is wasting his days in pointless desperation and neglecting studies and religion. Since Sincero never deals directly with the shepherd Enareto in *Arcadia*’s text, Sannazaro’s elegiac persona presumably corresponds to the lovesick shepherd Clonico and not to the protagonist. Both Sannazaro’s persona and Clonico, for example, openly confessed to having suicidal tendencies, which are translated into the metaphor of cutting Lachesis’ wire:

I, as you know, in the city here am constrained to obey my harsh mistress, and to pass my time in tedious delays. Nor is it of any use to have fixed the mind on rigorous studies or revered the holy goddesses. And though fate has granted me so many affectionate friends, there is none among them to bring me proper aid. Cruel love is pressing me hard, sharpening his arrows on the whetstone, and my neck may not move from under its heavy yoke. And though my heart is consumed away with so many constant cares, I ask from where so many evils can come. Would that measure of my life, or that some god worthy of belief should sing to my ear what remedy there is for the cruel madness.\(^{181}\)

Talor per ira o sdegno volno incidere/lo stame che le Parche al fuso avolgonio/ e con amor da sé l’alma dividere.\(^{182}\)

*(Arcadia VIII: 73-75)*

Se spirto al mondo di pietà ritrovasi,/per dio, quest’alma liberar consentami, ché miglior vita del morir non provasi./O terra, tu che puoi, terra, contentami:/tranghiotti il tristo corpo in le tue viscere,/si che uom mai non ne trove orma, né sentami.

*(Arcadia VIII: 85-90)*

\(^{181}\) *Elegiarum libri tres* II: 7, 7-20: “Nos hic, ut nosti, durae parere puellae/ Cogimur, et tristes ducere in urbe moras./ Nec tamen aut studiis animum intendisse severis,/Aut prodest sanctas excoluisse Deas./Quumque tot unanimes dererint mihi fata sodale,/Auxillum, nemo est, qui mihi rite ferat./Instat saevus Amor, reficitque in cote sagittas;/Nec patitur presso colla movere jugo./Et licet assiduis tabescant pectora curis;/Quae curae, unde queant tanta venire mala./Atque utinam tristes Lachesis mihi finiat annos;/Claudat et aetatis tempora dura meae;/Aut aliquis, saevi quae sit medicina furoris./Non vanus nostra cantet in aere Deus.” From now on, I quote from Nash’s revised in English translation of Sannazaro’s Latin poems (Nash 1996).

\(^{182}\) In the eclogue, this description of the lover’s suicidal tendencies is pronounced by the shepherd Eugenio in a dialogue with Clonico.
Both Sannazaro’s persona and Clonico, in addition, are represented as victims of Love abandoned by Apollo and Pan. Based on the context provided by elegy 2: 7, I would suggest that Apollo, Pan, and the Chaonian doves refer to ominous signs. They are all oracles whose silence leaves the desperate lover in a state of hopeless despair whose outcome is suicide. In the elegy, the poet directly complains about the silence of these oracles, whereas in *Arcadia* they are used to comfort Clonico and to exhort him to hope for a better future:¹⁸³

But now the oracles are departed from laurel-crowned Delphi, and the Cumaean virgin’s silent caves are mute, and Pan returns no answer from under the Maenalian shade, though the shepherd by night make offereing of the slain sheep’s entrails. I have no hope of hearing the Chaonian doves: horned Jove is ashamed to utter oracles. And Greece has marveled this long time that the oaks, forgetful how to speak, keep silence when the god is by.¹⁸⁴

_Ama il giocondo Apollo e 'l sacro Genio,/et odia quel crudel che si ti strazia,/ch'e danno in gioventu, vergogna al senio./AUora il nostro Pan colmo di grazia/con l'alma Pale aumenterà 'l tuo numero,/tal che la mente tua ne fia ben sazia._

(*Arcadia* VIII: 115-117)

Sannazaro’s elegy presents Giuniano Maio’s knowledge of magic rituals and skills in interpreting dreams as the only means by which he may heal from his desperate love. This description corresponds to the shepherd Opico’s description of Enareto found in _Arcadia:_

¹⁸³ This creates a correspondence between Sannazaro’s mention of the “chaonian doves” and the episode in which the shepherd Carino, immediately before jumping off a cliff, is saved by the sight of a pair of doves, which he interprets as a sign of good omen. Evidently, this Virgilian motif profoundly acted upon the author’s imagination and his ideas on natural signs.

¹⁸⁴ _Elegiarum libri tres_ II: 7, 21-8: “Sed jam laurigeris cessant oracula Delphis:/ Mutaque Cumeae Virginis antra silent. Nec Pan Maenalia reddit responsa sub umbra:/ Nocte licet pastor viscera libet ovis./Nec mihi Chaonias spes est audire columbas;/ Comigerumque pudet fata referre Jovem./Oblitasque loqui jampridem Graecia quercus/Mirata est posito conticuisse Deo.”
But you (Maius) can tell of things to come, and take counsel of benign divinities. You make your discoveries not so much from altar smoke or warning lightning-flash, but from dreams sent up from the Stygian realms: dreams which often disturb our uneasy sleep, while the mind perpends ambiguous images. O how many times I recall when I put away vain fear because of you, and continued my day in happiness! O how many times, when fearfully I thought they should not be ignored, I have been apprehensive of ills to come upon my head! Often when I told you my dreams about my mistress, you have surely predicted things fearful and not far off. Often you bade her wash her dripping hair in the river, and dissolve meal mixed with salt.\textsuperscript{185}

Oltra di ciò disse averli veduto tranghiottire un caldo core e palpitante di una cieca talpa, ponendosi sovra la lingua uno occhio di indiana testudine ne la quintadecima luna, \textit{e tutte le future cose indovinare}.

\textit{(Arcadia IX: 14)}

Riccucci asserts that Sannazaro’s elegy was written after \textit{Arcadia} and that it should therefore be read as the Latin amplification of what Sannazaro had written in vernacular. This claim is accurate if one considers only the first version of \textit{Arcadia}, which began to circulate before 1486 in the dedicatory copy addressed to Ippolita Sforza (Marconi 1997; Riccucci 2001 pp. 190-191). However, Sannazaro’s elegy refers to Giuniano Maio as still alive, which would suggest that the text was written before 1493, the year of Maio’s death. Given that the second version of \textit{Arcadia} was written in 1496, the text in vernacular could only have been written after the Latin elegy. This chronological argument corresponds to the interpretation of what the second version of \textit{Arcadia} is actually doing in relation to the subtext of the elegy. In the elegy, Sincero fashions

\textsuperscript{185} \textit{Elegiarum libri tres} II: 7, 29-42: “At tibi vetens, MaT, praedicere casus/ Fasest, et mites consuluisse Deos./Nec tantum aut arae fumos, aut nuncia sentis/ Fulgura, sed Stygiis somnia missa locis;/Somnia, quae miseram perturbant saepe quietem;/Dum mens incertis pendent imaginibus./O quoties per te vanum posuisse timorem/Me memini, et laetos continuasse dies./O quoties, trepidus quum non spernenda putarem,/In nostrum cavi damna futura caput./Saepe, meae tibi quum narrassem visa puellae./Dixisti, certos haud procul esse metus./Saepe illam madidos lustrare in flumine crines/Jussisti, et misto solvere farra sale.”
himself as an elegiac lover who is still enslaved to his mistress, a persona that is dismissed in the final version of the text. Also, in the complete version of the story, Enareto never interprets Sincero’s dream, which leads to his solitary descent to the underworld and eventual return to Naples as a poet of Meliseus’ entourage. The terms of the exchange envisioned by Riccucci, consequently, should be reversed.

In contrast with Ricucci’s interpretation, I argue that Arcadia’s text needs to be read as a parody of the elegy written for Giuniano Maio as a mentor and as an expert of natural magic. In tracing Sincero’s itinerary toward Pontano’s intellectual community, the narrator presents Maio/Enareto as a figure that belongs to a previous phase of the protagonist’s growth. His skills are presented as useless and misleading, and this fact is consistent with the demise of poetry in vernacular. Enareto, the false hero, and his language are juxtaposed to Meliseus. Thus, the second version of Arcadia inscribes the rebuttal of Giuniano Maio and the endorsement of Giovanni Pontano’s ideology.

Back in Naples

Scholars have generally disregarded Arcadia’s plot based on the historical circumstances in which this text was produced. Sannazaro left Arcadia unfinished and Pietro Summonte polished and prepared its final manuscript for the press. In doing so, Summonte could only partially rely on Sannazaro’s comments, because at that time - 1504- Sannazaro was in France and devoted to other literary projects. This explanation, however, is not completely satisfactory. If one considers Sannazaro’s tireless work of editing his collection of elegies, his Piscatorial eclogues and, above all, his De Partu
Virginis, Arcadia’s textual history is indeed unusual. Yet, given the rigor of Sannazaro’s editorial work it is unlikely that the author would have left his Arcadia without a meaningful plot. Further framed within the intellectual context of Naples, the story that Sannazaro ultimately tells conveys a coherent message.

Sannazaro’s text results from a work of reorganization of the author’s previous poems into a linear narrative that does not respond to conventional ideologies of love. Arcadia does not present love as a step toward the subject’s spiritual growth as it happens in Dante’s Vita Nuova or Petrarch’ Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta, the structures of which were commonly used for organizing poetic collections in Quattrocento Naples. Similarly to the works of Dante and Petrarch, Arcadia results from a work of selection, combination and re-contextualization of a corpus of poems that the author had written previously in his career. In general, the organization of isolated poems within a plot (like in Dante) or an overall architecture (like in Petrarch) requires a solid philosophical view. In Dante, this philosophical view resulted from the rebuttal of Guido Cavalcanti’s theory of love drawn from Arabic commentators of Aristotle’s De Anima and the endorsement of a theological view based on the Scholastic notion of analogia entis. Dante’s identification of the beloved with salvation sets the stage for the spiritualized conception of love theorized in Convivio and turned into a narrative in the Commedia. In Petrarch, the architecture of the RVF stems from the conflict between two contradictory philosophies. On the one hand, Petrarch endorses the Stoic conception of love as an inevitable passion that provisionally alters the stability of the soul, and on the other hand he accepts the rebuttal (borrowed from Augustine’s Confession and outlined dialogically
in the *Secretum*) of love as a sin. Dante and Petrarch offered their followers two paradigmatic conclusions, that is, either the subject’s contemplation of God or the substitution of the poet’s love story with a prayer to the Virgin. Neither of these structures is found in *Arcadia*.

This does not mean that the conclusion of Sincero’s story does not have a unity but only that its overarching ideology is not modeled on the paradigms of Dante and Petrarch. In *Arcadia*’s last chapter, the narrator reports Sincero’s arrival to Naples and his encounter with Barcinio and Summonzio, who are witnessing and reporting Meliseus’ lament for his dead wife. Francesco Tateo has persuasively illustrated how this section of *Arcadia* sets out a correspondence between Sincero’s tragic love story and Meliseus’ truncated marriage by translating and reframing Giovanni Pontano’s Latin eclogue *Meliseus* within *Arcadia*’s text (Tateo 1967 pp.64-67). Sincero’s loss of his beloved, which is explicitly reported in the epilogue, corresponds to Meliseus’ loss of Philli, which is the pastoral name of Pontano’s wife Adriana Sassone. According to Tateo, Sannazaro created this correspondence in order to communicate on the one hand his own biographic experience, and on the other hand his views on literary history. Following his years as a writer of vernacular eclogues, according to Tateo, the poet found the last remainings of Neapolitan poetry in Pontano’s humanistic circle (Tateo 1967 pp.52-53). Tateo’s interpretation, however, is not satisfactory. The critic has addressed the problem from a thematic perspective, but he has not paid enough attention to how this theme is communicated as a discourse. This emerges only by focusing on Pontano’s subtext in further details.
Sincero and Enareto can be grouped within two constellations of characters whose language betray different ideologies which are at work in *Arcadia*’s text. These ideologies, are ascribed on the one hand to the vernacular discourse community gathered around Ippolita Sforza and Giuniano Maio, and on the other hand to Giovanni Pontano’s circle. The ideology associated with Pontano’s circle and progressively endorsed by the protagonist is signaled by a language that emphasizes astrological themes, fortune, fate and chance as its cognitive devices and objects of study. In the last chapter of *Arcadia*, this ideology is spoken through the personae of Meliseus, Barcinio and Summonzio. Differently from Caracciolo’s reported direct speech, however, these characters directly interact with Sincero and adjust this ideology to the discussion of love.

The dialogic organization of the last eclogue and the way Sincero, Barcinio and Summonzio present themselves as witnesses of Meliseus’ lament is modeled on Giovanni Pontano’s *Meliseus*. Originally conceived for circulation among a small audience of friends in the form of scattered papers rather than a compact book, Pontano’s eclogues are marked by a constant feature. As in Pontano’s dialogues, which seldom present their author as a character but rather distribute his opinions throughout the personae of his followers, the author’s pastoral voice is always reported by other characters (Hubbard 1998 pp.248-256). In addition, Pontano’s eclogues are often set in the future and represent the poet’s followers in the act of lamenting the absence of the author, who fashions himself as a predecessor or a founding father (Hubbard 1998 p.250). In Pontano’s eclogues, in analogy with Sannazaro’s *Arcadia* and differently from most of
Quattrocento vernacular books of poetry, the authorial voice is always overheard and engaged in a dialogue with other voices.

Pontano's theoretical writings underpin the discourse of Arcadia's last poem. An attentive reader of classical texts with a special attention for their discursive aspects, Hubbard has suggested that the dialogic features of Pontano's use of the pastoral might stem from the author's old age at the time of his writing or from his views on the survival of his literary legacy (Nachleben). In Pontano, Hubbard argues, one can see a kind of denial of any idea of poetic immortality that transcends the verbal exchange among living individuals (Hubbard 1998 pp. 250, 253). Rather than a generic naturalistic worldview, however, I would suggest that this ideology of poetry stems from Pontano's philosophy of language explicitly formalized in the treatise De Sermone, implied in the dialogues and endorsed by Arcadia's text.

Pontano's De Sermone is based on two assumptions: nature provides humans with reason and words (75) and humans are naturally disposed to escape pain and look for rest (83). Consistently, the text brings forth an ideal of discursive virtue (medietas) and disposition toward truth (veracitas) along with a typology of humankind in relation to the way individuals interact in a conversation (81, 171). One may object that De Sermone is a philosophical work and that its thesis does not apply to poetic discourse, whose mechanisms and purposes are to be found exclusively in the poetic tradition. However, both the eclogues of Pontano and Sannazaro generally emphasize the simultaneous presence of many characters and frame the authors' voices within a choir of different personae. This poetics, I would suggest, has its bedrock in Pontano's De Sermone. The
protagonists of Giovanni Pontano’s eclogue *Meliseus* and Sannazaro’s *Arcadia*, therefore, are two individuals who are suffering for the loss of a woman they loved. Rather than looking for remedies in religious contemplation or magic rituals (like Arcadian shepherds do), Sincero and Meliseus find some rest in the conversation with a small group of selected friends.

In reporting Meliseus’s verses and commenting upon the tragic story of his wedding, Barcinio and Summonzio use celestial determination, Fate and Fortune in a way that creates a correspondence between Sincero and Meliseus. In his discussion with Carino, Sincero presents himself as victim of a nefarious celestial configuration that the outcome of his story confirms in its general terms. Likewise, Summonzio frames Meliseus’ tragic story in a language that is redolent of a bleak sense of astrological causation:

> Moran gli armenti, e per le selve vachesi/ in arbor fronda, in terra erba non pulule,/ poi che è pur ver che’l fiero ciel non plachesi.

*(Arcadia XII: 196-198)*

> Degno fu Meliseo di sempre vivere/ Con la sua sposa Filli, e starsi in pace amandola;/Ma chi può le sue leggi al ciel prescrivere?

*(Arcadia XII: 280-282)*

In addition, Sincero had received the ominous dream that caused him to find the entrance of the underworld in the surrounding of a water source. Likewise, Meliseus is presented as an inspired diviner whose vision leads him to see the image of his beloved by a water source:
Però che ove quell'acqua irata ingolfasi,/ ove più rutta al ciel la gran voragine/ e più grave lo odor redunda et olfasi,/ veder mi par la mia celeste imagine/ sedersi, e con diletto in quel gran fremito/ tener le orecchie intente a le mie page.

(Arcadia XII: 154-156)

The narrator had explained Sincero's story as caused by fortune and fate. Analogously, Summonzio and Barcinio appeal to these concepts in telling each other how they end up finding Meliseus and listening to his voice:

Summonzio: Voto fo io, se tu, Fortuna, agiutici,/ una agna dare a te de le mie pecore, / una a la Tempesta, che'l ciel non mutici./ Non consentire, o ciel, ch'io mora indecoro:/ chè sol pensando udir quel suo dolce organo/ par che mi spolpe, snerve e mi disiecore./ Barcinio: Or via, che i fatti a bon camin ne scorgano! Non senti or tu sonar la dolce fistula? Fèramti omai, che i can non se ne accorgano.

(Arcadia XII: 304-311)

Sincero's tormented acceptance of his new teacher's bleak sense of causality and brave resignation to the necessity of celestial decrees is sealed by the conclusion of Arcadia and reiterated in the epilogue. The narrator's voice overlaps with that of Pontano's persona. Following the speeches of his pupils Barcinio and Summonzio, Sannazaro's dialogic eclogue reports Meliseus' own voice. This voice conveys a message of melancholy that results from the conflict between necessity and memory. The resulting pain is only partially sweetened by a vague hope in an uncertain afterlife:

Io piango, o Filli, il tuo spietato interito, e'l mondo del mio mal tutto rinverdesi. Deh pensa, prego, al bel viver preterito, se nel passar di Lete amor non perdesi.

(Arcadia XII)
The authorial epilogue, which is found immediately after Meliseus’ lament, echoes Pontano’s persona and the philosophical views cultivated within his intellectual community. Sincero’s beloved, the reader now learns, has died like Meliseus’ wife. The pupil, so to speak, found himself in his new mentor’s situation and had to make sense of his life and his future endeavors based on the bleak metaphysical views found in De Fortuna. Sannazaro’s rebuttal of his poetry in vernacular is expressed in the farewell to the oaten flute. The language of this refutatio betrays Pontano’s theories on Fate, astrology and individual life:

Ecco che qui si compiono le tue fatiche, o rustica e boscareccia sampogna, degna per la tua bassezza di non da più colto, ma da più fortunato pastore che io non sono, esser sonata.[...] Non ti rimane altro omai, sampogna mia, se non dolerti, e notte e giorno con ostinata perseveranza attristarti. Attristati adunque, dolorosissima; e quanto più puoi, de la avara morte, del sordo cielo, de le crude stelle, e de' tuoi fatti iniquissimi ti lamenta. E se tra questi rami il vento per aventura movendoti ti donasse spirito, non far mai altro che gridare, mentre quel fiato ti basta.

(Arcadia. “A la Sampogna.”)

The encounter with Giles of Viterbo

Literary historians have commonly inferred Sannazaro’s conventional portrait from his works in vernacular and taken Arcadia as the outcome of the author’s literary career. If this were true, however, one may expect that having decided to be really portrayed by Titian in 1518, Sannazaro would have chosen a copy of this book to keep in his hands. Instead, Sannazaro’s portrait displays the presentation copy dated 1516 of a long poem in Latin hexameters entitled De Partu Virginis and dedicated to pope Clement VII. This simple, but rather strong evidence has encouraged recent scholarship to revise common
assumptions and interpretations of Sannazaro’s career and to investigate his production in neo-Latin. This recent scholarly trend, whose most important promoter is Marc Deramaix, has emphasized the importance of Sannazaro’s encounter with a figure that I have discussed in chapter three, that is, Giles of Viterbo. Whereas the documents of Giles’ encounter with Giovanni Pontano give evidence of a partial and highly selective endorsement of the friar’s legacy, Sannazaro’s approval of Platonic ideas through Giles’ mediation is close to a religious conversion. This conversion is inscribed in Sannazaro’s late writings, in which the notions of inspiration and conjecture are progressively understood through Ficino’s theory of prophecy. Sannazaro’s encounter with Giles of Viterbo and his conversion to Marsilio Ficino’s thinking marks the conclusion of Pontano’s legacy.

Giles of Viterbo arrived in Naples in 1498 and stayed in the city until 1501, divided between his pastoral mission and the composition of his first clearly Platonic work, the Sententiae ad Mentem Platonis. This text, as I have discussed earlier, translated Ficino’s thesis found in the Platonic Theology in the more familiar format of a commentary to the first seventeen articles of Peter Lombard’s Sententiae. This format was particularly suitable for spreading Ficino’s ideas among novice students of theology and, I would add, was also easier to browse for locating Platonic arguments and themes organized in a well structured hypertext. Although speculative, one might also suggest that the format of the running commentary was also a particularly attractive product for the audience of Pontano’s community. Pontano’s ideas on the notions of prophecy, astrology, conjecture and inspiration were transmitted by the running commentary of the pseudo-Ptolemaic
Centiloquium. In general Giles, as his three neo-Latin eclogues addressed to Sannazaro demonstrate, was particularly skilled in adjusting his language and themes to the expectations of his learned Neapolitan interlocutors.

The composition of the Sententiae, moreover, is consistent with Giles of Viterbo’s project of reconciling the members of Pontano’s intellectual community with Ficino’s theological approach to poetry that Pontano firmly criticised. Giles, who was probably well informed of Ludovico Lazzarelli’s unsuccessful incursion into Neapolitan culture, was aware of Pontano’s resistance to theological speculation and envisioned the members of his community as living in a state of confusion. In Giles’ mind, the knowledge of Plato’s philosophy would have enlightened Pontano and his followers by resolving their philosophical distemper. In a fragment that Monfasani has identified with Giles’ lost dialogue Quod divina cognosci natura non possunt and dated 1499-1501, Giles imagined that the Archangel Michael addressed a praise of Plato to the Bishop of Siponto. According to Monfasani and Deramaix, this praise culminates in a prophecy about the imminent reconciliation between Pontano’s intellectual community (which is designed by the volcano Vesuvius) and Giles’ Platonic culture (designed by the Cimino mountain, which was the location of an Augustinian hermitage near Viterbo). This reconciliation would have ideally taken place at the Augustinian Convent of San Giovanni at Carbonara in Naples (designed by Posillipo, which was the location of this building) (Deramaix 1990 p.196; Monfasani 1991). The consequence of this reconciliation is epitomized by the image of a cloudy tower being cleansed, which Deramaix intends as a reference to Christian renovation. Since this text was written while Pontano was working on his
treatise *De Fortuna* and immediately before he finished his dialogue *Aegidius*, however, I propose to interpret the image of the cloudy tower as a criticism of Pontano and his culture. Pontano did live in a tower and this building is often used to indicate his intellectual legacy in works like his dialogues *Antonius* and *Aegidius*.

Giles of Viterbo’s encounter with Sannazaro presumably occurred in a moment of political and sentimental anxiety due to the events that mark the history of the Aragonese Kingdom. In January 1495, in response to Charles VIII’s victorious campaign headed to Naples and terrorized by a series of portents, king Alfonso II decided to abdicate in favor of his young son Ferrandino, and retired in a monastery. On February 22, 1495 Charles VIII reached Naples and expelled Ferrandino; this event led to the end of the Aragonese dynasty. Giles of Viterbo’s pastoral mission in Naples coincided with a moment of political and social turmoil caused by the Aragonese attempt to reclaim the usurped throne. Differently from the derogatory legend spread by Florentine historians such as Guicciardini and partially accepted by contemporary scholarship, Pontano played a pivotal role in the victorious, but ultimately ephemeral, action of Ferrandino. Although he had praised Charles VIII at the time of his arrival, thus saving Naples from an almost certain sack, Pontano wrote a letter to the young King in which he exhorted him to resist.

Pontano interpreted Charles VIII’s descent within the framework outlined in his astrological treatises and temporarily accepted by Sannazaro’s *Arcadia*. Pontano’s letter invites the young King to accept the long term invasion as the dire consequence of a
Pontano’s warning is inspired by the theories on mundane astrology found Albumasar’s Book of Religion and Dynasties. In line with most of fifteenth century astrologers, Pontano explained the historical events of his days according to the Great Conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn that occurred in 1484. This analysis, however, is not phrased as an exhortation to blindly acquiesce to the consequences of the French invasion. Coherent with De Fortuna, rather, Pontano acknowledged that this negative astrological conjunction left a wide margin open to chance, which Ferrandino could exploit in a fast and brave action against the French troops. As the result of the encounter between Ferrandino’s undertaking and chance, the text envisions this brave action in the language of Fortune. Based on his understanding of French volatile nature and after a lucid analysis of the Italian political scenario, Pontano conjectured an action translated for the King in the language of chess playing. The action envisioned by Pontano was a kind of ambush, in which the King was exhorted to trust in Fortune only after having caught the enemy in a tactically appropriate place. This action resulted in an unexpected, but ultimately ephemeral, victory.

186 A Ferdinando d’Aragona (9 Febbraio 1945): “Sacra Maestà: Le invasion longinque, et senza precedente inuiure, quale incurre soleno intervenire per la vicinità, quando uno principe confina con l’altreo, preveneno da movimenti celesti, come designano per comete e per grande coniunctione di stele, quale è questa invasion al Vostro Padre ed ad Voi facta, per ben che Vostro Avo prime, e poi Vostro Padre se l’habbiano procurate per li avari et violenti loro portamenti. Et così el cielo adopera secondo la materia disposta. Et quando el cielo non trova resistentia inferiore, tira le cose al curso suo, come fa un fiume, repentinamente ingrossato di piovia et d’acqua adventitie, quando non sia provisto alle ripet et ad le argini” (Percopo 1907 p. 56).

187 Ibid. “Voi li darete un di scaccomatto; e quando sia ben scacco del cavallo e de l’alfile, Voi haverete vinto. Guardatevi dal temporegiare, perché adesso fa per li Francesi, non per Voi, dar tempo. Cresce modo di denari et ad Voi manca; cresceli reputazione et ad Voi manca; molti pensaranno de tradirve, che non pensano di tradire Re di Francia” (Percopo 1907 p. 57).

188 Ibid. “Si che è da fare alcuna cosa subito dignamente, et ad ciò Ve excito: quel che possete fare con prudentia, industria et laude, non dico però che Voi ve lassate tirare da l’adversario, o da necessità ad fato de arme, nè che vogliete temerariamente tentare la fortuna; ma dico che con astutia, con solertìa, con
Sannazaro, who actively participated in Ferrandino's attack against the French troops of occupation, praised the King's return to Naples in a poem written in 1496, the same year he was to finish his *Arcadia* and abandon vernacular writing. Written in the prestigious form of a *canzone* and addressed directly to the King, Sannazaro's poem can be read as a meditation upon human destiny. The text is formulated as a moral exhortation thatbetrays Pontano's ideas on the relationship between providence, fate, fortune and celestial decrees. The opening stanza links the King and Fortune in three solemn hendecasyllables that set the tone for the rest of the text:

O fra tante procelle invitta e chiara  
anima gloriosa, a cui *Fortuna* [Fortuna]  
dopo si lunghe offese alfin si rende,  
(XI: 1-3)

The unpredictable and inexplicable events that led Ferrandino to achieve this fortunate victory, however, cannot be directly discussed by the poet without the help of a form of natural inspiration, which Pontano ascribed to the action of stars and Sannazaro's poem mythically translates in the figure of Proteus. From the third stanza, Sannazaro's text reports the *prosopopea* of the sea god Proteus, whose voice conveys a meditation on the King's Fate. Based on Virgil's *Georgics* IV, Proteus is constructed as a creature whose body constantly changes and is the recipient of the gift of prophecy. Sannazaro's Proteus, differently from Virgil's version, is not bound for prophesying and is dubious about the accuracy of his responses. Also, Sannazaro's Proteus delivers a prophecy that betrays Pontano's view on the relationship between Providence and celestial decrees. The
King, Proteus says by adjusting the philosophical language to the needs of courtly discourse, was providentially chosen as a recipient of beauty and bravery. However, it was astrologically determined that he would be expelled from his Kingdom and live in a short exile:

_Ben provide a' di nostri il Re superno,_
quando a tanto valor tanta beltade,  
per adornarne il mondo, insene aggiunse.  
[...]
Or, onorata e degna,  
dimostra ben, che se in esilio visse,  
le leggi di là su son certe e fisse.

Proteus continues his speech by turning the particular event into a universal moral lesson marked by a bleak sense of causality and a brave acceptance of celestial decrees. Proteus' speech echoes Meliseus's voice at the end of _Arcadia_ and Pontano's moral treatises. In a way that is reminiscent of Pontano's characterization of superstitious individuals who uselessly complain about the necessary consequences of an astrological conjuncture, Proteus invites his readers to raise their thinking to a more comprehensive understanding of history and its unknowable design:

_Chi potrà dir, fra tante aperte prove  
e fra si manifesti e veri esempi,  
che de le cose umane il ciel non cure  
Ma il viver corto e 'l variar de' tempi,  
e le stelle, qui tarde e preste altrove.  
fan che la mente mai non si assecure  
a questo, e le speranze e le paure  
(si come ognun del suo veder si inganna)  
tiran il cor, che da se stesso è ingordo,  
a creder quel che 'l voler cieco e sordo  
più li consiglia e più gli occhi li appanna;  
e poi fra sé condanna,  
_nol proprio error, ma il cielo e l'alte stelle,  
che sol per nostro ben son chiare e belle._
This warning constitutes the theoretical basis for Proteus’s prayer that is found in the last lines of his speech before the authorial congedo conventionally addressed to the text itself. Having acknowledged the necessity of fate and the relationship between providence and celestial decrees, Proteus implores the now prosperous Fate to keep the King alive, thus helping to alleviate the pain of humankind in a time of war and devastation. Having said this, Proteus dives back into the sea in a way that clearly echoes Virgil’s Georgics IV, which is the most likely source of Sannazaro’s canzone:

Benigni fati, che a si lieto fine
scorgete il mondo e i miseri mortali
e li degnate di più ricco stame,
se mitigar cercate i nostri mali
e risaldar li danni e le ruine,
accì che più ciascun vi pregi et ame,
fate, prego, che 'l cielo a sé non chiame,
fin che natura sia già vinta e stanca,
questi che è de virtù qui solo esempio;
ma di sue lodi in terra un sacro tempio
lasce poi ne la età matura e bianca;
ché, se la carne manca,
rimanga il nome. - E così detto, tacque,
e lieve e presto si gettò ne l'acque.

Proteus’ prayers, so to speak, were left unheard and the celestial decrees mentioned in Pontano’s letter prevailed upon the young and brave Ferrandino, who fell sick and died exactly two months after defeating the French troops. His Kingdom passed to Ferrandino’s uncle Frederick IV. During Frederick’s reign, Giles of Viterbo’s stay in Naples was to occasion Sannazaro’s initiation to Ficino’s ideas. Sannazaro was particularly receptive to Ficino’s views on prophecy and poetry. As I have discussed in the second chapter, Ficino envisioned poets and prophets as the recipients of divine
inspiration and the signs of God’s action upon human history. Based on a theory of knowledge that projects human understanding upon a hierarchy of frenzies organized into four levels, divine inspiration is the engine of Ficino’s epistemology and is systematically used for explaining language, human achievements, ecstatic states of contemplation and poetic utterances. Ficino’s *Platonic Theology*, in addition, included an overarching theory of prophecy that envisioned two distinct prophetic modes epitomized by the figures of the sea god Proteus and the biblical prophet David. Thanks to his acquaintance with Giles of Viterbo, Sannazaro had access to this theory and used it to rethink his ideas on poetry.

Ficino envisioned Proteus as the recipient of a naturally caused form of prophecy whose accuracy is not completely reliable. This view is translated into the fourth poem of Sannazaro’s incomplete collection entitled *Piscatorial Eclogues*. Written in France, the eclogue *Proteus* is addressed to the young Prince Ferdinand, Frederick’s son and Duke of Calabria. The poet imagines to utter his poem at dusk under the inspiration of the Muses of Naples, and to conclude its delivery at night. The text is meant to exhort the young Duke to resist the temptation of going back to his native Spain and to bear the sadness of the French exile by remembering the achievements of Naples. In exchange, the poet promises that one day he will write an epic poem which will recount the return of the Aragonese dynasty to Naples and their victory over the foreign invaders. Based on the model of Virgil’s *Eclogue* IV and in agreement with the conventions of the *captatio benevolentiae*, the poet invites the Duke to content himself with the lower style of the piscatorial eclogue in anticipation of the epic celebration of his victory. The setting is the city of Orleans, which is poetically designed by the proximity of the Loire River.
(classically named Liger). Proteus' voice is reported indirectly by two fishermen named Melanthius and Phrasidamus.

Differently from the conventional characterization of the sea god Proteus found in the *canzone* to Ferrandino, Sannazaro's *Piscatorial Eclogues* echo Ficino's discussion on prophecy found in the *Platonic Theology*. Ficino constructed Proteus as the recipient of a form of knowledge resulting from the impulse of external idols on the faculties of phantasy and reason. Ficino envisioned this form of knowledge as a form of non-discursive thinking that precedes its verbal articulation. Sannazaro translates this mechanism by portraying the two fishermen as listening to Proteus, who is bursting into a form of non-discursive revelation that they have to translate into speech. At this point, the poet can report Proteus' words:

His dolphins too they saw, playing with erratic course, and heard the straits resound far off, being struck by the choirings of the Tritons. The god himself moreover in festive mood was singing to the idle air verses not fitly uttered in mortal speech [...] 189

Proteus retrospective look upon the natural origins and the history of Naples also include Pontano's pastoral persona Meliseus. Analogous to his representation in *Arcadia*, Meliseus is praised for his achievements in the pastoral genre. Differently from *Arcadia*, however, the view on prophecy endorsed in this eclogue allows the author to look at his mentor as a predecessor and not as the destination of his intellectual itinerary. From the higher perspective of prophecy, Proteus' revelation recalls the composition of a poem on stars that, in my view, is a reference to *Urania*. In Proteus' perspective, moreover,

189 *Eclogae Piscatoriae* IV: 21-29: “E puppi sensere Melanthius et Phrasidamus,/Ut forte a Capreis obscura nocte revidabant./Sensere et vario delphinas ludere cursu/Tritonumque choris longe freta pulsa sonare./Ipse autem haudquaquam mortali digna referri/Verba sono vacuas laetus cantabat ad auras [...].”
Pontano’s *Urania* is the result of an inspiration coming from a Goddess, which I propose to identify with the Muse Urania herself:

Then he sings how Melisaeus saw Corydon in the sacred cave and boldly played upon those reeds with which once Corydon sang lovely Alexis and declared the Muse of Damon and Alphesiboeus, by whose grace (the goddess dictating) he brought us forth so many splendid things, he so revealed the very bourne of heaven.\(^{190}\)

While in France, therefore, Sannazaro was already aware of Ficino’s views thanks to his encounter with Giles of Viterbo and was looking at Pontano’s legacy from the higher speculative standpoint of Florentine Platonism. After Pontano and Frederick IV had passed away respectively in 1503 and 1504, Sannazaro went back to Naples without a mentor and without a patron in the spring of 1505. Giles was well aware of his interlocutor’s state of mind and this second phase of their dialogue marks Sannazaro’s complete endorsement of the friar’s ideas. During an eremitic retreat on the island Martana on the Lake of Bolsena in 1504, Giles of Viterbo devoted some of his meditation to Sannazaro and wrote a poetic response to the *Piscatorial Eclogues*. This project took the form of three eclogues. The intended audience of Giles’ eclogues, as it has been demonstrated by their editor Marc Deramaix, was the intellectual community that used to gather around Giovanni Pontano, and in particular Jacopo Sannazaro (Deramaix 1990 pp. 274). In the first eclogue, Giles diffracts his authorial voice into the complementary figures of Aegon and Paramellus. In the second eclogue, Giles set out a dialogue between a shepherd named Lycida, which was Sannazaro’s pastoral persona in the second

\(^{190}\) *Ibidem* IV: 69-74 “Turn canit ut Corydona sacro Melisaeus in antro/ viderit et calaos labris admoverit audax/ formosum quibus ille olim cantarat Alexiæ/ dixerat et musam Damonis et Alphesiboei/ queis fretus, dictante Dea, tot sidera nobis/ prodiderit, tantas caeli patefecerit oras.”
Piscatorial Eclogue, and another shepherd named Meliboeus. The third eclogue is more appropriately defined as a hymn, since there are no shepherds and the poet directly addresses God in a prayer written in distiches.

Giles' eclogues inscribe an invitation to look at Pontano's mode of thinking and its poetic implications from the perspective of Ficino's Platonism. In the first text of his triptych, Giles staged the encounter of two characters named Aegon and Paramellus during a time of war and devastation. The topic of their discussion is the research of spiritual peace (quies), which Aegon has found but Paramellus is still looking for.  

While Deramaix has proposed to identify these two characters with Augustine and Giles himself, I would suggest that these characters are best understood as two facets of Giles of Viterbo's own intellectual agenda, which tried to combine the pursuit of theology (embodied in Aegon) with the practice of eloquence (embodied in Paramellus). Aegon's finding of spiritual peace is translated into the language of the pastoral and presented as the result of a moral and intellectual quest. This quest culminates with the encounter with a wonderful nymph, the identity of whom - as it can be inferred from the second eclogue - is the Virgin Mary. In light of this event, Aegon criticizes his own intellectual pursuit and that of other writers of his time, allegorically designated in the language of herding. The epiphanic nature of Aegon's encounter with the Virgin is

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191 Although it is not part of the reading approach adopted in this chapter, it should be noted that Giles' eclogue is structured upon Virgil's first eclogue. In Virgil's text, the shepherds Tytirus and Meliboeus were discussing of the newly acquired peace brought force by Caesar Augustus. In Giles' text, therefore, the imperial peace is interestingly substituted by Augustine's concept of spiritual peace (quies). This choice is particularly interesting if framed within the overall moral message conveyed by Giles' text, that is, to escape the disastrous political situation of his time by retiring into religious meditation.
suggested by the constant repetition of verb to see (video), which suggests how the vision of this woman has all the features of a miracle:

While I used to pay excessive attention to my flocks and my goats, perpetual worries were hurting my heart: I was oblivious of myself and of everything I am now talking about. But while looking for a goat lost on stray trails, I suddenly saw that nymph with a beautiful body, and I immediately understood everything.¹⁹²

In response to Aegon, Paramellus ventures into the evocation of an irremediably lost past by mentioning a group of poets whose learned verses used to deal with nature, stars, weather and the vain fables of the ancients. Paramellus attributes to these poets an outstanding eloquence which made their audience believe that they were acting under the influx of inspiration, and their endeavors are summed up by the symbolic figure of Daphnis. Paramellus’ evocation can be read as a generic reference to ancient poetry, which in Giles’ perspective imperfectly foreshadowed the arrival of Christianity. Given that Paramellus refers to astrology and meteorology, however, I associate this evocation to the poetry of Naples at Pontano’s times, and more specifically to the poems Urania and Meterorum Liber. In Giles’ Sententiae, moreover, the metamorphosis of Daphnis into an inanimate tree is interpreted as the symbol of human desire to know, which makes humans somehow superior to angels on the hierarchy of being.¹⁹³

¹⁹² Eclogae Sacrae I (p. 228): 30-34: “Cumque ouibus nimium haererem nimiumque capellis,/ tristia perpetuae lacerabant pectora curae;/ oblitus tamen ipse mei haud haec ipsa uidebam./ Sed uidi haec postquam errantem per deuita caprum/ disquirens, nympham praestanti corpore uidi.” I quote the text of Giles’ eclogues from Deramaix’s edition (Deramaix 1990).

¹⁹³ Sententiae ad Mentem Platonis VI 58. 6-7: “Quid quod non modo ab animantibus, verum etiam ab iis, quae animo sensuque carent, multis admirandisque actionibus superamur? Herbarum enim lapidumque vires non solum non aequantur a nobis, sed ne noscuntur quidem. Quas ob res, quanquam omnibus tam animantibus, quam anima carentibus natura praestamus, obstat tame nihil quibusdam in rebus pracelli. Hinc fingendi materia late patuit, homines quosdam vel in bruta, vel in arbores, vel etiam in res alias esse
Juxtaposing two kinds of poetry according to Ficino’s typology of prophecy, he presents the work of Pontano and his followers as the imperfect prefiguration of a new kind of poetry that Sannazaro and his peers are now discovering:

In other times, other poets used to sing the fertile grain fields, the gifts of Bacchus and the herding of the flocks, and the right stars for cultivating the soil along with the ingenuity by which the bees produce their honey. Eventually, other poets sang the signs of the coming rain and storm, or of the violent Notus and Borea. Many of them used to sing the course of the stars, what the sun and the moon from their changing residence can bring, what is announced by the five planets, and what is the cause of the course of stars. Also, other poets used to sing of the Dryads and the semihuman goat, the Satyres and the horned Fauni, the dreams of the forests and the misleading illusions of the ancients. [...] I also saw Daphni there, to whom the learned Muse gave the crown. A voice was given to him so powerful that everybody believed this man inspired by the presence of a god was actually a god under human appearance.  

Giles of Viterbo’s eclogues proclaimed Sannazaro’s initiation to religious poetry and esoteric knowledge. Giles’ second eclogue translates this event by constructing the shepherd Lycidas as one of those shepherds who assisted Christ’s birth in Palestine and as the divinely inspired holder of an esoteric form of knowledge. The eclogue creates a correspondence between Aegon and Lycidas, and Paramellus and Meliboeus. On the one hand, Aegon and Lycidas are presented as the embodiment of religious wisdom, which is associated with the understanding of ancient oracles and poetry in light of the Nativity. On the other hand, Paramellus and Meliboeus are constructed as individuals who are eager to receive their masters’ wisdom in order to escape from a state of moral distemper...
and intellectual frustration. After being praised for his pastoral poetry (a transparent reference to Sannazaro’s *Arcadia* and *Pastoral Eclogues*), Lycidas initiates his interlocutor to the kind of knowledge he now masters. Coherent with Giles of Viterbo’s ideas on ancient oracles as a form of esoteric access to sacred mysteries, Lycidas presents this knowledge as a kind of non-discursive truth that can be accessed only by a few chosen individuals:

Ask, Meliboeus, what is legitimate to know but don’t expect that everything is said: not everybody is allowed to be told everything. Neither pigs benefit from leaves nor kids from beachnuts; goats are not fed with barley and pigeons with weed. Likewise, one joy is not appropriate for everybody so that the sacred mysteries are not revealed to the profane populace.¹⁹⁵

In the dialogue *Actius*, Pontano had chosen Sannazaro as the embodiment of his ideal of the poet as an astrologically inspired individual whose talent consisted in recognizing patterns of sounds and words in Virgil’s hexameters. This idea of Virgil, however, was completely different from Giles’ interpretation of this poet as a prophet of Christianity whose texts were to be considered as written under divine inspiration and analogous to a biblical text. As O’Malley has explained, Giles proved that Virgil’s poems had the status of biblical textuality because he thought that the poet had Etruscan origins and that this ancient population had been the recipient of the Wisdom of Hebrew prophets (O’Malley 1968 pp. 31-32). Based on this genealogical argument, whose source is the

¹⁹⁵ *Eclogae Sacrae* II: 31-37 (p. 248): “Quod fas est, Meliboee, petas neve omnia dici/contendas neque
enim licet omnibus omnia dici./Ut nec fronde sues gaudent nec glandibus haedi,/ nec pascit fera praseda
boues nec prata leones/ordea non ovibus nec ponitur herba columbis./Haud secus et nobis non omnibus
una voluptas/ut sacra sint vulgo non committenda prophano.”
work of the Dominican friar and Biblical exegete Annio of Viterbo (1432-1502), Giles envisioned a method of deciphering Virgil using both the Bible and Plato.

Giles’ eclogue, I would suggest, is a response to Pontano’s text and at the same time as a poetic transfiguration of Giles’ approach to Virgil ideally sanctioned by Sannazaro, the most important poet of Naples. Giles’ text constructs Sannazaro’s persona as an individual who is now aware of the oracular meaning of Virgil’s poetry. In his text, he constructs Lycidas as able to interpret Virgil in relation to the *Sybilline Oracles* because of his attendance at the Nativity. In a brilliant work of synthesis, therefore, Giles rethought the figure of Sannazaro as Pontano’s ideal interpreter of Virgil in light of his own religious reinterpretation of classical scholarship. Based on Ficino’s idea of ancient theology, Giles’ verses transform this philosophical ideal into a visionary praise of Virgil’s poetry as a form of divinely inspired prophecy that is consistent with ancient oracles:

Tell it, Virgil, swan that Mantua generated. With me tell how you will melodiously sing the prosperous ages with a prosperous Muse now that this fading age is dying. Only, restrain yourself from saying that the Great Year is coming and that a new Typhis and a new Achilles are returing to their Argo and Pergamon: the Cumean prophecy does not say so. Rather, these are the omens of Samo, and not the Sybil’s words. Prosperous Muses, sing of the prosperous times!  

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196 *Eclogae Sacrae* II: 154-164 (pp. 260-262): “Dic, Maro, dic mecum, genuit quem Mantua cygnum,/ extremo ut modulans obeuntis funere saeccl/ foelici caneres foelicia saecula musa./ At tantum taceas magnos procedere menses/ nec Tiphys neve Argo adeat ne rursus Achilles/ Pergama, cumeum neque enim sic Carmen, at illa/ sunt Samii portenta piae non dicta Sibyllae./ Dicite foelices foelicia saecula Musae!” This passage can be read as a response to Marsilio Ficino. In contrast with Ficino’s views on Pytagoras’ theory of the Great Year, Giles embraced a Judaic prophetic view of history. According to Giles, Virgil had erroneously endorsed the Pytagorean view in his fourth Eclogue.
Based on these premises, Giles' eclogue implicitly invites Sannazaro to convert his literary production to the subject of Christ's nativity, and to abandon the imitation of pagan mythology. In the rhetorical schema of the “outdoing topos,” Lycidas examines his predecessors who foreshadowed Christ's descent to Hell by means of the fake figures of Hyppolitus and Orpheus. Against his predecessors, Lycidas praises the superiority of the true story of Christ and, implicitly, the superiority of a kind of poetry that will deal with this true subject:

With your help, Diana, the ancients imagined that Hyppolitus made his way back when he was in the immense kingdom of Dis. They also imagined that Orpheus recalled Eurydices with his harmonious lyre. However, it is easy to forge such false poems. This child, on the contrary, who looks up at the sky that reveres him, will call to their tombs the truthful Manes and the naked souls of those who were silent. And he will also descend to the infernal shadows, and having defeated the Furies he will open the black doorway of Tartarus; then he will carry the spoils of the Erebus and having broken its chains he will break off its doors. Victorious, he will liberate the shadows and rescue them from their nightly chains.

The *vates* as God's Prophet

Giles of Viterbo's representation of Sannazaro as the shepherd Lycidas was meant to celebrate the conversion of this poet from classical to religious studies. Differently from Sannazaro's self-fashioning proposed by Pontano's dialogue *Actius* and inscribed in

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197 Curtius has first identified and analyzed the "outdoing topos" in classical and medieval literature (Curtius 1990 pp. 162-165).
198 *Eclogae Sacrae* II: 189-194 (p.265): "Auxilio, Diana, tuo finxere priores/ Ditis in immani imperio redisse pudicum/ Hippolitum Eurydicensque lyra revocasse canora/ Orphea, sed facile haec mentita poemata fingunt./ At puer hic verso manes nudasque silentium/ ad tumulos animas caelo mirante ciebit./ Quin etiam infernos manes immania adibit/ Tartara dirarumque potens dira ostia pandet;/ inde Erebi feret exuvias fractisque catenis/ carceris infringet portas umbrasque resolvet/ victor et eripiet vinclis durisque tenebris."
Arcadia, Lycidas presents himself as an individual initiated into the esoteric knowledge of oracles and his poetry as divinely inspired prophecy. Giles’ eclogues, therefore, inscribe the success of the friar’s intellectual reform, which succeeded in converting the most eminent representative of Giovanni Pontano’s legacy to Ficino’s ideal of ancient theology and biblical poetry.

These texts epitomize the end of Giovanni Pontano’s critical approach to Ficino’s ideas on divine inspiration. Pontano’s standpoint was the result of an intellectual itinerary started with the commentary of the pseudo-Ptolemaic Centiloquium and polemically reiterated in his late works De Fortuna and Aegidius. Based on these readings, Pontano was critical of Marsilio Ficino’s views, which he criticized in the De Fortuna. Moreover, Pontano had defended his approach against the attacks of Ludovico Lazzarelli, whose anticlassical literary project based on the Corpus Hermeticum failed to infiltrate the intellectual community of Naples. Also, Pontano had defended his approach by partially endorsing Giles of Viterbo’s message in his dialogue Aegidius. Giles of Viterbo, however, ultimately succeeded in persuading Sannazaro and other members of Pontano’s community to embrace the cause of his religious reform of classical culture in light of Ficino and the Bible. Does Sannazaro’s literary production reflect the author’s portrait found in Giles’ eclogues? How did he inscribe his new poetic persona within his own works?

If Urania can be taken as the master product of the combination of astrology and rhetoric that is at the heart of Pontano’s mode of thinking, I propose to interpret Sannazaro’s De Partu Virginis as the result of Jacopo Sannazaro’s conversion to Ficino’s
Platonism through the mediation of Giles of Viterbo. Written while engaged in a constant correspondence with the Augustinian Friar and dedicated to pope Clement VII, *De Partu Viriginis* is a highly dialogic work that, like *Arcadia* or Pontano’s eclogues, frames the author’s voice along with those of a series of biblical and classical characters within the story line of Christ’s Nativity. These characters’ voices betray a consistent view on the relationship between poetry and prophecy. In particular, I propose that the poet of *De Partu Virginis* explicitly characterizes himself as a biblical prophet in the proem, in two declarations found in the second book and in the epilogue. The poet implicitly fashions himself in relation to characters such as Zacharias, Joseph, Aegon and Lycidas, who are respectively two characters from the Gospel and two characters found in Giles of Viterbo’s eclogue. The poet’s overall discourse, ultimately, is framed between the complementary figures of David and Proteus, whose prophecies organize the entire structure of the text. In general, the poet constructs himself according to the concept of divine inspiration, which is presented as the cause of his work and his relations with the other voices.

The proem in *De Partu Virginis* consists of a double invocation, the first addressed to the Muses and the second addressed to the Virgin Mary. Based on the notion of *concordia* promoted by Marsilio Ficino and transmitted to Sannazaro by Giles of Viterbo, the pursuit of the Muses is envisioned as complementary to the worship of the Virgin. With a move that recalls Ficino’s *De Religione Christiana*, the poet assesses the authority of the Muses by connecting their knowledge with the foreknowledge of the Magi, who
conjectured the Nativity by interpreting astral signs. The pursuit of the Muses, however, is perceived as determined by the Virgin’s intercession, which the poet invokes by recalling his private devotion that takes place in his house at Mergellina and the public displays that take place at Christmas. Consistent with the conventional topics of the exordium, and coherent with the new religious poetics embraced by the author, the poet fashions himself as trained in the pursuit of the Muses, and as a religious figure engaged in the worship of the Virgin, thus calling himself a prophet (vates) who is embarking in an enterprise that has never been undertaken.

The expectations raised in the proem are fulfilled in the second book when the poet returns to address the reader before recounting the mystery of Christ’s birth. In a passage that clearly echoes Giles’ second eclogue and parallels the proem, the poet declares his superiority over his ancient predecessors according to the schema of the “outdoing topos,” which he rethinks by linking poetic excellence and moral perfection. Before describing the mysterious moment of Mary’s delivery, the language of the poet’s self-presentation makes reference to the esoteric character of sacred mysteries evoked by

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199 De Partu Virginis I: 15-18: “Magna quidem, magna, Aonides, sed debita posco, nec vobis ignota: etenim potuistis et antrum/ aspicere et choreas, nec vos orientia caelo/ signa, nec Eos Reges latuisset putandum est.”

200 De Partu Virginis I: 19-30: “Tuque adeo, spes fida hominum, spes fida Deorum, /Alma Parens, quam mille acies, quaeque aetheris alti/ militia est, totidem currus, tot signa, tubaeque, tot litui comitantur, ovantique agmina gyro adglomerat: niveis tibi si solemnia templis/ sertam damus, si mansuras tibi ponimus aras/ exciso in scopulo, fluctus unde aurae canos/ despiciens celume Mergilline/ adtollit, nautisque procul venientibus/ si laudes de more tuas, si sacra, diemque/ ac coetus late insignes, ritusque dicamus,/ annua felicis colimus dum gaudia partus.” The place at Mergellina can be identified with Sannazaro’s chapel at Mergellina, in the proximity of Virgil’s tomb (Deramaix 1992).

201 De Partu Virginis I: 31-32: “tu vatem ignarumque viae, insuetumque labori,/ Diva, mone, et pavidis jam laeta adlabere coeptis.”

202 De Partu Virginis II: 301-304: “Nunc age, Castalii quae nunquam audita sub antris,/ Musarumve choris celebrata, aut cognita Phoebò, expediam: vos secretos per devia calles,/ Caelicolae, vos (si merui) monstrare recessus/ intactos [...]”
Lycidas in Giles’ eclogue. This self-representation follows the pattern encountered in works such as Ficino’s *De Raptu Pauli* or Lazzarelli’s *Crater Hermetis*. The poet presents his speech as resulting from a mystical rapture that liberates him from the burden of worldly worries, and leads him with Mary beyond the clouds. In this state of noetic contemplation, he can burst into singing the sacred mysteries conveyed by his poem.²⁰³

The author’s consecration as a biblical poet who combines the Christian message of Giles of Viterbo and the heritage of Giovanni Pontano culminates in the short epilogue that closes the third book of *De Partu Virginis*. The poet ends his poem by presenting himself as eager to take some rest in two places that symbolically recall the double invocation of the proem, divided between the Muses and the Virgin. The first place is Posillipo, which is meant to recall the Augustinian monastery of San Giovanni at Catinara where Giles of Viterbo used to live during his Neapolitan residence. The second place is Sannazaro’s villa at Mergellina. This reference recalls Pontano’s poem *Hortus Hesperidum*, which had nostalgically evoked Sannazaro’s cultivation of orange trees during his exile in France.²⁰⁴

The poet’s vision of sacred mysteries and his ability to turn them into words create a correspondence with the characters of Zacharias and Joseph, which can be read as the two polar opposites between which the poet posits himself. In the Gospel

²⁰³ *De Partu Virginis* II: 342-347: “[...] Quis me rapit? Accipe vatem,/ Diva, tuum; rege, Diva, tuum: feror arduus alta/ in nubes: video totum descendere caelum/ spectandi excitum studio. Da pandere factum/ mirum, indictum, insuetum, ingens: absistite, curae/ degeneres, dum sacra cano [...].”

²⁰⁴ *De Partu Virginis* III: 505-512: “Hactenus, o Superi, partus tentasse verendos/ sit satis: optatum poscit me dulcis ad umbram/ Pausilypus, poscunt Neptunia litora, et udi/ Tritones, Nereusque senex, Panopeque, Ephyreque et Melite, quaeque in primis mihi grata ministrat/ ocia, Musarumque cavas per saxa latebras,/ Mergillina: novos fundunt ubi citria Flores,/ citria Medorum sacros referentia locos:/ et mihi non solita nectit de fronde coronam.”
according to Luke, Zacharias was John the Baptist’s father whom the Archangel Gabriel had made dumb and mute for having doubted the Archangel’s message (Luke 1: 18-22). In Sannazaro’s poem, Zacharias plays the role of the seer who shows Mary the texts of a collection of ancient oracles written under divine inspiration.\(^\text{205}\) Zacharias can see the meaning of these oracles thanks to the intercession of the Virgin Mary. Unlike the poet, however, Zacharias is not able to turn these oracles into speech. Joseph, on the other hand, is presented as a frenzied prophet, blinded by the lights of the Angel who suddenly receives divine inspiration and bursts into a prophetic speech.\(^\text{206}\) In contrast to the poet, Joseph is able to turn inspiration into the words of a prayer for Christ but cannot see the crucial moment of the Nativity.

Epitomized in the closing images of Mergellina and Posillipo, the poet’s reconciliation of classical Muses and worship of Mary is dramatically translated into the choir singing of the shepherds Aegon and Lycida found in the third book. Whereas Aegon is described as extremely talented and famous, Lycidas is presented as poorly known in his hometown for his poems on the sea.\(^\text{207}\) Based on Giles of Viterbo’s eclogue

\(^{205}\) *De Partu Virginis* III: 76-81: "[...] At senior, nullus cui vocis ademptae/ usus erat, supplex nunc gressum observat euntis,/ virgineosque pedes, tactaeque dat oscula terrae:/ nunc laetus tollit duplices ad sidera palmas,/ quoque potest, solo testatur gaudia nutu:/ ostenditque manu vatum tot scripta priorum."

This passage, of course, would need further attention. On the one hand, the theme of Zacharias should be understood in the context of Florentine religious discussion, which is portrayed in Ghirlandaio’s fresco at the Cappella Tornabuoni. Interestingly, this fresco presents the leaders of all Florentine intellectual communities as witnessing and discussing the episode of Zacharias. Also, the sources of the ancient prophecies reported by Zacharias’ voice should be identified and their function should be discussed with more precision.

\(^{206}\) *De Partu Virginis* II: 438- 443: "(o timor, o mentis pietas!) puerilia membra/ non ausus tractare manu, cunctatur: ibi auram,/ insperatam auram divino efflantis ab ore/ ore trahens, subito correptus numinis haustu,/ adflatusque Deo, sic tandem voce quieta/ incipit, et lacrimis oculos subfundit obortis:"

\(^{207}\) *De Partu Virginis* III: 186- 193: "Turn Puero adstantes Lycidas et maximus Aegon,/ Aegon, Getulis centum cui pascua campis,/ centeni per rura greges Massyla vagantur:/ ipse caput late, qua Bagrada, qua vagus errat/ Triton, Cinyphiæa qua devolvuntur arenæ:/ ingens agricolis, ingens pastoribus Aegon./ At Lycidas vix urbe sua, vix colle propinquœ/cognitus, aequoreas carmen deflexit ad undas:"
and on the clear reference to the *Piscatorial Eclogues*, I identify these characters with Sannazaro and his new mentor Giles. In response to Giles’ eclogues and as a sign of endorsement of his new mentor’s teachings, the author represents Aegon and Lycidas in the act of embracing the oaten flute for reporting the verses of an old shepherd named Tytiro. These verses, which clearly rewrite Virgil’s *Eclogue IV*, are directly reported and explained to Jesus, who is invited to recognize himself in Virgil’s verses. Their function, in my view, is to seal Sannazaro’s definitive adhesion to Giles of Viterbo’s method for interpreting Virgil in light of Christian prophecy.

The binary pattern that describes the construction of the authorial figure also applies to the overall structure of the poet’s discourse, which is presented as a prophetic speech framed between the embodiments of two modes of prophecy: David and Proteus (Deramaix 2002 p.93-94). Immediately after the episode of the Annunciation, the poet describes David, the ancient heroes and other pious individuals as trapped in a place by the river Lete that might be identified with the Limbo. While he is melancholically collecting dead flowers on the river banks, David’s mind is suddenly hit by an unexpected frenzy and a divine inspiration, so that he can recount in form of prophecy the

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208 *De Partu Virginis* III: 192–205: “Hoc erat, alme Puer, patriis quod noster in antris/ Tityrus adtritae spreuit rude carmen avenae,/ et cecinit dignas Romano consule silvas:/ ultima Cumaei venit jam carminis aetas!/ magna per exactos renovantur saecula cursus./ Scilicet haec Virgo, haec sunt Saturnia regna:/ haec nova progenies caelo descendit ab alto:/ progenies, per quam toto gens aurea mundo/ surget, et in mediis palmes florebit aristas.” Sannazaro’s reuse of Virgil’s fourth eclogue should be the object of a specific study. Strictly in terms of its intertextuality, this text has been discussed by Nash, who remarks how this passage incorporates Virgil’s words and leaves them relatively unchanged (Nash 1994 pp. 13-14). Although persuasive in the framework of a generic imitation of Virgil, Nash’s study does not take into sufficient consideration the hermeneutic context of Sannazaro’s poem. Hence, his reading fails to explain what was really at stake in remaking the fourth eclogue through the voices of Lycidas and Aegon.
entire life of Jesus. The language by which the poet introduces David’s speech betrays Ficino’s theory on prophecy found in the *Platonic Theology*. God’s word, after having reached the Virgin Mary through the intercession of the Angel Gabriel, resounds in the Limbo and gets in touch with David’s mind, thus allowing his consciousness to rise above time and see into the future with complete certainty.

The second mode of prophecy embodied in Proteus is introduced in the third book. Having recounted Christ’s birth, the poet describes the personification of the river Jordan as living in a cave surrounded by a court of water nymphs and served by a young boy, whose ascetic clothes may refer to John the Baptist. While he is interrogating his urn about the meaning of the ominous signs that that are crossing the sky, Jordan’s cave is suddenly inundated by salty water. Stupefied by this exceptional event, Jordan remembers of a prophecy he had once received from the sea god Proteus and reports it. The language in which Proteus describes the source of his foreknowledge betrays the

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209 *De Partu Virginis* I: 234-244: “Tum vero Heroes laetati, animaeque piorum/ ad caelum erectas/ coeperunt tendere palmas./ Atque hic insignis funda, citharaque decorus,/ insignis sceptro senior, per opaca/ locorum/ dum graditur, nectitque sacros diademate crines;/ dum legit effoetos Lethaeo in gramine flores;/ qua tacitae labuntur aquae, mutaeque volucres/ ducunt per steriles aeterna silentia ramos;/ adtonita subitos/ concepit mente furores,/ divinamque animam; et consueto numine plenus,/ intorquens oculos, venientia fata/ recenset:”

210 *Theologia Platonica* XIII: II.23 (p.148): “Quando mentium ille influxus rationem nostram sortitur/ otiosam sive menti vacantem, ipsi aliquid ostendit eorum, quae ad universalem aeternarum rerum/ cognitionem seu mundi gubernationem pertinerebat, ut vel dei legem et ordines angelorum el saeculorum/ restitutiones et regnorum mutationem praevideat.”


212 *De Partu Virginis* III: 318-337: “Talia caelata genitor dum spectat in urna/ fatorum ignarus, oculosque/ ad singula volvit/ admirans: videt insolitos erumpere fontes;/ ingentemque undate domum: cavaque antra
second mode of prophecy envisioned in Ficino’s *Platonic Theology*. Proteus knows about Christ’s advent by means of a conjecture that his imagination could produce through the constant observation of celestial signs and the interpretation of ancient oracles, which granted him a partial and ambiguous glimpse into the future.

Sannazaro’s conversion to Giles of Viterbo’s intellectual project is therefore inscribed in the architecture of his *De Partu Virginis*. The author considered this prophetic and visionary work as the outcome of his life long poetic quest. The poet constructs himself as mastering the ancient Muses and as writing under the grace of the Virgin Mary. He posits his voice between the aware silence of Zacharias and the unaware speech of Joseph. He envisions his work as written between the Augustinian monastery of Posillipo and his scholarly retreat at Mergellina. He inscribes his own exchange with Giles in the choir singing of Aegon and Lycidas, who adjust their performance of Virgil’s fourth eclogue to Jesus. He presents his discourse as a prophetic utterance posited between the two different modes of angelic and natural prophecy theorized by Ficino and epitomized in the figures of David and Proteus. From this perspective and within this

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repleri/ fluctibus, atque novum latices sumpsisse saporem./ Dumque haeret, pavitatque simul, dum sublevat undia/ muscosum caput, et taurino cornua vultu/ adspicit insuetas late florescere ripas./ claraque per densas discurrere lumina silvas/ pastorum ludo: et laetos ad sidera cantus/ divinasque audit voces, et numina passim/ advenisse Deum testantia. Protinus ambas/ ad caelum palmas hilaris cum voce tetendit:/ “O maris, o terrae, divumque, hominumque Repertor,/ quis tua vel magno decreta incognita caelo/ detulit audax, medisque abscondit in undis?/ Ipse mihi haec quondam (memini), dum talia mecum/ saepe agitat, repetitque volens, narrare soletat/ caeruleus Proteus: mendax si caetera Proteus,/ non tamen hoc vanas effudit carmine voces:”

213 *Theologia Platonica* XIII: 2.23 (p.148): “Quando idolorum naturamque instinctus rationem omnino et phantasmam offendit vacuum, aliquid sibi portendit eorum quae ad futuram praevideat pluviam, terraemotus atque similia. Qua via istud? Vis illa supernorum idolorum pluvias inductura ad pluvias praefigurat caelorum rotas, hae aerem humefaciunt, aer usus pituitam movet nostram (humorem scilicet aquaeum), pituita spiritum, ex ea praeeritim parte qua et ipse est aquaeus.”
newly acquired theoretical framework, Sannazaro succeeded the old astrologer and rhetorician Pontano and thus fashioned himself as the new Neapolitan vates.
Conclusion

Did the use of conjecture and inspiration, astrology and prophecy come down exclusively to the needs of constructing one author’s identity in a way that was acceptable within his intellectual community? Were the discussions and polemics among the authors analyzed throughout the chapters of this dissertation only about philosophical or poetical authority? At the current state of my research, I do not think so. To advance my final point, I will use another anecdote whose characters are Giovanni Pontano, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, and Girolamo Savonarola, a famous divinely inspired prophet and charismatic political leader.

In 1496 Giovanni Pico della Mirandola’s nephew published his uncle’s *Disputationes contra Astrologiam Divinatricem* (*Disputations against divinatory astrology*, first printed 1496). Ernst Cassirer has used this text as an epitome of humanism, by which he meant an ideology that foreshadows modernity by proclaiming the liberation of man from the burden of superstition and ignorance. Giovanni Pico’s *Disputationes*, however, is a slippery kind of evidence for such an overarching generalization. Immediately after his uncle’s death in 1494, Giovan Francesco Pico had a rather interesting correspondence with a Carmelite Friar, Giovan Baptista Mantuanus. In his letters, he sought advice for the difficult task of wrapping his uncle’s last papers into a printable book. Giovan Francesco’s description of what was to become Cassirer’s monument of Quattrocento humanism is remarkable because it makes reference to
everything but a finished book representing its author’s intentions and ideas. This is what Giovan Francesco described to his correspondant:

I don’t know whether I should thank you, or rather rejoice, for having scavenged almost all the books of our Giovanni Pico’s *Disputations against Astrologers* from a blotted exemplar scattered into many parts, which after a while I have lost any hope of reorganizing, although not without my diligence and pious effort, along those of my illustrious philosopher Giovanni Maio, whom I put in charge of preparing this gift. I think that by reading these books you won’t rejoice that my uncle had extinguished that dangerous plague from intelligent minds, as much as you will laugh out loud for the vanity of astrologers.\(^{214}\)

This unfinished project, now in the hands of the chief member of a community of religious fanatics called Piagnoni, did not promise to become the bedrock of a humanist manifesto but rather part of a collection of texts of Christian apologetics including Giovanni Pico’s commentary on the Psalms, his *Heptaplos* and his biography. Blinded by his religious zeal, Giovan Francesco claimed that Giovanni Pico had written the disputations to reinforce people’s faith by extirpating a dangerous belief, and he had also written a commentary of the pseudo-Ptolemaic *Centiloquium*, which he had found among his uncle’s papers:

He also translated Ptolemy’s *On Hundred Fruits* (which we call *Centiloquium*) from Greek into Latin, and adorned it with a very beautiful commentary with this intention: demonstrating to those crazy heads that besides the fact that Astrology is a mere fiction and a mere delusion for erudites, their founder’s book that was respected and almost worshipped for so many centuries was actually filled with many errors in its vulgate translation.\(^{215}\)

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\(^{214}\) *Opera Omnia* II p. 1340: “Nescio an magis tibi gratulor, an mihi gaudeam, quando disputationum Ioan. Pici nostri adversus Astrologos ab exemplari literato multasque in partes discerpto omnes pene libros eruerimus, de quibus recuperandis spem omnem evolutus temporis amiseramus, id tamen operis non sine, et mea, et Ioan. Mai nostri praestantis Philosophi huic excerpendi muneri a me praefecti, et diligentia et labore sanctitatum est, horum librorum lectione puto te non tam gavisurum quod pestem hanc bonis ingenios pernitosam patruus ille noster extinxerit, quam de Astrologorum vanitate forte risurum.”

\(^{215}\) *Opera Omnia* II p. 1341: “Centum enim Ptolemaei fructus(quos Centiloquium nuncupamus) et Graeco in Latinum sermonem vertit, et pulcherrima expositione honestavit, hoc consilio, ut deliris illis capitis
If one looks at Kibre's catalogue of Giovanni Pico's library and at Rutkin's thematic reorganization of Pico's library holdings, the book Giovan Francesco was referring to is actually a manuscript of Giovanni Pontano's annotated translation of the *Centiloquium*, which Giovanni Pico was probably using while drafting his disputations and that his nephew failed to identify (Kibre 1936; Rutkin 2002 p.150). In his reply to Giovan Francesco, Baptista Mantuanus did not fail to unmask his correspondent's misunderstanding and, although he shared his interlocutor's critical views concerning astrology and astrologers, he implicitly invited him to revise his attribution and interpretation of this text.\(^{216}\) Probably worried about his interlocutor's lack of philological skills or perhaps by his rather clear ideological bias, moreover, Baptista Mantuanus invited Giovan Francesco to put together the fragments of Giovanni Pico's works as he found them in his drawers and boxes.\(^{217}\) Giovan Francesco, however, did not heed Baptista Mantuanus' and compiled his uncle's *Opera Omnia*, a collection which includes the suspiciously well organized and wonderfully written *Disputations*. What was this book originally about? And did Pontano have something to say about this harsh attack against the very foundations of his way of looking at himself and the world?

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\(^{216}\) *Opera Omnia* II p.1353: "Ante quinque annos cum essem Romae, vidi et perlegi Centiloquium Ptolemaei, nuper a Ioanne Pontano translatum cum commentationibus eiusdem. Vide ergo ne is sit, quem te repperisse scribis inter libellos et scaedas Pici nostri."

\(^{217}\) *Opera Omnia* II p.1353: "Consulo ut omnis patrui philluras excutias, scrinia omnia perlustres, ramentia omnia colligas, reliquias omnes tam excellentis ac prope divini ingenii afferas, nihil perire sinas, in eum ordinem apparebit, si non coharebunt, si non penderit unum ex altero, singula per se stabunt, propria nitentur bonitate. Tomi erunt, Aphorismi erunt, nihil abicito, nihil suprimito, nihil enim in eis puto quod salem suum non habeat, quod sit languidum, quod enerve, quod frivolum, quod ociosum. Collige omnia, audiamus mortuum loquentem, a tacente plures discamus quam a loquente liceat intueri, tantum naturae connatum iuvenilis ingenii miraculum temporum nostrorum ornamentum."
Initially, Giovanni Pico's *Disputations* were conceived as a section of a long project of religious apologetics organized into seven parts, in which Giovanni planned to defend Christian faith from its enemies (atheists, politheists, Hebrews, Muslims, heretics, astrologers, and incoherent Christians). As it was planned, this work would have included sections on religion, theological questions, a defense of the Biblical translations by Jerome and the Seventies, and a dispute on the computation of time. The only extant section is that on astrology. Giovanni Pico began to work on his antiastrological treatise between 1493 and 1494, but it was left unfinished because he was poisoned on November 17, 1494 (Di Napoli 1965 p. 272). Although the impetus behind Giovanni Pico's enterprise is difficult to assess, the astrologers of the time, among whom Giovanni Pontano, had very clear ideas about it. In the astrologers' perspective Giovanni Pico had written it to defend Savonarola's political authority.

Giovanni Pontano's attitude toward Giovanni Pico's writings against astrologers constitutes another example of "epiphenomenon of writing," which scholars interpreted in two opposite ways, neither of which is completely persuasive. Giovanni Pontano criticized Giovanni Pico in book XII of *De Rebus Coelestibus*, book III of *De Fortuna* and the dialogue *Aegidius*. Benedetto Soldati has been the first to observe a striking difference in the degree of Pontano's criticism in the two manuscript versions and the 1512 printed edition of *De Rebus Coelestibus*, which ranges from the violent slander found in the manuscripts to the polite disagreement of the printed editions. Soldati has proposed that Pontano rewrote the text after having learned about Giovanni Pico's death in 1494, and his hypothesis has been substantiated by Thorndyke (Soldati 1986 pp.229-230, 238; Thorndyke 1966 p.540). Giovanni di Napoli and John d'Amico have corrected
this hypothesis by reconfiguring the year in which Pontano's corrections were made to 1496 (the year of the publication of Giovanni Pico's *Disputations*). These scholars have also suggested that Pontano might have been adjusting his text to the expectations of his addressee Paolo Cortesi, whom they consider one of Pontano's friends and whose advice book *De Cardinalatu* includes a section against astrology based on Giovanni Pico's book (Di Napoli 1965 pp. 143-144; D'Amico 1981 p.43).

In opposition to the first group of interpreters, Giovanni Desantis has demonstrated that the firm but polite disagreement found in the printed edition needs to be attributed to the posthumous editor Pietro Summonte (Desantis 1986 pp.183-184). Having thoroughly studied the textual history of Pontano's *De Rebus Coelestibus*, Desantis has indicated that the manuscript versions are consistent in their criticism of Giovanni Pico's text. As additional evidence for his interpretation, Desantis has matched the editorial pattern of *De Rebus Coelestibus* with that of book III of *De Fortuna*, whose manuscript version also includes a virulent attack against Giovanni Pico that Pietro Summonte decided to cancel from the printed edition (Desantis 1986 pp.186-188).

Both groups of interpreters are extremely well documented, but they are ultimately unsatisfactory. The first group of scholars has ultimately relied on a documentary mistake. They have interpreted what was actually Pontano's editor's choice as the result of Pontano's intention and have erroneously proposed that this intention stemmed either from a generic respect for a dead person or the acquaintance with Paolo Cortesi. However, Giovanni Pontano and Paolo Cortesi probably never met, and Cortesi's name was inserted as the addressee of this book by Pietro Summonte, who often adjusted the
dedications of Pontano’s texts to the needs and expectations of a new audience (Monti Sabia 2000). Desantis, on the other hand, has relied on an accurate, but incomplete, documentary research and overlooked the context of Giovanni Pontano’s response. In particular, Desantis has correctly proposed that Giovanni Pontano was always critical of Giovanni Pico but has not fully examined the terms of this criticism. Further, he has not taken into consideration that both the manuscript version and the printed edition of Pontano’s *Aegidius* do give evidence of a changed attitude toward Giovanni Pico that approximates the tone used in Summonte’s edition. Does my own hypothesis on the changing attitude of Pontano’s intellectual community toward conjecture and inspiration contribute to disentangle this philological puzzle? Let’s start from the critique found in *De Rebus Coelestibus*.

I propose that the first version of Pontano's book XII of *De Rebus Coelestibus* was written after 1496 and before 1498. The *terminus a quo* is not Pico della Mirandola’s death (De Santis 1986 p.185), which occurred on November, 17 1494, but the 1496 publication of the *Disputationes*. Although it is not completely certain, I propose that the text was written before 1498. The original manuscript version of book XII of *De Rebus Coelestibus* alludes to Giovanni Pico's brush with Innocent VIII, which corresponds to an analogous passage found in the manuscript version of Pontano's *De Fortuna*. Whereas both texts mention Pico's troubles with Innocent VIII, only *De Fortuna* wraps this episode into a narrative that ends with a reference to Savonarola's death (which occurred

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218 This version is found in the manuscript Vat.Lat. 2839 cc. 350r-359v. Described by Desantis, this manuscript is Pontano’s autograph (Desantis 1986 p.181).
on May 23rd 1498). Therefore, the first version of book twelve of *De Rebus Coelestibus* was probably written before Savonarola’s execution.

Rather than offering a point by point refutation of Giovanni Pico’s arguments against astrologers (which I doubt Pontano ever read), in the first version of his text Pontano’s attack consists in strategically presenting the *Disputationes* as the last episode in a career marked by aristocratic arrogance and disrespect for well established disciplines. In doing so, the text recalls Giovanni Pico’s 1486 attempt at discussing the 900 theses in Rome and the eventual brush with pope Innocent VIII. In Pontano’s narrative, however, Innocent VIII’s repressive measure against Giovanni Pico failed to contain his insolence, which was fueled by his wealth and the intemperance of his personality. The attack ends with unconvincing praise of Giovanni Pico, whom the author confesses to have admired during his life and is disinclined to reprove after his death.

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219 Vat. Lat 2839 c.351 r: “Joannes Picus vir summa nobilitate, maximo etiam ingenio, dum et nobilitati plurimum et ingenio suo tribuit, praeter unam theologiam, omnes simul sive disciplinas, sive scientias adversando illis, ne dicam perverse sentiendo, est insecutus; ipsam quoque theologiam tandem aliquando insecuturus.”

220 Vat. Lat. 2839 c. 351 r : “Nam et Rome non multos ante annos quam mortuus est, ea cum proposuisset, de quibus singulis in disciplinis publice esset disputationibus scriptis, de illis quidem in theologia dicturum se professus est; de quibus ne diceret, quod parum consentanea christiane quidem religioni haberentur, ab Innocentio octavo pontifice maximo fuit edicto etiam publico coercitus.”

221 Vat. Lat. 2839 c. 351 r: “Itaque dum divitiae illum, dum ingenii intemperantior vis insolentiorem faciunt, quodque de laniandis etiam theologis maximum se aliquando locum inter christianos assecuturum, arrogantius fortasse promittit, ad hoc ipsum maledicentiae genus maxime impudenter est compulsus.”

222 Vat. Lat. 2839 c. 351 r : “Verum enim qui viventem illum ego laudandis extollendisque ingenii eius viribus honesterim, insecurerine increpando mortuum ? Absit ab ingenio institutisque meis et ab summa benevolentia in illum, dum vixit, mea. Quin magis magisque in dies et laudabo morum eius suavitatem et admirabor ingenium, quippe qui evasurum illum clarum aprihite atque excellentem virum in divinis pariter ac naturalibus rebus vel iurare ausis, si gloriae cupiditati, quaque ratione tantum deceptat hominem ac taligenio praeditum, adhibuisset.”
Since the reference to Giovanni Pico’s brush with Innocent VIII does not appear in the second manuscript version of book XII of *De Rebus Coelestibus*, whereas it does appear in the autograph of Giovanni Pontano’s *De Fortuna*, I propose that Pontano composed the attack found in *De Fortuna* before revising *De Rebus Coelestibus*. In addition, the first versions of *De Rebus Coelestibus* and *De Fortuna* give evidence of a similar polemical strategy by presenting Giovanni Pico as an arrogant writer inclined to heresy. This strategy, however, is dismissed in the second version of *De Rebus Coelestibus*. Moreover, I propose that the attack found in the third book of *De Fortuna* was written after December 1498 and sometime before the end of 1499. The text makes reference to the Augustinian father Mariano da Genazzano’s death, which occurred on December 14, 1498 (Gutierrez 1983 p.38). The text also refers to the astrologer Lucio Bellanti as though he were still alive, while it is well known that he passed away before the end of 1499 (Vasoli 1965 p. 599).

As in the case of the first version of *De Rebus Coelestibus*, the first version of Pontano’s *De Fortuna* is not a punctual critique of Giovanni Pico’s arguments against astrologers but rather elaborates on the portrait of Giovanni Pico as a heretic attacking astrology. Pontano could now avoid the burden of criticizing Giovanni Pico’s text by recalling and praising Lucio Bellanti’s *In Disputationes Ioannis Pici Adversus Astrologos*

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223 The second version of *De Rebus Coelestibus* is found in the manuscript Barberiniano Latino 338. Described by Desantis, this manuscript is an apograph of the first version (Desantis 1986 p.181).

224 These termini can be narrowed down to a period between the autumn of 1499 and the end of 1499. The text mentions the author’s conversation with the Augustinian father Giles of Viterbo as the event that occasioned the writing of the third book of this work. Giles have been to Naples twice: the first time with Mariano and the second time by himself following his companion’s death. In a letter written in 1504 to Mannio Capenati, Giles suggests that he arrived in Naples immediately after Mariano’s death (Egidio da Viterbo. *Lettere Familiari*. v.1 pp.234-236). Recent scholarship, however, has opted to correct the date of Giles’ second trip to Naples to the Fall of 1499 based on a letter to Marsilio Ficino written in the summer of 1499 (Roth 1990 pp. 50-51).
Responsiones, a point by point refutation of Giovanni Pico’s book that Bellanti published along with his De Astrologica Veritate in the volume entitled Defensio Astrologiae Contra Ioannem Picum Mirandulam (first printed 1498). Giovanni Pico’s reckless attempt at destroying well established disciplines is polemically associated with an ancient and a modern example of subversive thinkers - the skeptical philosopher Pyrrhus and Lorenzo Valla. In addition, the text presents Giovanni Pico’s inclination to heresy as consistent with Girolamo Savonarola’s enterprise and his acrimony against astrologers as driven by personal motives. The Friar’s favorable prog nostications concerning Giovanni Pico’s death, the text insinuates, were in contradiction with an

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225 Vat.Lat 2841 c.52r/v: “Nee nos deterrebit Ioannes Picus magna tum nobilitate, tum etiam ingenio ac dotrina vir, qui nuper diruere prorsus sideralem conatus est disciplinanm. Cui quo minus ipsi respondeamus, labore eo nos omni liberavit in omni disciplinae genere clarus ac perquam acutus Lucius Bellantius, cui aetas nostra multum profecto debet, debituri autem longe amplius posteri, ne ad eos maledicentia perinvidentis hominis penetraret, quid enim aut invidum magis aut maledicum quam tot seculorum tradita, tot excellentium hominum velle inventa labefacere, et quae disciplinarum est omnium antiquissima, in eam rabid ferri morsu rictibusque oblatrantissimis?”

226 In praising Bellanti, Pontano was also responding to his own praise found in Bellanti’s book. In his refutation of book five of Giovanni Pico’s Disputationes, Bellanti tries to counterargue that although the stars are not completely known by astrologers this does not imply that astrological prediction is impossible. Since Pico had supported his claim based on the authority of Gellius’ Attic Night (1: 9-10), whose argument against astrologers is borrowed from a philosopher named Favorinus, Bellanti pokes fun at the use of such a miserable authority and reports Giovanni Pontano’s critique of this philosopher. Responsiones lib. VIII ca. I t iii v: “Ut recte doctissimus nostri temporis Pontanus dicere solet non magis fortasse philosophum quam grammaticum qui in nominibus imponendis. Quomodo grammatici est, ut familiarius meus doctissimus solet dicere: et ipse et Gellius saeppe cespitant: magnoque casu cadunt. Verum haec grammatici videant: tu quaeso lege Gellii cap.i.li.xiii contra mathematicos. Non poteris in extremum cachinnum non solui.” The reference is to Gellius’ Noctes Acticæ 1.9-10. “Fabarinus” is a worldplay based on the latin word “faba” (bean).

227 Vat.Lat 2841 c.52r/v: “Videlicet Picus noster (voco eum nostrum quia magna mecum benevolentia coniunctus fuit, quandoque doctissimum quenque maxime mihi familiarem atque amicum statuo, tractus ipse quidem exemplo est aut Pyrrhonis qui physicam et moralem omnem doctrinan evertere conatus est olim, aut Laurentii Vallensis, qui nuper vel decret praedicatorem seriem, ne dialecticae dicam omnem, ut subrereret, quid non tentavit?”
astrologer’s bleak calculations. Pontano cruelly used Giovanni Pico’s premature death as further proof of the importance and accuracy of astrology.\textsuperscript{228}

Although it may sound ridiculous, I will say what I hold as abundantly assessed and thoroughly examined. Pico shared his studies with Fra Girolamo, who was at the head of the Florentine Republic for many years. Under Savonarola’s persuasion he harshly attacked astrology. They were both trying to build something new in the body of Christianity and, among other things, that sneaky priest had persuaded him that he would have resurrected shortly after his death. As Savonarola, Pico was almost charged as a heretic in Rome by Innocent VIII, but the respect for nobility and the rule of generosity prevailed on the pope. The conclusion of these events, however, teaches the essence of Girolamo’s persuasion. Upon a resolution of the Florentine senate and people, which for many years he had directed with the rumour of his sanctity, he was executed with the most severe and infamous form of capital punishment. Since an astrological prognostication requested by Pico said that he would have enjoyed the benefits of a shorter life, he began unjustly (because he wanted to get old regardless of the celestial decrees) to demonstrate that since astrology relies above all on observation, what is demonstrated by the stars is eminently unobservable. And, of course, he took pains in this endeavor for some years. Moreover, in fulfillment of the fatal course of the stars, the astrologers demonstrated that their prediction was accurate and supported by correct demonstrations and calculations.\textsuperscript{229}

\textsuperscript{228} For what I know, this argument is found in the writings of astrologers such as Luca Gaurico and Francesco Giuntini, who credit Bellanti, Antonio Seratico and the Carmelite friar Angelo Catastrini for the successful guess. Gaurico’s text (\textit{Nativitatum}, in \textit{Opera}, Basilea 1575 v.2 p. 1572) says: “L. Bellantius Senensis vir doctissimus qui satis docte perfregit singulas nugas Joanni Pici Comitis Mirandulam, quas contra astronomos iratus scripserat, quippe cui tre genethliaci praedixerant ipsum ante 33. aetatis annum fore interiturum, quod ita iam accidisse perhibent. Non tamen flocci facienda est haec astrorum scientia, si Picus nullam Astronomiae fidem adhibebat” (Di Napoli 1965 p.517). Although there is no evidence that these three men ever cast Pico’s horoscope, two charts were given to Pico’s nephew Gianfrancesco immediately after his uncle’s death in Ferrara, as he writes in a 1495 letter to G. Mainardi found in \textit{Opera}, II f. 1279 (Di Napoli 1965 p. 449 and notes).

\textsuperscript{229} Vat.Lat 2841 c.52r/v: “Ridiculum forte videatur, dicam tamen quod cognitum abunde ac plane perspectum habeo. Ininit comitatem studiorum cum fratre Hieronymo, qui multos annos in re publica Florentina primarium tenebat locum; elusque suasu in astrologiam acerrime illatus est. Uterque enim tentabat nova quaedam Christiana in re molire facileque sacerdos versuissimius inter alia persuaserat eum, et quidem haud multo post obtinum resurrecturum. Nam et Picus parum absult quo minus Romae ab Innocentio octavo haereseos damnaretur, sed praevaluit laenissimum apud pontificem nobilitatis respectus atque humanitatis ratio. Quals autem fuerit Hironymi suasio, docere eventus ipse rerum eius postet. Decreto enim senatus populique Florentini, cui multos annos sanctitatis opinione praescripsen, severissimo maximeque infami supplicii affectus est genere. Eidem etiam mathematicum consulenti Pico responsum cum esset brevioris eum vitae functurum muneribus, tuit ipse adeo indigne (volebat enim concanescere invitis astris) ut, quod astrologia maxime observatione niteretur, inopportuine (sic !) cum primis vellet, quod a stellis portenderetur, ostendere. Et ipse quidem annos aliquot in eo laboravit.
The context of Pontano's attacks found in the first version of *De Rebus Coelestibus* and *De Fortuna*, I would suggest, is the difficult process of rehabilitation of Giovanni Pico's heritage immediately after his death and during the years of Savonarola's domination of Florence. As an astrologer, Pontano maintained that inspiration resulted from the influx of a celestial configuration and was inclined to explain current historical events in the framework of the Great Conjunction of 1484. Pontano, therefore, was prone to interpret Giovanni Pico's attack against astrologers as a work of political propaganda intended to defend Savonarola's claims of being a divinely inspired prophet from the calculations of astrologers like Lucio Bellanti. Slightly differently from Pontano, Bellanti's *Responsiones* tried to question the authenticity of Pico's *Disputationes* by focusing on their contradictions with works such as the *Oratio* written in 1486 or the *Apologia* written in 1487. In line with Pontano's argument, Bellanti's text suggests that these contradictions can be ascribed to the influence of Savonarola. In the opening lines of the first book, Bellanti observed sarcastically:

First of all, I want the reader to consider how much credit must be given to the idea that Pico hated astrology. Everyone can easily understand it by looking for the arguments used immediately before his death in the *Apologia* dedicated to Lorenzo de Medici and in the *Oratio* addressed to the Cardinals. In these writings, everyone will find how much importance this man attributes to celestial virtue and will learn many other things that thoroughly contradict the content of this book (i.e. the *Disputationes*). It is unbelievable that in such a short time he ended up dismissing astrology as false and irrelevant, unless that famous friar Savonarola, whom he often used to consult, happened to make of him a partaker of that true light and he ended up embracing the truth (my emphasis).²³⁰
According to Bellanti, Savonarola's interest in attacking astrologers was dictated by political reasons in which discourses of prophecy and astrology were closely intertwined with the notions of inspiration and conjecture. Savonarola, the text continues, decided to print Pico's book along with a writing of his own in vernacular because his religious authority was undermined by prognostications such as that casted by Paul of Middelburg (1446-1534) and Bellanti himself. Bellanti's friend Paul of Middelburg was an astronomer and high prelate born in Zeeland who arrived in Italy in 1480 upon invitation of the Republic of Venice to teach at the University of Padua. Friend and personal physician of important figures such as the duke of Urbino Francesco Maria della Rovere and the Archduke of Austria Maximilian, Paul of Middelburg (often referred in Bellanti's text as "Theutonicus") wrote several successful prognostication during the 1480s, some of which he eventually destroyed after his appointment as bishop at the dioceses of Fossombrone in 1494 (Hagen 1911).

Bellanti's text most certainly refers to Paul of Middleburg's 1484 Prognostica ad viginti annos duratura, a text that foretold the advent of a "little prophet" as the result of an astronomical event, that is, the Great Conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter in 1484 (Di Napoli 1965, 487-88). According to a theory usually ascribed to the treatise De Magnis Coniunctionibus written by the Persian astronomer Abumasar (787– 886), the conjunction of these planets was taken to mark crucial events in history. Paul's text applies this theory to the conjunction that occurred in the fall of 1484 and forecasts

Mirum autem est ut tam brevi temporis spatio astrologiam falsam abiciendamque deprehenderit: nisi forte veri luminis particeps factus ab eo (quem sepissime consulebat) fratre Hieronymo Savonarola omnem veritatem sit complexus."
twenty years of tragic historical events. His text, printed in October 1484 and dedicated to the Emperor Maximilian, describes the ambivalent figure of a prophet who, while a gifted and exceptional intellectual, was a liar and a hypocrite. Since the conjunction occurred under the influence of Scorpio, the text continues, the prophet's action would have resulted in bloodshed. Since the “little prophet” was sometimes false (like Mohammed) and sometimes true (like Saint Francis and Saint Dominic), Paul invited the reader to ignore the prophet's signs and wonders and refuse to follow him. This exhortation is supported by a scriptural quotation against false prophets (Schoener 2004).

In Bellanti’s text, Paul of Middelburg's prognostication about the “little prophet” is applied to Savonarola and his political parable in Florence. Bellanti explained why Savonarola was a false prophet in the context of a discussion about the opposition between divinely inspired prophecy and astrology. Pico had discussed this point in book V of his Disputationes and asserted that if one concedes that the divine gift of prophecy stems from a celestial configuration, even the Christian religion has to be subordinate to the influence of stars as it occurs in the works written by Albumasar, Abraham the Jew and Guido Bonatti. Bellanti concedes that these authors were wrong and that divinely inspired prophecy stems directly from God. This does not apply, the text continues, to pseudo-prophets such as Savonarola whose advent he and Paul of Middelburg (at the time bishop of Fossombrone) could easily conjecture by matching the pattern of the Great Conjunction with Savonarola’s natal chart:

That most excellent man Paulus Fo. Sem. Epi. (the abbreviation refers to the bishopric of Fossombrone, a town in the vicinity of Urbino) foretold the advent of a false prophet, from whence he came, and where he would seduce people. And as it is the astrologers'
task, he made his prediction based on a general conjunction, which Pico reports at this point. Therefore Pico does not have to say that no false prophet arrived, because he has often spoken to one of them. He cannot assert that astrologers, ignorants excluded, are false prophets, because while we write these things we understand that astrologers are divine and our subject itself gives evidence of astrology's divinity. And it does not seem appropriate to pass under silence that in Florence I have many trustworthy witnesses. After inspecting his natal chart, I foretold that Girolamo Savonarola was inclined to heresy, and that five months before his defeat, while his success flourished, he would have ended his life with a rope. The recently past conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter forewarned the learned ones.231

The language of conjecture, inspiration, astrology and prophecy, therefore, did not only apply to the assessment of a poet’s or a philosopher’s intellectual authority, but also to his political legitimacy. Astrologers like Paul of Middelburg, Lucio Bellanti and Giovanni Pontano were inclined to see the political success of a charismatic leader like Savonarola as the result of a combination of celestial patterns that, if properly recognized, could be used for extrapolating a useful conjecture about the outcome of a political enterprise. Astrology and prophecy, in other words, could constitute two alternative theoretical bedrocks for political and literary theory based on a different approach to the notions of inspiration and conjecture. Savonarola’s defeat, if considered through the eyes of Quattrocento individuals, represented great success for the partisans of astrology and a failure for believers in prophecy like Giovanni Pico. Lucio Bellanti, Giovanni Pontano and other individuals of their time did not read Giovanni Pico’s Disputationes as

Cassirer’s manifesto of humanism, but rather as an argument in support of Savonarola’s divinely inspired prophecy. Faced with the difficult task of explaining his support of the false prophet to the College of the Cardinals immediately after Savonarola’s defeat in 1498, Marsilio Ficino astutely used the language of conjecture and inspiration to defend the intellectuals and the populace of Florence. Savonarola’s success, in Ficino’s words, is explained as caused either by the influence of stars, or by the action of demons:

Moreover, for what reasons the Astrologers, as well as the Platonists, conjectured that Savonarola had been inspired by many and conflicting or unlucky influences of the stars, it is not expedient to dispute at present. But I might briefly say that from conflicting and unfortunate influences and confluences of the stars, just as from certain signs, the Astrologers conjectured, as did the Platonists, that Savonarola - or rather, as I should more correctly say Sevonerola- had become subject to various and wicked demons. But whether he was thus made subject by strange and marvelous means, or whether he rather subjected himself to evil spirits by his own pride and iniquity, it is certain that devils and similar influences, flowing together into his diabolic spirit as into their own workshop, at once breathed out a venom pestilential wherever exhaled; and not him only did they infect and destroy, but also those drawn near to him in whatever fashion and this very populace itself, commited to and too much believing in him. They say that a certain similar misfortune impending over the Ephesians was discovered and expelled by Apollonius of Tyana in the form of a certain squalid old man directed by evil demons. 

In 1499, as I have examined in the third and fourth chapters, Giovanni Pontano’s intellectual authority had to compete with the preachings of Giles of Viterbo, who soon became an increasingly influential presence for the local intelligentsia. As a result, the most eminent members of Pontano’s intellectual community, and in particular Jacopo Sannazaro, progressively abandoned their old mentor’s views on astrology and poetry and became more and more interested in Giles’ answers to their literary and intellectual pursuits. Between 1499 and 1501, therefore, the figure of the poet astrologer, as I have

explained, was progressively isolated and displaced by that of the poet as a divinely inspired prophet. The presence of Giles of Viterbo, a great friend and admirer of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, might have also changed the perception of this author and his legacy among Neapolitan intellectuals, and influenced Pontano’s polemical views.

I propose that the “epiphenomenon” of Pontano’s attacks against Giovanni Pico can be explained within the context that I have reconstructed throughout this dissertation, and that Pontano’s moderate attitude toward Giovanni Pico is the result of his contacts and partial agreement with Giles of Viterbo. In the only extant manuscript version of the dialogue *Aegidius*, which was completed in 1501 and is almost identically reproduced in Summonte’s edition, the charges of heresy and the innuendos about Giovanni Pico’s affiliation with Savonarola are replaced by an abstract defense of astrological conjectures. Consistent with the detached tone found in the dialogue *Aegidius*, the text of the second version of book XII of *De Rebus Coelestibus* eliminates the reference to Innocent VIII’s repressive measures and criticizes Giovanni Pico only for his temperament and aristocratic arrogance. These two texts, in my view, might have induced Pietro Summonte to eliminate almost every trace of polemical intention from his

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233 This version is found in the apograph manuscript Corsiniano Rossi 78 (3F16) cc.42r- 66v.
234 Barb. Lat. 338 c.169r: “Ioannes Picus vir summa nobilitate, maximo etiam ingenio, dum et nobilitati plurimum et ingenio suo tribuit, preter unam theologiam, omnes simul sive disciplinas, sive scientias adversando illis, ne perverse dicam sentiendo, est pene insecutus. Itaque dum divitie illum, dum ingenii intemperantior vis insolentiorem faciunt, ad hoc ipsum maledicentes genus preter ingenitum a natura pudorem est delapsus. Verum enim qui viventem illum ego laudandis extollendisque ingenii eius viribus honestaverim, insecerne increpando mortuum? Ab sit ab ingenio institutisque meis et ab summa benevolentia in illum, dum vivit, mea. Quin magis magisque in dies et laudabo morum eius suavitatem et admirabor ingenium, quippe qui evasurum illum clarum apprime atque excellentem virum in divinis pariter ac naturalibus rebus vel iurare ausis, si gloriae cupiditati, quaque ratione tantum debeat hominem ac tali ingenio praeditum, adhibuisset.”
editions of *De Rebus Coelestibus* and *De Fortuna*. Summonte’s editions reproduce two texts that are completely different from the first manuscript versions for they eliminate any precise reference to the historical context of late fifteenth century Italy. In contrast with Desantis, however, I do not think that these texts are simply the result of Summonte’s manipulation. Rather, I propose that Summonte was building upon Pontano’s understanding of the changed attitude toward prophecy and astrology found in the intellectual context of Naples after the arrival of Giles of Viterbo, which is inscribed and partially endorsed in the second version of *De Rebus Coelestibus* and the dialogue *Aegidius*.

The hypothesis I have proposed in the first four chapters, therefore, is confirmed by the textual history of Giovanni Pontano’s attack against Giovanni Pico, and causes me to extrapolate from my case study a cautious generalization. In the first chapter, I have shown how Giovanni Pontano had found the figure of the poet astrologer in the pseudo-Ptolemaic *Centiloquium* and he had proudly adopted this astrological theory of poetic inspiration for fashioning himself in his poetic masterpiece *Urania*. This astrological

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235 *De Rebus Coelestibus* lib. XII c. 158r: “Ioannes Picus vir summa nobilitate, maximo etiam ingenio, Paule Cortesi, dum et nobilitati plurimum et ingenio suo non injuria tribuit, in astrologiam acriter est invectus. Verum enim qui viventem illum ego laudandis extollendisque ingenii eius viribus honestaverim, inscet ne increpando mortuum? Absit ab ingenio institutisque meis et ab summa benevolentia in illum (dum vixit) me. Quin magis magisque in dies et laudabo morum eius suavitatem et admirabor ingenium.”

236 *De Fortuna* lib. III: “Nec nos deterrebit Ioannes Picus magna tum nobilitate, tum etiam ingenio ac doctrina vir, qui nuper diruere prorsus sideralem conatus est disciplinam. Cui quo minus ipsi respondeamus, labore eo nos omni liberavit in omni disciplinae genere clarus ac perquam acutus Lucius Bellantius, cui aetas nostra multum protector debet, debiti autem longe amplius posteri, ne ad eos tanta haec indignitas penetraret. Quid enim indignius? Quam tot seculorum tradita, tot excellentium hominum velle inventa labefacere, et quae disciplinarum est omnium antiquissima, eam longo post tempore insectari? Videlicet Picus noster (voco eum nostrum quia magna mecum benevolentia coniunctus fuit, quandoque doctissimum quemque maxime mihi familiarem atque amicum statu, tractus ipse quidem exemplo est aut Pyrrhonis qui physicam et moralem omnem doctrinam evertit conatus est olim, aut Laurentii Vallensis, qui nuper vel decem praedicamentorum seriem, ne dialecticam dicam omnem, ut subueret, quid non tentavit?”
theory, which I have explored in its rhetorical and astrological ramifications, had been the trademark of Pontano’s legacy against Marsilio Ficino’s prophetic alternative, which was gaining popularity among Quattrocento writers and was spreading in Naples thanks to Giles of Viterbo. This astrological theory had allowed Pontano and his followers to resist external influences such as Ludovico Lazzarelli’s prophetic and Biblical interpretation of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, whose clash with the culture of Naples is inscribed in the *Crater Hermetis* and *Aegidius*. Initially endorsed by Pontano’s favorite pupil Jacopo Sannazaro to construct his own poetic persona within the narrative of *Arcadia*, the astrological view of poetic inspiration and its related conjectural mode of thinking became controversial issues once Giles of Viterbo began to spread his philosophical and religious message among the members of Pontano’s intellectual community. In 1501, its members were more and more inclined to embrace the Augustinian friar’s Platonism and his project of religious literary reform epitomized by Jacopo Sannazaro’s *De Partu Virginis*. In the same year, Pontano’s legacy was abandoned. His astrological views were becoming increasingly isolated and the members of his intellectual community were converting to other mentors and ideas.

Beyond conventional views of Renaissance culture as the crossroad of prepackaged ideologies such as humanism, neoplatonism, hermetism; in contrast with simplified approaches to the controversy on astrology as the conflict between medieval superstition and modern individual entrepreneurship; against the insular study of poetic inspiration as nothing more than a literary theme: I assert that the study of the Neapolitan
intellectual community's changing attitude toward a mode of thinking signaled by the complementary notions of conjecture and inspiration demonstrates how Quattrocento individuals could envision astrology and prophecy as sources of intellectual and political authority. Literary authority and its textual manifestations, as well as political authority and its changing sources of legitimacy can therefore be rethought in a broader perspective. The results of this inquiry could therefore provide the critic with a bridge between literary studies and intellectual history, and contribute to rethink these disciplines as complementary approaches to Quattrocento culture.
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