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Fallax Antiquitas: Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola's Critique of Antiquity

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on the metanarrative of antiquity found in the poetic production of Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469-1533), a Renaissance philosopher and territorial ruler whose religious orientation is ascribable to Girolamo Savonarola and his followers. In four chapters focusing on specific phases in the author's literary career, this dissertation sets out to explore the multiple connections between Pico's poetry and the rest of his *oeuvre*, and more specifically with the author's peculiar approach to Greco-Roman antiquity expressed in *De Imaginatione*, *De Rerum Prenotione* and *De Amore Divino*. Starting with an analysis of Pico's *Staurostichon* (1503-1506) and concluding with his 1513 *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis* through a thorough examination of *Hymni Heroici Tres* (1507), the goal of this dissertation is to examine and reconstruct Gianfrancesco Pico's dystopian, demon-infested view of antiquity and to indicate some of its polemical targets including Renaissance astrology, Platonic philosophy and paganizing artistic and literary aesthetics.

The first section of this dissertation provides a detailed list of objectives, a defined thesis structure, a short biography of the author, and a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of the figure of Gianfrancesco Pico in past and contemporary historiography. The second section focuses on Pico's first published poem, *Staurostichon* (1506-1507), and its relationship with astrology, prophecy, and blood devotion. The third chapter of the dissertation focuses on the 1507 collection of hymns known as *Hymni heroici tres*, their metanarrative of antiquity and their influence in the genre of Renaissance hymnography. Finally, the fourth section explores Pico's 1513 poem *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis* in light of his criticism of Neoplatonism and pagan aesthetics.

Keywords: Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, Antiquity, Neoplatonism, Astrology, Prophecy, Savonarolism, Christianity.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette dissertation se concentre sur le métarécit de l'Antiquité trouvé dans la production poétique de Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469-1533), philosophe et souverain territorial de la Renaissance dont l'orientation religieuse est imputable à Girolamo Savonarola et ses disciples. En quatre chapitres centrés sur des phases spécifiques de la carrière littéraire de l'auteur, cette thèse explore les multiples liens entre la poésie de Pico et le reste de son œuvre, et plus particulièrement l'approche distinctive de l'auteur envers l'Antiquité gréco-romaine formulée dans ses traités philosophiques connus sous le nom de *De imaginatione*, *De rerum prenotione* et *De amore divino*. En commençant par une analyse de son poème *Staurostichon* (1503-1506) et en concluant avec son *De Venere Cupidine expellendis* (1513), en passant par un examen approfondi de *Hymni heroici tres* (1507), le but de cette thèse est d'examiner et de reconstruire la vision dystopique et démoniaque de l'antiquité contenue dans les œuvres de Gianfrancesco Pico, et d'explorer certaines de ses cibles polémiques, y compris l'astrologie, la philosophie platonicienne et l'esthétique artistique et littéraire paganisante de la Renaissance.

La première section de cette dissertation fournit une liste détaillée des objectifs, une structure définie de thèse, une concise biographie de l'auteur, et une analyse complète de l'évolution de la figure de Gianfrancesco Pico dans l'historiographie passée et contemporaine. La deuxième section se concentre sur le premier poème publié par Pico, *Staurostichon* (1506-1507), et sa relation avec l'astrologie, la prophétie et la dévotion au sang. Le troisième chapitre de la thèse porte sur la collection d'hymnes de 1507 connue sous le nom de *Hymni heroici tres*, leur métanarration de l'antiquité et leur influence dans l'hymnographie de la Renaissance. Enfin, la quatrième section explore le poème *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis* à la lumière de sa critique du néoplatonisme et de l'esthétique philo-païenne de son temps.

Mots clés: Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, Antiquité, Néoplatonisme, Astrologie, Prophétie, Savonarolisme, Christianisme.

“Eadem igitur obscuritate contagionis adspiratio daemonum et angelorum mentis quoque
corruptelas agit furoribus”¹

Tertullian, Apologeticus XII, 6-8.

Chapter One: Introduction

1. Seeing Demons

The beginning of Donato Bramante’s (1444 – 1514) architectural works on the *Cortile del Belvedere* in 1505 bears a deep, symbolic meaning that goes beyond the renovation of the Vatican from the late Medieval age of the 15th century to the Renaissance that characterized the 16th century.² Started under the orders of Pope Julius II (1443 – 1513), this enclosed garden was a key element of the pontiff’s grand project to renovate the Holy See, and a symbolic

¹ “Then by the same obscure contagion the breath of demons and angels achieves the corruption of the mind in foul bursts of fury and insanity.”

² I would like to take advantage of this first attempt of periodization to discuss my personal approach to it. As Hamish Scott states: “All periodization necessarily involves the privileging of a particular viewpoint. The established framework sees the early modern era extending from—very broadly—1500 to 1800; the start date was at times moved back into the second half of the fifteenth century, to 1480, when the economy and demographic expansion of the long sixteenth century was firmly underway, or even to the 1450s: the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople appeared an important date in political history, while the crucial technologies of printing and gunpowder were beginning to be influential by mid-century.” I personally abide by this trend. That said, however, I ascribe to those experts who think that the 1450/1500–1800 periodization is too limited chronologically for the Italian context, as I believe that the whole Italian Renaissance occupies a solid place as the beginning of modernity in the West. As many other historians, I thus include the Italian Renaissance (especially the High Renaissance, in which this study is situated) in the early modern period. That said, I am fully aware that many dominant themes of post-1500 Europe have their origins and even their counterparts during the era conventionally styled the ‘Later Middle Ages’: whether in topics as diverse as state-formation, high culture, or voyages of exploration. On this subject, I do not believe in strict boundaries when it comes to periodization. I highly respect the vision of those who, developing a more “modern” view of the fourteenth and early fifteenth century, have suggested an extension of the early modern era backwards. I am equally open to the idea of a long Middle Ages elaborated by Jacques Le Goff (1924–2014) during his last thirty years of life. On the subject, see Hamish M. Scott, "Introduction: ‘Early Modern’ Europe and the Idea of Early Modernity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern European History, 1350-1750*, ed. Hamish M. Scott (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199597253.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199597253-e-29>. See also Jacques Le Goff, *Faut-Il Vraiment Découper L'histoire En Tranches?* (Paris: Éditions Points, 2014). 137–186.

representation of his take on religion, philosophy and politics.³ As a matter of fact, the main purpose of Bramante's work – together with all the projects that were part of Julius II *renovatio urbis* – was to create a clear link between this papacy and the grandeur of ancient classical civilization, weaving together complex symbolic themes that incorporated references from the Apostolic Succession, Roman imperialism, Etrusco-Roman heritage and the Biblical tradition.⁴

In practical terms, Bramante's Cortile was designed to facilitate access between the Vatican Palace on the south side, and the *Villa Belvedere* on the north side – i.e. between two spaces dedicated to the complementary pursuits of active life (concerning papal and courtly matters), and of contemplative life (concerning philosophical and theological reflection). Beyond this practical purpose, however, Bramante's *Cortile* also brought a whole new architectural concept into the development of the Vatican, conveying a new monumental tradition, bringing an innovative concept of space in garden architecture into existence.⁵ Built as a semi-walled garden leading towards another of Bramante's architectural masterpieces – the *Stanza della Segnatura*, home of the well-known fresco “The School of Athens” – this architectural arrangement needed to provide a suitable outdoor space in which the pope and his court could deliberate on

³“The choice of Donato Bramante as the sole director of [Julius II's] architectural program was near to being a creative act in itself. [...] the personalities of the Pope and the architect as we know from their other activities suggest a community of spirit based on the sharing of just that characteristic of dynamic imagination noted above [x]. Their association in the creation of the new Vatican may be described only as a partnership. The project itself so eloquently expressed the conception from which it emerged that we have no means of distinguishing the contribution of the patron from that of the artist.” James S. Ackerman, *The Cortile Del Belvedere*, Studi E Documenti Per La Storia Del Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano, V. 3. (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1954). 13-14. On this subject, it is important to note that there have been discordant voices on the real engagement of Julius II in the iconographic choices of the artists and architects working under his patronage. See Christine Shaw, “The Motivation for the Patronage of Julius II,” in Gosman, Martin, Alasdair MacDonald, and Arjo Vanderjagt. 2005. *Princes and Princely Culture 1450-1650*, Volume Two. Leiden: Brill. 43 – 61.

⁴ Nicholas Temple, *Renovatio Urbis. Architecture, Urbanism and Ceremony in the Rome of Julius II* (New York: Routledge, 2011). 2.

⁵ Ackerman, *The Cortile Del Belvedere*. 12, 19.

philosophical and theological matters, possibly in emulation of Plato's academy.⁶ The four terrace-courts of the garden, more precisely, were designed to serve three functions. The lowest was conceived as a theatre stage, while the two higher terraces were formal gardens decorated with sumptuous fountains. A fourth court, the “*cortile delle statue*,” was also created at the entrance of the pope Innocent VII's (1339 – 1406) villa to serve as the seat of the “*antiquario delle cose antiche*,” an indoor/outdoor museum that Julius II founded for reasons that exceeded a simple antiquarian intent. In fact, as a whole, the *Cortile* was not merely conceived as an infrastructure meant for leisure, but as the core of an ambitious project. What Julius II really wanted, when imagining his *Cortile del Belvedere*, was the creation of the first architectural garden, the first permanent theater, and the first museum building since antiquity.⁷

In order to better emphasize the link between his own dominion and the legacy of classical civilization, the Pope ordered the retrieval of ancient statues that were found in the ancient Roman ruins around the city and their transfer to his garden; each one was to be put in its own loggia, not unlike the shrines used for that purpose in ancient times.⁸ The written testimony of an anonymous Venetian merchant, who was sent to Rome in 1513 as envoy to Pope Hadrian VI, gives a genuine picture of the *Giardino* that conveys its true beauty and the impact it had on its visitors:

One enters the garden, of which half is filled with growing grass and laurels, mulberries, and cypresses, while the other half is paved in squares of tiles, laid on end, and in every square a beautiful orange tree grows out of the pavement, of which there are a great many, arranged in perfect order. In the center of the garden there are two enormous men

⁶ Temple, *Renovatio Urbis. Architecture, Urbanism and Ceremony in the Rome of Julius II*. 135. For a discussion on the Cortile del Belvedere as a classical villa see James S. Ackerman, *Distance Points: Essays in Theory and Renaissance Art and Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991). 112-19.

⁷ *The Cortile Del Belvedere*. 18.

⁸ Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Illustrissimi Ac Doctissimi Principis Jo. Francisci Pici Mirandulae... De Venere & Cupidine Expellendis Carmen; Item Eiusdem Laurentius & Geminianus Hymni* (Rome: Iacobus Mazochius, 1513). Fol. 8R.

in marble; one opposite to the other, twice life size, who lie in a sleeping position. One is the Tiber, the other the Nile; very ancient figures, and two fountains issue from them. At the main entrance to this garden on the left there is a sort of chapel built into the wall where, on a marble base, stands the Apollo, world famous, a very beautiful and worthy figure, life size, of the finest marble. Somewhat farther on, also in the same façade, which runs along this side, and in a similar place with a similar base, as high off the ground as an altar, opposite a most perfect well, is the Laocoon, celebrated throughout the world [...] Not far from this, and mounted in a similar fashion, there is a lovely Venus of life size, nude, with a bit of drapery over her shoulder which partly covers her genitals: as beautiful a piece as is possible to imagine. [...] On one side of this garden is a most beautiful loggia at one end of which is a lovely fountain that irrigates the orange trees and the rest of the garden by a little canal in the center of the loggia. At the other end, through a small door, one passes out onto two even more beautiful *loggie* [sic], as high off the ground as half the campanile of S. Marco (because they stand on the peak of a hill). There is a marvelous view from there, as charming as one could desire. At the entrance to the loggias on the left is a beautiful and devout chapel, perfectly ornamented [...] then a string of large and small rooms, gracious both for their decoration and their view: and this is the Pope's quarters.⁹

The act of building something like the *Cortile del Belvedere*, a garden that aimed to incorporate ancient art and architecture in the holy place of the Vatican, is not to be underestimated. As Marc David Baer states, any process of religious acculturation, adhesion and hybridity, syncretism, and transformation of converts is accompanied by a spatial dimension of religious change. “If the ruler of a society converts, whether to piety or to a different religion altogether, he (rulers are usually male) converts holy spaces of other religions to his own, including the most grand and significant structures located in the capital and major cities of his state, or he constructs new edifices celebrating and announcing his personal decision [...]”¹⁰ Following this logic, the official incursion of pagan antiquity aesthetics and thought within the Holy See during Julius II's dominion was one of his highest proclamations of his theological take on Christianity. In the Pope's view of the *Cortile del Belvedere* – and of his *renovatio urbis* as a whole, one might say –

⁹ Quoted in Ackerman, *The Cortile Del Belvedere*. 34.

¹⁰ Marc David Baer, “History and Religious Conversion,” ed. Lewis R. Rambo, *The Oxford handbook of religious conversion* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). 7.

the pagan idols of antiquity were allowed to share the sacred space of the Vatican with the holy symbols of Christianity, exactly as the pagan philosophers were permitted to face the Church fathers in the frescoes of the Pope's private library: the *Stanza della Segnatura*.¹¹

As Timothy Verdon states in his study entitled "Pagans in the Church: The School of Athens in Religious Context" (1997), the structure and the subjects portrayed in the frescoes illuminating the *Stanza* demanded a "syncretic vision of intellectual history," in which pagan philosophers, divinely inspired in their quest for Wisdom, approached, imitated, or even understood the Christian God, though unclearly.¹² Following this intuition, Verdon interpreted the architecture of the scenes of the "School of Athens" to the "Disputation of the Holy Sacrament" as a single portrayal of a unified space, notably in the way the pagan philosophers were gathered on one side, standing in what would be the nave of a great church, while the Christian theologians, Saints, and God, were arranged around the sacrament in the apse of that same structure.¹³ The respective positioning of the philosophers and the theologians is of the greatest significance to Verdon's interpretation of meaning in the series of frescoes. In his reading of the room, its space, decoration, and meaning, pagans had "a place in the church," both literally and figuratively.

Thus Julius II wanted to characterize his new Rome, and thus the artists and architects complied, following his grand design. Such a "syncretic" approach¹⁴ toward pre-Christian

¹¹ John K. J. Shearman reviewed the documentary evidence and concluded that the *Stanza della Segnatura* was the most plausible location of Julius's library, though he acknowledged on page 383 of his study that the possibility remained that the Pope's collection could have been housed in the Torre Borgia. See John Shearman, "The Vatican Stanze: Functions and Decoration," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 57 (1971), John K. G. Shearman, *The Vatican Stanze: Functions and Decorations* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972). 369-424.

¹² Timothy Verdon, "Pagans in the Church: The *School of Athens* in Religious Context," in *Raphael's "School of Athens"*, ed. Marcia B. Hall (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997). 122-5.

¹³ *Ibid.* 119-22.

¹⁴ The term syncretic is kept between quotation marks for a very precise reason, as much debate has been going on over the misuse of the category of syncretism in the past. If we consider Verdon's point above, the term – I argue – is well placed here. However, if we take into account Marc David Baer's definitions of the four categories of religious

antiquity, however, did not simply result from the whims of this ruler, but rather revolved around the cultural change that originated at the end of the Byzantine Empire (1453), and the rediscovery of ancient Latin and Hellenistic sources. The objective of Julius' efforts was manifest: he wanted to create a new beacon of ancient civilization, a sanctified Athens, where the knowledge and art of antiquity may shine, while being corrected by Christian truth under the benevolent light of what the philosophers of the time called *prisca theologia / philosophia perennis*.¹⁵ These two concepts, difficult to separate before Agostino Steuco's *De perenni philosophia* (1540), were also at the root of the system of belief that prompted the famous Raphael – and his patron Julius II¹⁶ – to include Greek philosophy in the sacred space of the *Stanza della Segnatura*.¹⁷ Following the Neoplatonic teachings of Marsilio Ficino (1433 – 1499)

conversions (acculturation, adhesion or hybridity, syncretism, and transformation) then adhesion/hybridity might be the right word here. See Baer, "History and Religious Conversion." 1: "Acculturation is when religious change accompanies the incorporation of a people and its territory into a conquering empire or socioeconomic system. Adhesion or hybridity is when the person or group adopts new beliefs and practices alongside the old. Syncretism occurs when the convert(s) reconcile or fuse old and new beliefs and practices to create a new religious synthesis. Transformation is when converts attempt to completely replace the old with the new."

¹⁵ The *philosophia perennis* is an adaptation of Marsilio Ficino (1433 – 1499) and Nicholas Cusanus' (1401 – 1464) concept of *prisca theologia* by the philosopher and theologian Agostino Steuco (1497 – 1548). While the *prisca theologia* appears as a continuity of the philosophical tradition through time – a unified development of human thought, proceeding from an ancient and thoroughly dependable philosophical-theological wisdom, a tradition that had survived until the era of the Christian revelation (through Christ and the Church Fathers), and was later recovered after the rebirth of the philosophy of the 'divine' Plato – the *philosophia perennis* is a collection of doctrines that arose and prospered through the original act of divine intervention, occurring within the hearts of men or through direct communication to various individuals. 'Wisdom' and 'philosophy' in this case are synonymous in the sense that human enquiry, originating from a divine 'voice' but then frequently abandoned to its own devices and proceeding along paths of varying certainty, achieves certitude in its doctrines through the revelation of Christ, and can then properly be called 'wisdom'. The main difference between the two concepts, therefore, must be found in the role that Divine Revelation had in them: a fundamental chapter for the *prisca theologia*, the finish line of the *philosophia perennis*. See Francesco Bottin et al., "Models of the History of Philosophy: From Its Origins in the Renaissance to the 'Historia Philosophica,'" (1993). 14-25.

¹⁶ The testimony of Paolo Giovio, the only contemporary to remark directly on the program of the *Stanze*, states that Raphael worked following "the specifications of Julius II." See D. Redig de Campos, *Raffaello Nelle Stanze* (Milano: A. Martello, 1965). 5 as quoted in Ingrid R. Rowland, "The Intellectual Background of the School of Athens: Tracking Divine Wisdom in the Rome of Julius II," in *Raphael's "School of Athens"*, ed. Marcia B. Hall (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997). 141.

¹⁷ Timothy Verdon, "Pagans in the Church: The *School of Athens* in Religious Context," *ibid.* 122-7. Verdon righteously talks only about *prisca theologia*, as Steuco's book *De perenni philosophia* will be published only in 1540. However, I argue that, retroactively speaking, Julius II and Giles of Viterbo's idea of *prisca theologia* was closer to what Steuco would have later defined as *philosophia perennis*.

and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463 – 1494), through the mediation of his counselor Giles of Viterbo (1472 – 1532),¹⁸ Julius II allowed the pagans “into the Church”, and permitted them to approach God because they participated in God’s “hidden plan,” though without realizing it. Drawing upon the history of ancient Rome and Greece, together with the biblical narratives of the Holy Land, therefore, this master vision was meant to justify the belief in the imminence of a new Golden Age under Julius II, when the iniquities and sins of past ages would be swept aside by the creation of a new papal empire of faith.¹⁹ As the papal orator Battista Casali (1473 – 1525) enthusiastically declared in his speech on January the 1st 1508:

You, now, Julius II, Supreme Pontiff, have founded a new Athens when you summon up that prostrated world of letters as if raising it from the dead, and you command that, amid threats of suspended work, that Athens, her stadia, her theaters, her Athenaeum be restored. [...] This is why, Blessed Father, you achieve what your soldiers shall never conquer by arms, shackling your adversaries with bonds of learning, learning with which, as with a sponge, you will erase all the errors of the world and circumcise the ancient roots of evil at their base with a sickle of adamant.²⁰

In 1512, one year before Julius II’s death, Casali’s propagandistic prophecy became reality. Julius II’s project of building a New Athens, accepting pre-Christian philosophy and aesthetics into the walls of the Catholic Church, was almost complete. At that time, several political leaders and intellectuals visited the pope’s *Atrio del Piacere* as hosts, and, while wandering through the statues and the fountains, witnessed its outstanding beauty and magnificence.²¹ Yet, that very

¹⁸ To learn more about the influence of Giles of Viterbo on Julius II and the imagery of the *School of Athens*, see Ingrid R. Rowland, “The Intellectual Background of the School of Athens: Tracking Divine Wisdom in the Rome of Julius II,” in *Raphael's “School of Athens”*, ed. Marcia B. Hall (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997). 131-70.

¹⁹ Temple, *Renovatio Urbis. Architecture, Urbanism and Ceremony in the Rome of Julius II*. 1.

²⁰ Casali, Battista, “Oratio habita ad Iulium Secundum Ponteficem Maximum in Circumcisione” transl. John O’Malley in John O’ Malley, *Giles of Viterbo on Church and Reform: A Study in Renaissance Thought* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968). 271-87.

²¹ Ackerman, *The Cortile Del Belvedere*. 34.

year, one visitor did not marvel at such splendor. Instead, that man saw monsters lurking in the garden, and turned the harmony of this inner sanctum into a vision of a nightmare. His name was Gianfrancesco Pico (1470–1533), Lord of Mirandola and Count of Concordia, eminent humanist. Then banished from his lands, the nobleman had come to visit the Pope in order to request his help in reconquering what he had lost to his brothers. During the long days of waiting between his hearings, the lord of Mirandola had the opportunity to wander through the pontifex’s newly built wonders, and to reflect on the presence of pagan deities in that sacred place.

In a letter to his friend Lilius Giraldi (1479 – 1552), dated 29 August 1512, Gianfrancesco wrote:

Didn’t you know, Lilius, Venus and Cupid, the gods of vain antiquity? Julius II, Pontifex Maximus, has unearthed them from Roman ruins, where they were recently found and has placed them in that most fragrant citrus grove, paved with flint stone, in the center of which there is also a colossal statue of the blue Tiber. Everywhere, however, ancient statues are placed, each on its own shrine. [...] For indeed they say that in these places there are countless brutes and that animals are known to spread out on these hills, some on the Janiculum, more on the other hills, and that the Vatican hosts the most numerous and big. And that this was established precisely for this reason, so that they could be appeased if Zephyrus is not blowing, for it is commonly held that animals in captivity are definitely more vicious than in the wild. And that this brutish race was not discussed by Aristotle, Aelianus Meccius and Ctesias the Cnidian. Albertus Magnus knew one from another country, but he did not reveal it, and its nature is as yet not sufficiently explored. For the beasts of his time were not as harmful and fierce. And so, while I consider that I am placed amongst these very animals accustomed to the grove of Venus and Cupid, I wrote these verses on how to chase out Venus herself and Cupid.²²

²² Pico della Mirandola, *Illustrissimi Ac Doctissimi Principis Jo. Francisci Pici Mirandulae... De Venere & Cupidine Expellendis Carmen; Item Eiusdem Laurentius & Geminianus Hymni*. Fols. 9R-V: “Nostin Lili Venerem atque Cupidinem vanae illius Deos vetustatis? Eos Iulius secundus Pontifex Maximus accersivit ex romani ruinis, ante paulum erutos collocavitque in nemore citriorum illo odoratissimo constrato silice, cuius in meditullio Caerulei quoque Thybridis est imago colossea. Omni autem ex parte antiquae Imagines suis quaeque arulis super impositae. [...] Nam bruta esse iis in locis non parum multa dicunt ac beluas cum notas, tum ignotas, per hosce colles expatiantur, Ianiculum aliquas, aliquanto plures colles caeteros at Vaticanum et plurimas alere et ingenteis. Quare id institutum, ut nisi flante Zephyro mansuescant, cumque habentur veluti cicures ipsis esse feris omnino ferociores. Quod genus bruti nec Aristotele nec Aeliano nec Cnidio Cresiae ccompertum, nouisse id aliqua ex parte Magnum Albertum, sed non prodidisse non dum eius satis explorata natura, nec enim ferae illius tempestatis tam noxie tamque efferate degebant vitam. Haec itaque inter animalia venereo cupidineoque nemori assueta cum me positum existimarem, de ipsa Venere et Cupidine expellendis carmina istaec faciebam.”

In Gianfrancesco Pico's description, Bramante's *Giardino del Belvedere*, recognized nowadays as one of the Italian Renaissance's highest architectural and artistic achievements, was turned into the opposite of what it was meant to be. Instead of representing the symbol of Rome reborn, Julius II's garden of delights became, in Pico's mind, the beacon of a new treacherous Babylon: a bleaker distorted image of Battista Casali's *New Athens*, where Hellenic half-human creatures inhabit the city and monsters lay their nests on top of the churches. As Gianfrancesco wrote in *De Venere et Cupidine Expellendis*, the poem published alongside the aforementioned letter to Giraldi:

Flee false Babylon, abandon its languid spells / and its honey mixed up with poison. / Too many too dangerous monsters / moved there, and ravenous Scyllae and Gorgons; there / the Harpies nested inside the churches. / And those who once acknowledged Atlas and Titan / as parent, did not forget their ancient tricks, / and even goat-like half beasts moved their homes / and golden domes on the hill of the new Babylon, / and now Sirens are sitting on top of a consecrated church.²³

This dystopian vision of the eternal city may seem in sharp contrast to what was publicized in the Roman court of the time, and to what could be referred as the "Renaissance ideal" tout court. Yet, it is the product of a Renaissance thinker, and it resonates with the same widespread tradition, which characterized Savonarola's millenarian message and Martin Luther's accusations against the Vatican: the theme of Babylonian Rome.²⁴ Understanding this vision, I argue,

²³Ibid. 5R-V: "Liquite fallacem Babylona, relinquitte molles / Illius illecebres permistaque mella ueneno. / Huc etenim nimium nimiumque nocentia monstra / Migrare truces Scyllaeque et Gorgones, atque / Harpyiae in mediis posuere sedilia templis. / Nec non quae Atlantem olim, et quae Titana parentem / Agnorunt, arteis nec dedicere vetustas, / Semiferaeque etiam caprearum rupe recentis / Mutare domos Babylonis, et aurea tecta / atque super sacra sidunt Acheloides aede."

²⁴ The theme of Babylon has Biblical and theological roots. In his *City of God*, Augustine of Hippo postulates two symbolic cities, Jerusalem (the City of God) and Babylon. These are primarily moral and spiritual symbols: the celestial or spiritual, and the terrestrial or worldly. The one is governed by the love of God, the other by the love of self. See Augustine of Hippo, *De Civitate Dei = the City of God*, trans. P. G. Walsh (Cambridge: Aris &

enriches our contemporary understanding of Early Modern Italy with a distinctive, darker, facet.²⁵

The aim of this research is to explore such vision by examining the features and objectives of Gianfrancesco Pico's metanarrative²⁶ of antiquity. Although Gianfrancesco Pico had a critical influence on his contemporaries and his successors,²⁷ his full body of work still has not received much attention to this day. Whereas Pico himself has certainly been an object of research in recent historiography, as we shall see, most of his books still wait to be translated, and most specialists have only focused their attention on the *Strix sive de ludificatione daemonum* and the *Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium*. In order to really understand Pico's unique vision of pagan antiquity, therefore, I opted for another approach centered on some of his

Phillips/Oxbow, 2005). For Savonarola's use of the theme of Babylonian Rome, see Alessio Assonitis, "Fra Girolamo Savonarola and the Aesthetics of Pollution in Fifteenth-Century Rome," in *Rome, Pollution, and Propriety: Dirt, Disease, and Hygiene in the Eternal City from Antiquity to Modernity*, ed. Mark and Kenneth R. Stow Bradley (2012). 142. For Luther's use of the theme of Babylonian Rome, see Martin Luther et al., "Church and Sacraments," (2016). See also Martin Luther and William R. Russell, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012). For further uses of the Babylonian theme to identify Catholic immorality and corruption in the Protestant world, see John N. King, *Voices of the English Reformation: A Sourcebook* (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). See also Frances E. Dolan, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

²⁵ It also provides a new instrument for the understanding of a Renaissance tradition that highly criticized the intrusion of pagan idols into sacred spaces on the part of Christian observers (from the Dominicans like Bernardino of Siena and Savonarola) but also a lot of others. See chapter 4.

²⁶ Following Jean-François Lyotard's definition, the "metanarrative" refers, in critical theory, to a "narrative about narratives" of historical meaning, experience or knowledge, which provides a society legitimation through the foretold accomplishment of a (as yet unrealized) master idea. See Joseph W. Childers, "The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism," (2000). 186, and Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). xii-iv. A more detailed description of the term will follow in a later section.

²⁷ Charles B. Schmitt affirms that Gianfrancesco Pico's works influenced many intellectuals after him. For example, Schmitt states that his *Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium* has been a major source for the humanists Mario Nizolio (1488-1567), Giulio Castellani (1528-86), Giovanni Battista Bernardi, Paolo Beni (ca. 1552-1625), Filippo Fabri (1564-1630), Pierre Gassendi (1592-1655) and Leibniz. The possible influence of the *Examen Vanitatis* on Agrippa and Montaigne is still a matter of discussion. Two different points of view have been expressed on this question: Fortunat Strowski stated that the *Examen* was known to Montaigne and used extensively by him in the *Apologie de Raymond Sebonde*. P. Villey, stated that Montaigne did not make direct use of the *Examen* - even though he did not deny the possibility that he knew it and had even read it. Recent criticism has maintained that Montaigne's scepticism was based on a direct knowledge of Sextus Empiricus and the arguments contained in the *De vanitate* by Cornelius Agrippa (who in his turn partly followed Sextus and partly Gianfrancesco Pico). See Charles B. Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola (1469-1533) and His Critique of Aristotle*, International Archives of the History of Ideas, 23 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967). 160-81. See also Malusa in Bottin et al., "Models of the History of Philosophy: From Its Origins in the Renaissance to the 'Historia Philosophica'." 49.

lesser known productions, namely his vast production in Latin verse. In fact, very few scholars have worked on Pico's poetic writings, and the existing studies have very seldom considered these poems as a distinctive poetic corpus in its own right.²⁸ This dissertation thus aims to partly fill this historiographical void: a deeper understanding of Pico's poetry, I argue, is crucial to fully understand his thought because they provide a strong *trait d'union* between his philosophical and theological works. Moreover, these poems develop some unique traits that I wish to analyze and contextualize. As I will explain in my dissertation, Pico conceived his hymns as an example of sacred poetry capable of contrasting the growing tradition of Neoplatonic poetry. Pico's poetic production, therefore, was conceived with the same underlying intentions as the rest of his literature: it illustrated his attack against antiquity and also his stance in the contemporary debate on *prisca theologia* and *philosophia perennis*.

Before exploring the role of Pico's poems more fully, it is important to understand who this author was. In order to do so, I will first provide a short biography of Pico, giving an overview of his life and work. Second, I will take a look at the evolution of Gianfrancesco Pico's role in broader historiography in order to address the reasons why Pico progressively became a fundamental character at the center of new narratives about the Italian Renaissance. This exercise will also allow me to better highlight the shortcomings of the existing studies and how this dissertation aims to provide new and useful insights about Pico and the relevance of his poetic writings.

2. Gianfrancesco Pico: A Short Biography

²⁸ With the exception of Matteo Soranzo, "Un'identità Religiosa Nel Primo Cinquecento," *Italian Studies* 70, no. 1 (2015).

Just as many complex and intriguing figures of the past, Gianfrancesco Pico remains, in many ways, a mystery. In order to properly understand the reasons behind his poetry and system of thought, it is necessary to first consider the context in which Pico lived and worked. Despite the originality of his line of thinking, Gianfrancesco Pico was by all means a “man of the Renaissance”. Indeed, his personal history shows a typical image of the Renaissance man: Gianfrancesco Pico was a noble lord, a philosopher, a theologian, and a poet. He wrote biographies, poems, dialogues, and treatises on almost every subject typical of his time: history, philosophy, religion, and perhaps alchemy. As a product of his century, he accepted some intellectual trends while rejecting others, still fitting perfectly within the canons of his age.

Born in 1469, son of Galeotto I Pico (1442 – 1499) and Bianca Maria d'Este (1440 – 1506), Gianfrancesco, future lord of Mirandola and Count of Concordia, was just six years younger than his uncle Giovanni Pico (1463 – 1494), from whom he managed to buy the hereditary title to the principate of Mirandola.²⁹ The deep relationship between the two Picos, uncle and nephew, is manifest not only in Giovanni’s will, dated 1491,³⁰ but also in the letters the two men exchanged during Giovanni’s last years.³¹ Following this affectionate exchange of ideas on philosophy and on faith, it is not difficult to understand the reasons that brought Giovanni Pico to designate Gianfrancesco as curator of the first edition of his *Opera Omnia*.³² We find further proof of this close friendship in the fact that Gianfrancesco was tasked by his

²⁹ See Ferdinando Calori Cesis, *Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola, Detto La Fenice Degli Ingegneri*. (Bologna, 1872). 58-64.

³⁰ See *ibid.* It is important to note that, during the same year, Gianfrancesco ‘bought’ the title of lord of Concordia from his uncle. See Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola and Lucia Pappalardo, *La Strega (Strix) Di Gianfranco Pico* (Roma: Città Nuova, 2017). 85.

³¹ Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Opera Omnia*, ed. Luigi Firpo, vol. I, Monumenta Politica Philosophica Humanistica Rariora (Turin: La Bottega d'Erasmus, 1972). 817-19, 850-51 as quoted in Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola (1469-1533) and His Critique of Aristotle*. 12.

³² Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *De Hominis Dignitate Heptaplus De Ente Et Uno, E Scritti Vari a Cura Di Eugenio Garin*. (Firenze Vallecchi, 1942). 55-59.

uncle to continue the philosophical debate that he had left unfinished after his *De ente et uno*.³³

In fact, the bond of affection and esteem between the two men remained unchanged until the abrupt and unfortunate death of Giovanni in 1494. After Giovanni's passing, Gianfrancesco became his official biographer and editor, inheriting de facto a wide network of friends and contacts in the courts of Florence and Ferrara.³⁴

After the death of his uncle, Gianfrancesco followed the guidance of a new teacher, one of the most important figures of Early Modern philosophy and a man who profoundly marked the development of the Italian Renaissance: Girolamo Savonarola (1452 – 1498).³⁵ From early

³³ Gianfrancesco's contribution to Giovanni's philosophical *querelle* with Antonio Cittadini da Faenza can be found in the various editions of his own works (see *Opera Omnia*, I., 74-89, 840-42). For a broader spectrum on the whole polemic, see *De Hominis Dignitate Heptaplus De Ente Et Uno, E Scritti Vari a Cura Di Eugenio Garin*. 34-40.

³⁴ Among these contacts, it is important to stress the presence of Marsilio Ficino, who wrote a letter of condolences to Gianfrancesco after the death of Giovanni Pico (*Ioannis Pici... Opera*, p. 275), Girolamo Benivieni, who dedicated an edition of his works to Gianfrancesco (GKW 3850), Aldo Manuzio, Matteo Bosso, Pietro Crinito, Domenico Grimani, Filippo Beroardo the Elder, Battista Guarino, and Ercole Strozzi. See Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola (1469-1533) and His Critique of Aristotle*. 13-4.

³⁵ See Weinhardt, Joachim. "Savonarola, Girolamo." in Hans Dieter Betz, "Religion Past and Present," (2009). "The grandson of Michele Savonarola, a famous court physician to the dukes of Ferrara. He studied at the arts faculty of Ferrara, intending to become a physician himself. The crises shaking the church and society gave him doubts about the existence or providence of God. Finally, he interpreted the decay of the church and the world that he was experiencing as a sign of the imminent Last Judgment; he fled his parental home in 1475 and joined the Dominican order in Bologna. He studied theology, held various offices within the order (first stay in Florence between 1482 and 1487), travelled as a preacher, and finally returned to Florence in 1490. In 1491 he became prior of San Marco. With the help of the Medici, he separated his monastery from the provincialate of Lombardy and founded the reformed congregation of San Marco. With burning penitential zeal, he also urged a reform of popular morals (*De simplicitate christianae vitae*, 1496). Besides moral reform, his primary concern was a theoretical demonstration of the truth of the Christian faith in the face of neo-Epicurean and other heterodox schools of thought (*Solatium itineris mei*, sometime after 1480; *Triumphus crucis*, 1497). He believed that the empirically verifiable moral purity of his followers' lives argued the truth of the faith that motivated them. Initially he developed his apocalyptic preaching through exegesis of the Old Testament prophets, but soon he himself was having auditions and visions. When Charles VIII of France entered Italy and took Naples, he saw the event as the fulfillment of his message of judgment. Now he came forward openly as a prophet (*Compendium revelationum*, 1495; *De veritate prophetica*, 1497). The French failure to sack Florence, the expulsion of the Medici, and the reintroduction of a republican constitution reinforced a transformation of his view of the future that had been coming for some time: expectation of the apocalypse gave way to proclamation of a coming renewal of church and state after a period of tribulations. Savonarola's influence grew, even within the civil government (*Trattato circa il reggimento e governo della città di Firenze*, 1498). He advocated a pro-French policy, because he saw Charles as God's instrument for church reform. Pope Alexander VI however formed an Italian league against the king and pressured Florence not to ally with him. Because Savonarola refused to change his attitude, he was forbidden to preach, then finally excommunicated and executed as a heretic. Although Savonarola rejected the pagan cultural interests of the Renaissance, he attracted numerous scholars and artists (e.g. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, S. Botticelli). Luther called him as a witness to the truth against the Roman Church, not only on account of his resistance to Alexander but also because of his interpretation of Pss. 30 and 50 against the

adulthood, in fact, Gianfrancesco had shown the signs of a deep religious faith, an attitude that was further developed under the strong influence of both his humanist mentors, his uncle Giovanni Pico and the friar Savonarola. Notwithstanding the strength of the ties binding uncle and nephew, however, nothing proved as significant for the development of Gianfrancesco's philosophical outlook as the teachings of Girolamo Savonarola. Despite the Dominican friar's wretched fate – he was excommunicated by Pope Alexander VI (1431 – 1503) and then executed as a heretic in 1498 – Pico's affection for him and his ideas went unchanged throughout the years. For example, during the period when this religious reformer was under attack, Pico wrote three apologetic defenses in his honor.³⁶ Furthermore, after the preacher's conviction and death in 1498, Gianfrancesco wrote his biography, a piece that circulated in manuscript form from the beginning of the sixteenth century until its publication in 1674.³⁷ Even after the death of the Dominican friar, Pico never stopped helping the Savonarolan cause. In 1501, Gianfrancesco drew up a defense of Pietro Bernardino (1475 – 1502),³⁸ a controversial follower of Savonarola

Catholic doctrine of merit. But his interpretation stayed within the bounds of late medieval Catholic theology, and in other respects, too, Savonarola nowhere went beyond the views of later internal Catholic reform.”

³⁶ The first, *Invectiva in prophetiam fratris Hieronymi Savonarolae*, was published in Milan in 1497 [H 4566] and reprinted in 1498 as *Defensio Hieronymi Savonarolae adversus Samuelem Cassinensem* [H 13, 003]. Another defense, named *Opusculum de sententia excommunicationis iniusta pro Hieronymi Savonarolae prophetae innocentia*, was written right after the friar excommunication in May 1497 and dedicated to Ercole d'Este [See documents 145-46 in Antonio Cappelli, “Fra Girolamo Savonarola e notizie intorno al suo tempo”, *Atti e memorie... per le provincie modenesi e parmensi*, IV (1968), 399-400]. In 1498, however, when Savonarola's situation further deteriorated, Pico felt obliged to write a third and last defense of Savonarola, this time in Italian: the *Epistola del conte Zuanfrancesco da la Mirandula in favore de fra Hieronymo da Ferrara dappoi la sua captura* [R 1321]. See Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola (1469-1533) and His Critique of Aristotle*. 15-6.

³⁷ Several manuscripts can be found in the Biblioteca Riccardiana. See *ibid.* 16.

³⁸ “Florentine heretic; born at Florence about 1475; died 1502. His parents were common folk, and he himself lacked all higher education. But he attached himself with fanatical zeal to Savonarola, and, by diligent attendance at his sermons and zealous study of his writings, acquired a wide but superficial theological knowledge. Peter preached to the people in the public squares of Florence and, during the lifetime of Savonarola and after his death, he propagated secretly eccentric and revolutionary doctrines. According to him, the Church must be renewed with the sword; until this was accomplished, there was no need to confess, since all priests, secular and regular, were unworthy. According to the Florentine chronicler, Cerretani, about twenty adherents of Savonarola formed a secret society and elected Peter pope. The latter, who was then twenty-five years old, assumed special ecclesiastical functions and anointed his followers with oil (the alleged anointment of the Holy Ghost). The members attended no Divine Service, but during their meetings prayed in spirit under the leadership of Peter, whom they regarded as a prophet. The association was discovered by the archbishop and at his request the Council of Florence proscribed its meetings. In 1502 the members

who had found refuge in Mirandola. Pico, moreover, offered ample support to the Savonarolan ‘living saint’ Caterina Mattei da Racconigi (1486 – 1547),³⁹ although the questionable conduct of the religious woman had already led to an interrogation by the court bishop of Turin in 1512.⁴⁰

When it comes to Pico’s political life as the Prince of Mirandola, we get a picture marked by complexity and controversy. About a year after the death of Savonarola in 1498, Pico’s own father died, leaving Gianfrancesco in a difficult position. In the years of his father Galeotto I’s dominion, there had been several family disagreements over the rights of inheritance of the lands of Mirandola and Concordia.⁴¹ In order to avoid future issues in matters of succession, in 1491 the younger brothers of Gianfrancesco, Lodovico (1472 – 1509) and Federico, had forfeited their right of succession. In the same year, Galeotto had been able to obtain the investiture of Emperor Maximilian I (1459 – 1519) to the domain of Mirandola and the surrounding areas together with the right of succession for his eldest son, Gianfrancesco. Following this new acquisition, Antonmaria, Galeotto’s brother, tried in vain to gain the support of the Emperor, who rejected his request and confirmed Galeotto as Prince of Mirandola. After his father died in 1499, therefore, Gianfrancesco inherited the coveted title. For precaution’s sake, the young Prince requested – and obtained – a new investiture by Maximilian I.⁴² Despite the Emperor’s support, however,

left the town secretly and proceeded to Mirandola where Count Gian Francesco, a zealous supporter of Savonarola, gave them a friendly reception. When, a little later, the count was besieged by two of his brothers, who claimed Mirandola, Peter declared it God's will that Gian Francesco should overcome his enemies. However, Mirandola was taken and the count lost his territory in August 1502. The sectaries falling into the hands of the victors, Peter and some of his companions were burned as heretics; the remainder were expelled or dispatched to Florence. The attempts of Protestant historians to stamp Peter as a forerunner of the Reformation cannot be historically justified.” Ludwig Pastor and Frederick Ignatius Antrobus, *The History of the Popes: From the Close of the Middle Ages: Drawn from the Secret Archives of the Vatican and Other Original Sources* (London; St. Louis: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co.; Herder, 1902). 214-16.

³⁹ For further information, see: Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola and Linda Pagnotta, *Compendio Delle Cose Mirabili Di Caterina Da Racconigi* (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 2010).

⁴⁰ See Herzig in AA.VV., *Dizionario Storico Dell'inquisizione*, vol. I (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2010). 1206-07.

⁴¹ Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola (1469-1533) and His Critique of Aristotle*. 17.

⁴² See Girolamo Tiraboschi, “Memorie Storiche Modenesi Col Codice Diplomatico Illustrato Con Note,” (1793). IV, 196.

Gianfrancesco then faced the insurrection of his two younger brothers, who formed a coalition in order to take Mirandola forcefully. After several unsuccessful attempts, Lodovico and Francesco finally managed to conquer the region in 1502 with the help of their ally Gian Giacomo Trivulzio (1441 – 1518), forcing Gianfrancesco into exile.⁴³

Gianfrancesco's long period of banishment had a major impact on his life, and marked his philosophical development in a profound way. During his eight years of exile, Pico managed to visit some of the most important courts of his time, especially the Imperial and Papal courts, allowing him to establish new and strong bonds with the intellectual milieu orbiting around these two cultural epicenters. Gianfrancesco visited the Emperor twice, in 1502 and in 1505. He did so mostly to gain support for his claim over the principality he had lost to his brothers. During his short stays, Gianfrancesco had the opportunity to get acquainted with some of the most important German philosophical and theological figures of the time, notably Johann Reuchlin (1455 – 1522), Conrad Celtis (1459 – 1508), Beatus Renanus (1485 – 1547), Willibald Pirckheimer (1470 – 1530), Jacob Wimpfeling (1450 – 1528), and Thomas Wolf.⁴⁴ The latter has also been instrumental in the printing, distribution, and overall success of Pico's writings in Germany. The Emperor's seat in Germany was not the only pilgrimage site that Gianfrancesco visited several times. Indeed, another one was naturally very decisive in his quest for political support: the pontifical court.

Despite the obvious differences of opinion that divided the two men in matters regarding faith and dogma – on that point, Pico notably accused the pontifex after his death⁴⁵ –

⁴³ Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola (1469-1533) and His Critique of Aristotle*. 17-8. See also Pico della Mirandola and Pappalardo, *La Strega (Strix) Di Gianfranco Pico*. 85.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 23.

⁴⁵ Gian Mario Cao, *Pico Della Mirandola Goes to Germany: With an Edition of Gianfrancesco Pico's De Reformandis Moribus Oratio* (Bologna: Il mulino, 2004). 522.

Gianfrancesco found in Julius II a solid political ally when his army allowed him to enter Mirandola once again in 1511, although only for a short period.⁴⁶ His first official visit to the Pope took place between 1508 and 1509. The reason for the visit was simple: convincing the Pope to free Mirandola with his army lodged in Bologna. Although this visit did not have any immediate consequences, it nevertheless allowed Pico to start building a relationship with Julius II and his entourage.⁴⁷ It is unsure if the second visit to the papal court between 1511 and 1512 had a major impact on Gianfrancesco's political troubles. However, as we have seen, his longer stay in Rome allowed him to give a precious testimony to some of Julius II's greatest architectural and propagandistic works. Moreover, while stationed at the papal court, Gianfrancesco wrote one of his most influential works, the collection of *epistulae* between him and the Cardinal Pietro Bembo (1470 – 1547), better known as the *De imitatione*.⁴⁸ With the death of Julius II in 1513 and the beginning of Leo X's (1475 – 1521) pontificate, Gianfrancesco thought he had found a better interlocutor not only for his political claims, but also, and foremost, for his exhortations towards a moral reformation of the Church. For this very reason, Pico, once again in control of Mirandola thanks to the help of the imperial vicar bishop Matthäus Lang von Wellenburg (1469 – 1540), strived to gain the new Pope's trust and support.⁴⁹ Gianfrancesco's works *De amore divino* (1516) and *De reformatandis moribus* (probably written between 1513 and 1515, but printed only in 1520), two pieces of deep theological and moral value, were both dedicated to Leo X. The same can be said of the treatise *De veris calamitatibus*

⁴⁶ Pico della Mirandola and Pappalardo, *La Strega (Strix) Di Gianfranco Pico*. 85.

⁴⁷ Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola (1469-1533) and His Critique of Aristotle*. 25.

⁴⁸ See Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola, Pietro Bembo, and Giorgio Santangelo, *Le Epistole "De Imitatione"* (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1954).

⁴⁹ Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola (1469-1533) and His Critique of Aristotle*. 25.

causis nostrorum temporum, published after Leo X's permission to establish a printing press in Mirandola.⁵⁰

Between 1514 and 1533, Pico's main political controversies seemed resolved. Thanks to a diplomatic agreement with his family overseen by Bishop Matthew Lang, the Prince of Mirandola finally ruled over part of his lands.⁵¹ After the long-awaited opportunity to rule, Pico quickly showed his religious and political inclination to the world. As a ruler, in fact, Gianfrancesco made continuous efforts to protect Savonarola's sympathizers, a clear sign of his unbroken devotion and dedication to the Savonarolan ideal. While he was helping alleged Savonarolan heretics, lamenting the unjust execution of friar Girolamo, and even interceding in support of a controversial holy woman, Caterina da Racconigi, Pico showed no remorse when it came to justifying his harsh treatment of heretics and vehemently denouncing Luther as "the worst heresiarch in history."⁵² He also enthusiastically supported the campaign against witchcraft initiated in Mirandola in 1522 by Girolamo Armellini (1470 – 1550),⁵³ the filo-Savonarolan inquisitor of Reggio and Parma.⁵⁴ In April of 1523 friar Luca Bettini, one of the Savonarolan radicals protected by Pico, was appointed vicar of Armellini. Finally united by their intent to eradicate sorcery and heresy, the inquisitor and the vicar tried more than sixty suspects and, with full support from Gianfrancesco Pico, they ordered the execution of seven women found guilty

⁵⁰ F. J. Norton, *Italian Printers, 1501-1520: An Annotated List, with an Introduction* (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1958). 53. *De reformandis moribus* was also the title of the speech Gianfrancesco Pico delivered during the 5th Lateran Council. See Gian Mario Cao, *Pico Della Mirandola Goes to Germany: With an Edition of Gianfrancesco Pico's De Reformandis Moribus Oratio* (Bologna: Il mulino, 2004).

⁵¹ Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola (1469-1533) and His Critique of Aristotle*. 25. See also Pico della Mirandola and Pappalardo, *La Strega (Strix) Di Gianfranco Pico*. 85.

⁵² Massimo Firpo, *Gli Affreschi Di Pontormo a San Lorenzo: Eresia, Politica E Cultura Nella Firenze Di Cosimo I*, Biblioteca Di Cultura Storica (Torino Einaudi, 1997). 343.

⁵³ See Herzig, Tamar "Armellini, Girolamo" in AA.VV., *Dizionario Storico Dell'inquisizione*, I. 68-72.

⁵⁴ On this subject, Pappalardo pointedly remarks that Pico's persecution of the witches could have hidden his desire to hinder Francesca Trivulzio's power over the territories that she took away from him. See Pico della Mirandola and Pappalardo, *La Strega (Strix) Di Gianfranco Pico*. 85-86.

of witchcraft in 1522 and 1523. Gianfrancesco, who had previously expressed concerns about magic and witchcraft in some of his early works, was closely involved in the prosecution and, with the help of Armellini and Bettini, he even interrogated some of the accused himself. His personal involvement in the different trials clearly had political reasons, since some of the suspects lived in the domain of Francesca Trivulzio (1475 – 1560) and his patron, the Marquis of Mantua, tried in vain to prevent the prosecutions against them.⁵⁵ In response to the growing criticism following the witch trials in Mirandola, Pico wrote the best-known book on witchcraft of the Italian Renaissance: *Strix, sive de ludificatione daemonum* (Bologna, Hieronymus de Benedictis, 1523). Promptly translated by Friar Leandro Alberti (1479 – 1552) in 1524, the book became the first treatise on witchcraft published in the vernacular in Italy. Pico, among others,⁵⁶ argued that witches were part of a heretical sect and praised the inquisitors who strove to exterminate them, while immortalizing Armellini as the figure of the judge in this dialogue. As examples of this book's tangible influence throughout the century, inquisitors such as Bartolomeo Spina (1474 – 1546 ca.)⁵⁷ and important demonologists such as Jean Bodin (1530–1596), later referred to the *Strix* as a fundamental work on demonology and witchcraft.⁵⁸

After a life of political struggles, Gianfrancesco's dominion over Mirandola found a brutal end on 16 October 1533, the day his nephew Galeotto II Pico (1508 – 1550) entered the castle of Mirandola, murdered Gianfrancesco and his son Alberto (1519 – 1533), and imprisoned his wife and the other members of the family.⁵⁹ From the writings produced in the last years of

⁵⁵ Herzig, Tamar in *ibid.* 1206-7.

⁵⁶ I am primarily referring to Heinrich Kramer. See Heinrich Institoris, *The Hammer of Witches a Complete Translation of the Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. Christopher S. Mackay (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁵⁷ See Gabriella Zarri, "Spina Bartolomeo," in Richard M. Golden, *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition* (Santa Barbara [Calif.]: ABC-CLIO, 2006). 1081–2.

⁵⁸ Herzig, Tamar in *AA.VV.*, *Dizionario Storico Dell'inquisizione*, I. 1206-7.

⁵⁹ Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola (1469-1533) and His Critique of Aristotle*. 29.

his life, little remains but a meager collection of letters. This period was, however, far from being uneventful. Indeed, Pico died a few years after the sack of Rome (1527), and the capitulation of the Republic of Florence (1530). It was the end of the age of strife that marked the beginning of the 16th century, an age that found in Gianfrancesco Pico one of its most iconic personalities.

3. Toward a Narrative of Complexity: Gianfrancesco Pico in the Early Historiography

In this next section, we will see how the figure of Gianfrancesco Pico progressed over the years in the historiography, at first almost completely forgotten, to eventually being considered one of the leading figures of Italian early modernity. As we have seen, the importance of Gianfrancesco Pico was manifest in the eyes of his contemporaries, and his success as a writer continued until the beginning of the 18th century.⁶⁰ Yet, despite this early recognition, the figure of Pico is yet to be thoroughly analyzed, and many of his works still wait to be published in modern editions and translated. Although the reasons behind this delay might be many – Gianfrancesco Pico’s complex Latin syntax, for instance – the overall conceptualization of the Renaissance in the late 19th and early 20th century did not help to shed light on this philosopher and his multifaceted world. Ever since its genesis as a modern concept, in fact, what is referred to as the “Italian Renaissance” has been associated with a period of drastic change that followed the darkness of the Middle Ages. However, as we shall see, this break with the previous era was not depicted in such a “traumatic” way in Gianfrancesco’s philosophical writings, especially when compared to those of Marsilio Ficino, Nicholas of Cusa and, of course, of his uncle Giovanni. The Renaissance has thus for a long time been seen as the rebirth of the single individual in society as well as in the cosmos, and as the reawakening of the application of

⁶⁰ Ibid. 160-81.

ancient knowledge to political, cultural and philosophical matters.⁶¹ This new period was brought forth by what we generally call Humanism – a new cultural and intellectual movement that prompted the urge to rediscover ancient civilization and thought. Throughout the early historiography, as detailed below, the leading intellectuals of the Renaissance were believed to be mainly concerned with the major philosophical schools of the era – Aristotelian and Platonist - combining the philological ideals of the early humanists with a new vein of Hellenic knowledge, thus building the bases for modern philosophy and science.⁶²

Although this general depiction might seem reasonable at first glance, recent historiography will argue that such a simplistic description cannot truly portray the many facets of what is now called the Early Modern period.⁶³ Indeed, the general idea of an enlightened Renaissance, liberating humanity from the oppression of medieval culture is, first and foremost, a historical construct, a vision fostered by modern Western scholars.⁶⁴ In short, the “Renaissance

⁶¹ John Addington Symonds, *The Age of the Despots* (New York: Putnam, 1960). 22.

⁶² One must also mention the long linguistic bias that modernity held against most Renaissance literature in Latin, which Celenza cleverly defines as “the lost Italian Renaissance.” This lack of attention toward many Latin sources of the 15th and 16th century certainly played a major role in the oblivion of Gianfrancesco Pico’s works. On this subject, see Christopher S. Celenza, *The Lost Italian Renaissance: Humanists, Historians, and Latin’s Legacy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

⁶³ See, for example, Christopher S. Celenza, *The Lost Italian Renaissance: Humanists, Historians, and Latin’s Legacy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004). On the validity of the term “Renaissance” or “Renaissances” see Warren Treadgold, “Introduction: Renaissances and Dark Ages,” in *Renaissances before the Renaissance: Cultural Revivals of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. Warren Treadgold (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1984). See also Peter von Moos’s incisive 1988 critique of the term in general in Peter von Moos, “Das 12. Jahrhundert—Eine ‘Renaissance’ Oder Ein ‘Aufklärungszeitalter’?,” *Mittelateinisches Jahrbuch*, no. 23 (1988). Moreover, see Marcia Colish, “Haskins’s Renaissance Seventy Years Later: Beyond Anti-Burckhardtianism,” *The Haskins society journal: studies in medieval history. Vol. 11, issued to members for the year 1998* 11 (2003). and “When Did the Middle Ages End? Reflections of an Intellectual Historian,” in *Schooling and Society: The Ordering and Reordering of Knowledge in the Western Middle Ages*, ed. A. A. MacDonald and Michael W. Twomey (Leuven [Belgium]; Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2004). On the lively debate on whether or not the Renaissance has been an absolute epochal divide, or whether we would do better to de-emphasize or even abandon that notion, see Karl H. Dannenfeldt, *The Renaissance: Basic Interpretations* (Lexington, Mass.: Heath, 1974).

⁶⁴ See Arnaldo Momigliano, G. W. Bowersock, and Tim Cornell, *A.D. Momigliano: Studies on Modern Scholarship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). 46: “The new antiquarianism of the nineteenth century, like that of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was an answer to Pyrrhonism, but unlike the earlier antiquarianism it claimed to be able to penetrate beyond phenomena into the spirit of a people and the structure of an organization. It was a study of antiquity revised in accordance with romantic notions of national character and the organic state, which in its turn paved the way for the sociological investigation of the ancient world introduced by Max Weber.”

ideal” constitutes what the 20th century French philosopher François Lyotard (1924–98) defined as a metanarrative.⁶⁵ Master narratives, metanarratives, metadiscourses, and grand narratives, as explained by Lyotard, are generally synonymous terms which refer to the accumulation of social theories or philosophies of history that appeal to ideas of mystical and universal truth, a sort of general summary that aims to offer an all-inclusive account of knowledge and experience.

Metanarratives have a rhetorical and moral force, capable of regulating society according to the truths they proclaim. They are *narratives* in the sense that they help shape history in a way that will reveal an underlying meaning. These teleological narratives are also *metanarratives* in that they organize, account for, and reveal the meanings of all other lesser narratives, from the stories of scientific discoveries to the trajectories of single individuals, which are used to emulate and substantiate the grand narratives. It is through their universal descriptive scope that the master narratives hold a society together. They reinforce the status quo in regard to institutions and activities because they orient decision-making, prescribe behavior, order social life, give it a sense of purpose, determine rules and conventions and what counts as valid practice, establish what is true and just, and provide means of interpreting and valuing human action and experience.⁶⁶ Despite their utility, therefore, metanarratives are static, universal, absolute, and totalizing. The task of the postmodern age is, as Lyotard puts it, to delegitimize and deconstruct such accounts. This task has been undertaken with great effort by the historians of the Early Modern period since the second half of the 20th century. Although the path towards a more accurate dialogical⁶⁷ “narrative of narratives” that can encompass, deconstruct and, at the same time, enrich our understanding of what we commonly define as the Italian Renaissance has been

⁶⁵ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. XXIII-IV.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 19-20.

⁶⁷ In a Lyotardian and Bakhtinian sense. See M. M. Bakhtin and Michael Holquist, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981). 276-7.

successfully developed in the recent years, it does not yet fully account for all its facets and nuances.⁶⁸ The study of Gianfrancesco Pico, I argue, is essential in order to offer such nuance and effectively illustrate the inner intricacy of early modern Italy.

First conceptualized in the 19th century, the metanarrative that defined the Italian Early Modern period, the Grand Narrative of the Italian Renaissance, is mainly the creation of a single, brilliant individual: Jacob Burckhardt (1818 – 1897). Pupil of Leopold Von Ranke (1795 – 1886), one of the main founders of modern source-based history,⁶⁹ Burckhardt was the first historian to establish the concept of the Renaissance and branded the essence of that period in Italian history and culture. In short, Burckhardt saw the Renaissance as an *époque* when people ceased hiding their identities in the power of collectivity and tried to shape themselves into proper individuals, using the Greco-Roman ideal as model.⁷⁰ He considered Renaissance individualism as the awakening of man’s awareness of himself, as a being apart from a group or a class, and saw man’s consciousness of self not only as a set of numerous possibilities, but also as the origin of profound issues and contradictions. If the awareness of himself, in fact, gave the Renaissance man freedom to develop and create, it also put him in relation to God and the world,

⁶⁸ Moreover, despite the notable advancements on this subject, the field of historiography as a whole may still suffer of what Peter Novick calls “the crisis of objectivity.” See Bernard Bailyn, “The Challenge of Modern Historiography,” *The American Historical Review* 87, no. 1 (1982). 2-7, as quoted in Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1988): “Paths cross and identities merge, and historiography grows ever broader—and, one would have thought, deeper and more meaningful. But depth of understanding is a function, at the least, of coherence, and the one thing above all else that this outpouring of historical writing lacks is coherence. [...] The absence of effective organizing principles in modern historiography—its shapelessness, its lack of general coherence—is not simply the result of the immense increase in writing. It stems [...] from deeper roots. Many of the most energetic historians have forsaken the general goals of history for technical problem-solving. [...] Perhaps that is the way historical understanding must grow. But, whether or not that is so, large areas of history, including some of the most intensively cultivated, have become shapeless, and scholarship is heavily concentrated on unconnected technical problems.”

⁶⁹ See Fritz Richard Stern, *The Varieties of History: From Voltaire to the Present* (New York: Meridian Books, 1956). 54. See also Anna Green and Kathleen Troup, *The Houses of History: A Critical Reader in Twentieth-Century History and Theory* (New York: New York University Press, 1999). 2.

⁷⁰ Jacob Burckhardt, Samuel George Chetwynd Middlemore, and Irene Gordon, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (New York; Toronto: New American Library, 1960). As in James Hankins, “The “Baron Thesis” after Forty Years and Some Recent Studies of Leonardo Bruni,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56, no. 2 (1995). 310.

which he also became responsible for.⁷¹ With this new mentality came an increasing lack of commitment to family, state, and religion, and a new willingness to treat these matters not as givens of tradition but as *Menschenwerke*, inert material ought to be shaped by the *homo faber*.⁷² Burckhardt's effective vision of the Renaissance, despite its weaknesses and obvious idiosyncrasies, was able to last longer than any other narrative about the Early Modern period.

Despite the efforts of a consistent wave of "microhistory"⁷³ that has effectively reshaped academic research after the studies of Carlo Ginzburg⁷⁴ – an approach that still influences the

⁷¹ Jacob Burckhardt, Samuel George Chetwynd Middlemore, and Irene Gordon, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (New York; Toronto: New American Library, 1960). 81-82: "In the Middle Ages both sides of human consciousness – that which was turned within as that which was turned without – lay dreaming or half awake beneath a common veil. The veil was woven of faith, illusion and childish prepossession, through which the world and history were seen clad in strange hues. Man was conscious of himself only as member of a race, people, party, family, or corporation – only through some general category. In Italy this veil first melted into air; an objective treatment and consideration of the state and of all the things of this world became possible."

⁷² Hankins, "The "Baron Thesis" after Forty Years and Some Recent Studies of Leonardo Bruni." 310.

⁷³ For a definition of microhistory, see G. Magnússon Sigurður and István Szijártó, "What Is Microhistory? Theory and Practice," (2013). "Microhistory is, in the first approach, the intensive historical investigation of a relatively well defined smaller object, most often a single event, or 'a village community, a group of families, even an individual person' [Edward Muir, Guido Ruggiero, and Collection Mazal Holocaust, *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991). 3]. Focusing on certain cases, persons and circumstances, microhistory allows an intensive historical study of the subject, giving a completely different picture of the past from the investigations about nations, states, or social groupings, stretching over decades, centuries, or whatever *longue durée*. Similarly to classical Greek plays, where we can find a threefold unity of place, time and action, the microhistorical approach creates a focal point, collecting the different rays coming from the past, and this lends it a real force. Microhistory, however – and this is the second and not any more evident element of its definition – has an objective that is much more far-reaching than that of a case study: microhistorians always look for the answers for 'great historical questions,' soon to be defined, when studying small objects. As Charles Joyner said, they 'search for answers to large questions in small places' [Charles W. Joyner, *Shared Traditions: Southern History and Folk Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999). 1]. And finally, the third main feature of microhistory, and here first of all the original Italian *microstoria* is meant, is the stress put on agency. For microhistorians, people who lived in the past are not merely puppets on the hands of great underlying forces of history, but they are regarded as active individuals, conscious actors. These elements of a definition are evidently interconnected. It is the 'great historical question' that legitimates the micro-analysis, while, as Brad S. Gregory put it, it is on the micro-level that the agency of the ordinary people can be preserved [Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999). 101]."

⁷⁴ Even though Carlo Ginzburg himself has sketched the story of the term "microhistory" (See Carlo Ginzburg, "Threads and Traces True, False, Fictive," (2012). 193 – 214), demonstrating its existence prior to the 70's, the influence of the Italian wave of "*microstoria*" has been the sparkle that started the entire trend. Within this "*microstoria*," it is indeed the work of its best-known representative, Ginzburg, that might serve as a starting point, and the obvious choice to demonstrate his scholarship is his world-famous book *The Cheese and the Worms*, published originally in Italy in 1976. See *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

work of many historians nowadays⁷⁵ – the Grand Narrative of the Renaissance is ever present in our collective psyche. The Italian Renaissance is still perceived as a period of cultural and intellectual rebirth, symbolized by Niccolò Machiavelli’s civic humanism, Sandro Botticelli’s (1445 – 1510) pagan gods, and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola’s syncretic aspirations towards a common religion and thought under the light of the *prisca theologia*.⁷⁶ However, every light casts its shadow, and while this Grand Narrative still succeeds in highlighting major characters and influential trends of 15th and early 16th century cultural history, it tends to overlook, if not silence, I argue, any kind of evidence that constitutes an anomaly for its underlying paradigm. What are now considered icons of Renaissance painting were not necessarily celebrated in their time, for instance Sandro Botticelli’s famous *Birth of Venus*, which its very author eventually deemed unworthy in light of more conservative types of *pietas*.⁷⁷ As we saw earlier, Giovanni

⁷⁵ Such as Giovanni Levi, Simona Cerutti, and Osvaldo Raggio. See Giovanni Levi, *Inheriting Power: The Story of an Exorcist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). See also Simona Cerutti, *Mestieri E Privilegi: Nascita Delle Corporazioni a Torino, Secoli Xvii-Xviii* (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1992). And Osvaldo Raggio, *Faide e parentele: Lo stato genovese visto dalla Fontanabuona* (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1990).

⁷⁶ *Prisca theologia* is the doctrine that affirms that a single, true, theology exists, and that such theology lives through all religions, and which was given by God to man in antiquity. Following the examples of the Ancient and late Ancient thinkers, “Renaissance philosophers understood from the sources at their disposal that true philosophy had not begun with the Greeks and true religion had not begun with the Hebrews; the two had their common origin in a much more ancient “*prisca theologia*” or “*prisca sapientia*”, also known as magic and widespread in the ancient world; and of course – by the very fact that it was “true” – this ancient wisdom had to be compatible with the fundamental tenets of Christianity.” Wouter J. Hanegraaff et al., “Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism,” (Leiden; Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2005). 1126.

⁷⁷ In later life, Botticelli was, along with Fra 'Bartolomeo and the young Michelangelo, one of the artists who have been deeply influenced by teachings of Friar Girolamo Savonarola. Although the full extent of Savonarola's influence remains uncertain, traces of it can be found in Botticelli's *Mystic Nativity* (1500-1501). On this subject, see Rab Hatfield, “Botticelli's Mystic Nativity, Savonarola and the Millennium,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*. 58 (1995). Quoting Richard Viladesilau: “It is known that members of Botticelli's family, including his brother Simone, were disciples of Savonarola. According to Vasari, the painter himself was also a *piagnone* (weeper) as Savonarola's followers were mockingly called [Giorgio Vasari, Julia Conaway Bondanella, and Peter E. Bondanella, “The Lives of the Artists,” (1998). 228]. Some point to the preacher's influence as the reason for the change in Botticelli's late style, as well as for his apparent abandonment of mythological themes. Some have seen Botticelli's Mystic Crucifixion of 1498(?) (online: <http://tinyurl.com/2vma49>) as a tribute to Savonarola. It certainly reflects the later apocalyptic warnings to the city of Florence. The crucified Christ is shown against the background of the city, in which we can recognize Brunelleschi's cathedral dome and the tower of Giotto. Behind the cross, flames appear through dark clouds. At the top left sits God with a book (the Apocalypse?). Crusader-like shields bearing a red cross fly through the air. Mary Magdalene, the symbol of repentance, throws herself at the foot of the cross, looking not at Christ but at an angel standing to the right. The angel holds a flaming scourge, threatening an animal that seems to be intended to be a lion (symbol of the city of Florence) that he holds in the other hand. (If the animal is a lion, it is

Pico della Mirandola, Gianfrancesco Pico's uncle and the central hero of Ernst Cassirer's seminal *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy* (1927),⁷⁸ was buried in Dominican vestments after having devoted the last years of his short existence to the Prior of San Marco, Girolamo Savonarola.⁷⁹ Moreover, if many enlightened writings were produced during the Renaissance, many depicting a contrasting philosophy were also published. For example, in 1486 – only two years after the publication of Ficino's *Opera Platonis* – the Dominican friar Heinrich Kramer (1430 – 1505) published the fearsome *Malleus Maleficarum*, possibly the most important and influent treaty on witchcraft known to western culture.⁸⁰ The common idea of the Renaissance as a prelude to the Enlightenment is therefore challenged by the ominous presence of religion and collectivity in almost every sector of culture. On this subject, during the second half of the 20th century, a different kind of Grand Narrative started to take shape, a more nuanced narrative that finally started to take Gianfrancesco Pico into account.

Among the generation of experts who approached the Grand Narrative of the Renaissance after Burckhardt, Eugenio Garin and Paul Oskar Kristeller were the most important scholars to acknowledge Gianfrancesco Pico and to consider him as an important missing character for a better understanding of his age, while regretting the lack of research on the subject.⁸¹ In spite of

much out of proportion to the human figures. It would be tempting to interpret it as a weasel, which medieval bestiaries list as a symbol of those who hear the word of God and lose it because of the cares of the world [Matt. 13:22], or perhaps an otter, the symbol of a tyrant and killer. However, the thickness of the neck of the animal seems most easily explained as an attempt to portray a lion's mane.) The painting is now in the Fogg Museum at Harvard University.” See Richard Viladesau, *The Triumph of the Cross: The Passion of Christ in Theology and the Arts, from the Renaissance to the Counter-Reformation* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). 300.

⁷⁸ Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).

⁷⁹ Richard Henry Popkin, “The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle,” (2003). 20.

⁸⁰ Institoris, *The Hammer of Witches a Complete Translation of the Malleus Maleficarum*. 1. For a detailed reconstruction of the influence of the *Malleus Maleficarum* in relation to Gianfrancesco Pico's account of Witchcraft, see Pico della Mirandola and Pappalardo, *La Strega (Strix) Di Gianfranco Pico*. 52-70.

⁸¹ One must not forget, however, the contribution of Gertrude Bramlette Richards and Harry Caplan during the first half of the century. See Gertrude Bramlette Richards, “Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola” (Cornell University Press, 1915). See also Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola and Harry Caplan, *On the Imagination* (New Haven; London: Pub. for Cornell University, Yale University press; H. Milford, Oxford University Press, 1930).

the challenges to a unified Grand Narrative of the Renaissance that Pico's work might bring, in fact, both Kristeller and Garin understood that Giovanni's nephew was a key element in comprehending the Early Modern period. Kristeller never undertook a direct research on Gianfrancesco Pico. However, while naming Gianfrancesco *en passant*, the German historian defined him as "a significant thinker in his own right who would deserve much more extensive study than he has received so far."⁸² Agreeing with this later point of view, Kristeller managed himself to set in motion something that would influence the field of research on Gianfrancesco Pico in the years to come. As the supervisor of Charles B. Schmitt at Columbia University between the late Fifties and 1963, in fact, Kristeller advised him to research Gianfrancesco Pico instead of his better-known uncle, Giovanni. In order to help him with this task, Kristeller introduced him to Richard Popkin (1923 – 2005), one of the leading experts in the evolution of Pyrrhonian skepticism in Early Modern philosophy, thus directing Schmitt's attention to one of the most important aspect of Gianfrancesco Pico: the skeptical tradition.⁸³ Schmitt's dissertation, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469-1533) and His Critique of Aristotle*, finished in 1963, was published in 1967 and, as of today, it is still the most complete and important study on Gianfrancesco Pico.⁸⁴

Even though Eugenio Garin did not supervise any study on Gianfrancesco Pico, he still provided important insight about the philosopher. Introducing Gianfrancesco Pico's intellectual legacy in a brilliant overview, he stated:

⁸² See Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, vol. III, Storia E Letterature (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e letteratura, 1993). 228.

⁸³ Paul Oskar Kristeller and Richard H. Popkin, "Charles B. Schmitt, 1933-1986," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 26, no. 2 (1988).

⁸⁴ Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola (1469-1533) and His Critique of Aristotle*.

Gian Francesco was simply not a pedantic individual affected by bigotry. [...] While in Gian Francesco humanism also lived, though deprived of any boldness, the need was present in his spirit for a religion felt more deeply than in the way it was felt in the beautiful universal credence of the Platonists, credence that could have easily become a deistic Illuminism. He felt that Christianity had brought something new in the world, a radical discovery not available to the classic world, the discovery of a creative spirit, in regard to which the name of Vico was rightly mentioned. Gian Francesco had no power of synthesis, but he illumined with clarity an attitude that was going to be engrafted on the humanistic revival and that reminded all human beings, after the period of elation, of their restricted and sorrowful humanity.⁸⁵

Moreover, in his introduction to Pico's *Opera Omnia*, Garin argued that further studies on Gianfrancesco Pico might reveal how this philosopher's intellectual stature was in fact equal to that of his uncle Giovanni Pico.⁸⁶ If from the elder Pico emerged both the heroic struggle toward what Garin calls "*la scoperta dell'uomo*," and that progressive combination of Platonism and Hermeticism that would have had enormous success in 17th century Europe, in Gianfrancesco appeared several relevant archetypes of a non-lesser Renaissance: the rediscovery of Pyrrhonian scepticism, and the *mise en question* of peripatetic philosophy, imagination, imitation, and divination.⁸⁷ This assertion is a key element that not only shows Garin's acknowledgment of two contemporary Renaissance metanarratives – the Grand narrative and its "darker" mirror – but also encourages the reconsideration of the two Picos as examples of two competing intellectual and cultural streams.

Particularly important on this subject is the work of the scholars who studied and worked at the Warburg Institute⁸⁸ under the influence of Ernst Gombrich. It is Gombrich, in fact, who, in

⁸⁵ Eugenio Garin, *History of Italian Philosophy*, trans. Giorgio Pinton, vol. I (Amsterdam - New York: Rodopi, 2008), 389-90.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ See Garin, Eugenio in Pico della Mirandola, *Opera Omnia*, I. I.

⁸⁸ Founded in 1900 by the German historian and cultural theorist Abraham Moritz Warburg, the *Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg*, later called Warburg Institute, has been the cradle of some of the most important theories on the relationship between the Renaissance and classical culture. During its first German incarnation, the *Bibliothek Warburg* served scholars such as Ernst Cassirer and Erwin Panofsky in developing

the late 1940's and 1950's, began to use Pico as a precious witness that could help us understand the symbolic charge of the *Giardino del Belvedere* and also better grasp the relationship between allegory and demonology.⁸⁹ Thanks to Gombrich's intuition regarding Gianfrancesco Pico, many other Warburg scholars of the following generations started to bring their attention to the lesser known philosopher. Among these, there is the British Warburg musicologist Daniel Pickering Walker.

When in 1958 Daniel Walker published his *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella* – a ground breaking work that remains at the foundation of the contemporary scholarly understanding of a critical aspect in Early Modern Europe: Renaissance esotericism – he challenged the common idea that magic was a secondary and insignificant aspect of Renaissance.⁹⁰ Walker's intuitions provided an important take on the theory of magic and its deep relationship with Early Modern Christianity. According to Walker, in fact, Renaissance intellectuals were constantly in search of means to justify their belief in non-Christian practices under a Christian paradigm, thus reinforcing the division between spiritual and demonic magic. In order to describe the reaction that such attempt at conciliation had on a certain part of the intellectual elite of the time, Walker makes use of Gianfrancesco Pico, placing him among the homogenous group of intellectuals who rejected Marsilio Ficino's theology and practice.⁹¹

theories that brought to works like *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy* (1927), *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923–1929) and *Ein Beitrag zur Begriffsgeschichte der älteren Kunsttheorie* (1924; translated into English as *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*). For further reading on the institute and his founder, see E. H. Gombrich and Fritz Saxl, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

⁸⁹ See Ernst H. Gombrich, "Icones Symbolicae: The Visual Image in Neo-Platonic Thought," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 11 (1948). 179-80. See also "Hypnerotomachiana," *Journal of the Warburg and the Courtauld Institutes* XIV (1951). 123-4.

⁹⁰ See Brian B. Copenhaver in Daniel P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella* (University Park (PA): Pennsylvania state University Press, 2000). VII – X.

⁹¹ See Daniel P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella* (University Park (PA): Pennsylvania state University Press, 2000). 146-51.

Despite his harsh judgment on such group, whom he described as “evangelical hard-heads,”⁹² Walker was possibly one of the first academics to actively acknowledge a counter-tradition to Ficino and his intellectual legacy.⁹³ The Gianfrancesco Pico described by Walker, despite some limitations, showed some of the main elements that are still very much associated to him: the rediscovery of the ancient sceptical tradition, the critique on pagan philosophy as whole, and the condemnation of magic and prescience, both seen as witchcraft.⁹⁴ Walker’s most important insight regarding Gianfrancesco Pico, however, concerns the reason that brought the lord of Mirandola to dedicate most of his life to the critique of ancient religions and thought. For Walker, in fact, the aim of Pico was not just to invalidate the lessons of non-Christian ancient philosophers, but also to attack the theories of his contemporaries and their intention to legitimize non-Christian thought and practice, especially with regards to Marsilio Ficino⁹⁵, a subject that shall be developed in more detail in the following chapters.

Following in Walker’s footsteps, Frances A. Yates, one of the most influential pioneers in the field of Early Modern philosophy and the history of science in the 1960’s and beyond, designated Gianfrancesco Pico as one of the most significant figures leading “a growing outcry of alarm, mounting in intensity throughout the sixteenth century, against the increase in magical practices.”⁹⁶ Even if he was only the subject of a short chapter in her treatise *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (1964), Gianfrancesco Pico’s presence among those who opposed themselves to what Yates called the “Hermetic Tradition” is important for many reasons, as it put

⁹² See Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*. 145: “The members of this [group] can be described as evangelical hard-heads [...] who believe all magic to be demonic or diabolic and illusory; who tend to be sceptical about the reality of supernatural phenomena; who distrust all pagan philosophy, particularly Neoplatonism; who take the Bible as their supreme authority whenever possible; who in general have a sensible, no-nonsense outlook on things, usually based on a moderate, Christianized Aristotelianism.”

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 146

⁹⁵ Ibid. 146-9.

⁹⁶ Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1964). 157-8.

Pico not only as a witness to a certain tradition/narrative, but also as a protagonist of a second one, still uncertain, still out of focus but definitely present. Introduced in an important article on the *Corpus Hermeticum* written by Kristeller in 1938,⁹⁷ the development of the concept of Hermetic Tradition is often considered as Francis Yates' academic greatest contribution. In the years immediately following her *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, the idea of a hidden and forgotten tradition suppressed and ostracized by mainstream historiography became a major source of debate.⁹⁸ Although at the present time the concept of the Hermetic Tradition as an instrumental factor in the rise of modern science is no longer accepted by historians,⁹⁹ Yates' vision of the Renaissance is still significant nowadays, and it is important to underline how her metanarrative accepted Gianfrancesco Pico as a witness and a counterpart to the hermetic tradition.

On that topic, it is fundamental to also remember the contribution of Richard Popkin, who shed light on the influence that Savonarola and Gianfrancesco Pico had in the rebirth of the sceptical tradition between the 15th and the 16th century. In his *The History of Scepticism: from Savonarola to Bayle* (first published in 1960) Popkin identified the Florentine Convent of San

⁹⁷ Paul Oskar Kristeller, "Marsilio Ficino E Lodovico Lazzarelli: Contributo Alla Diffusione Delle Idee Ermetiche Nel Rinascimento," *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa*. 7 (1938).

⁹⁸ Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Beyond the Yates Paradigm: The Study of Western Esotericism between Counterculture and New Complexity1," *Aries* 1, no. 1 (2001). 14. Hanegraaff's latest contribution toward the refutation of Yates' grand narrative of the Hermetic tradition clearly defines, I argue, the position of contemporary historiography on the subject. See (Hanegraaff 2015) 205: "[...] "Renaissance Hermeticism" was actually not very "Hermetic" at all. The essential Hermetic doctrine of salvation by means of a "supra-rational" knowledge or gnosis was largely or completely overlooked. With just very few exceptions (perhaps only Lazzarelli, followed by Agrippa), it seems that Renaissance intellectuals were far more interested in aspects that are in fact marginal to the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the philosophical *Hermetica* generally: notably the idea of a venerable *prisca theologia* and concepts of astral magic. Thirdly, it follows that we cannot speak of a "Hermetic Tradition" in any precise sense of the word, that is to say, of an actual transmission of Hermetic spirituality from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance. That terminology should be abandoned. It is much more correct to speak of a discourse about Hermes. Finally, this discourse should not be seen as some autonomous entity. It makes more sense to see it as just one dimension of a much broader and more fundamental Renaissance discourse on ancient wisdom. As suggested earlier, we might refer to it as Platonic Orientalism: the idea of a very ancient spiritual wisdom transmitted by Platonism and originating not in Greece but deriving from some Oriental source."

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 14.

Marco as one of the places where the interest for Pyrrhonian scepticism found its Renaissance renewal.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, he designated Savonarola and Gianfrancesco Pico as some of the main promoters of this rediscovery, providing reliable proof supporting the fact that the former wanted some of his colleagues to make a complete translation of Sextus. Indeed, according to Pico's *Life of Savonarola*, the friar assigned Vespucci and Zanobi Acciaiuoli, both important Florentine humanists, to the *codices* available at the time in the library of the Convent as well as Pico's own library, which had been moved to San Marco, to work on the translation of Sextus into Latin.¹⁰¹ According to Popkin, however, no significant signs of Pyrrhonian ideas can be found prior to the printing of Sextus' *Hypotyposes*, except for that of Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola.

On this subject, Popkin states:

[...] Gianfrancesco Pico, possibly following the charge he had been given by Giovanni Nesi, offered a thoroughgoing examination and rejection of natural and non-Christian knowledge claims to show their inadequacies. Joining the sceptical arguments of Sextus, which he quoted and used liberally, to Savonarola's negative view of natural knowledge, he presented the first text since antiquity utilizing Pyrrhonism, using it to illuminate knowledge by faith! He concluded that a single religious dogma based on Scripture is much more valuable than all of pagan philosophy.¹⁰²

Even though Popkin believed that Pico had limited influence on the subsequent development of sceptic philosophy, he nevertheless stated that the philosopher of Mirandola managed to set forth the ancient sceptical criticisms of sensory knowledge claims in order to decide what is true and false.¹⁰³ Thanks to his approach and his rediscovery of Sextus Empiricus, Pico, and Savonarola

¹⁰⁰ Popkin, "The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle." 20.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 21.

¹⁰² Ibid. 24.

¹⁰³ Ibid. 24-6.

before him, became nevertheless, in Popkin's opinion, the unwilling initiators of something that would bring forth the modern sceptical tradition.

It is with the publication of Charles Schmitt's *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469-1533) and his critique of Aristotle* (1968), that the younger Pico finally achieved a role of importance not only in the sceptical tradition, but also within the entire Renaissance paradigm. Pico's role, of course, was that of questioning the monolithic experience of the Grand Narrative. "The Renaissance was a many faceted occurrence" stated Schmitt, in a way that echoes in a number of ways the prudence and historicist stance of his mentor Kristeller. "All attempts to reach a definitive characterization of it seem to have fallen short in some way."¹⁰⁴ The outstanding work of those intellectuals who, like Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico, meant to build a bridge between the ancient past and their own age, therefore, cannot suffice in describing a moment of utter complexity such as that of the Italian Renaissance, and Gianfrancesco Pico – infers Schmitt – can be seen as an example of such intricacy. He also explained that:

Whereas Giovanni Pico had often argued that all philosophies and all religions have attained a portion of the truth, Gianfrancesco said, in effect, that all religions and all philosophies – save the Christian religion alone – are mere collections of confused and internally inconsistent falsehoods. In holding such a view, he sided not only with Savonarola, but with certain of the Fathers and with the Reformers as well. On this point, he was insistent. Christianity is a self-subsistent reality and it has little if anything to gain from philosophy, the sciences and the arts. This central thesis diffuses itself through nearly the whole of Gianfrancesco's literary output. He writes not to praise or extend the realm of philosophy but to demolish it.¹⁰⁵

Although it mainly focused on Gianfrancesco's attack against Aristotle contained in his *Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium*, Schmitt's book also succeeded in demonstrating the evolution of

¹⁰⁴ Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola (1469-1533) and His Critique of Aristotle*. 1.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 3.

Pico's thought from an earlier position of tentative doubt and possible conciliation to a mature standpoint of all-destructive scepticism. Schmitt, moreover, managed to demonstrate how Pico's reasons behind his attack on pagan knowledge traced back not only to a strong religious motivation, but also to a deep disillusionment with contemporary learning, and to the rediscovery of the ancient sceptical tradition. Pico, therefore, stood once again between two different worlds: that of Renaissance humanism, well exemplified by his uncle Giovanni Pico, and the religious anti-intellectual resurgence represented by his spiritual guide, Savonarola. With his effort to unite humanism to religious faith, Pico contributed to the re-emergence of a sceptical tendency in the Renaissance period, blending philosophy with theology, philology, and a critical approach to the classical tradition.

Schmitt's and Popkin's studies constituted a huge step forward in the study of Renaissance skepticism, as they helped overcome some of the biases expressed by previous scholars, such as the conviction that the outcome of all scepticism was irreligion, the idea that scepticism emerged from the final crisis of Italian Aristotelianism, or the view that saw new Pyrrhonism as closer to the themes of the Reformation.¹⁰⁶ Charles B. Schmitt also went further than Popkin and introduced an important innovation. Thanks to his study on Gianfrancesco Pico, he situated the watershed of Renaissance scepticism before and not after the intellectual crisis of the Reformation.¹⁰⁷ According to Schmitt, therefore, Gianfrancesco Pico became one of the most important pioneers of modern scepticism.

4. Competing Narratives: Contemporary Approaches to Gianfrancesco Pico

¹⁰⁶ See Henri Busson, *Les sources et le développement du rationalisme dans la littérature française de la Renaissance (1533-1601)* (Paris, Letouzey & Ané 1922). See also, from the same author, *La pensée religieuse française de Charron à Pascal* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1933).

¹⁰⁷ Gianni Paganini and José Raimundo Maia Neto, "Renaissance Scepticisms," (2009). 14.

As we have seen above, the concept of metanarrative as developed by Lyotard is a key concept in our analysis of the role of Pico and his philosophy within the grander Renaissance narrative. Possibly the most important element of Lyotard's account on metanarratives is related to what he identifies as a shift characteristic of twentieth-century postindustrial societies that resulted in a decline of grand narratives' power, credibility, and capacity to forge consensus. Technological progress have changed the nature of knowledge itself and the ways it is acquired, used, and shared. Knowledge is no longer perceived as an end in itself; it is no longer primarily concerned with the "truth," but rather produced according to its uses. Lyotard describes this new, postmodern era as defined by "incredulity towards metanarratives".¹⁰⁸ The Postmodern condition thus ensues a disbelief that an all-encompassing philosophy or one single theory (such as Illuminism, Marxism, or the Grand Narrative of the Renaissance) is capable of uniting, ordering, and explaining all experiences and knowledge in one coherent whole. The universalistic, humanistic narratives of secure knowledge have thus lost their authority; the belief that scientific knowledge and reason can solve social ills and provide a basis for creating a better world have been in large part discredited. Instead, according to Lyotard, grand narratives have been replaced by a plethora of smaller, finite narratives. These multiple and incompatible *petites histoires* or theories function in local, limited contexts: they account for or reveal the meanings of certain specific phenomena, but do not claim universal truth, applicability, or legitimacy.¹⁰⁹ The Grand Narrative of the Renaissance, as it was developed in the 19th and early 20th century, is also subject to this postmodern criticism. During the last fifty years, in fact, scholarship has reevaluated and questioned what was until then seen as certain within the grand narrative of the

¹⁰⁸ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. XXIV.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

Renaissance. During this process of reevaluation, scholars often referred Gianfrancesco Pico and his works.

Thanks to Charles B. Schmitt's monography, the rest of the field progressively began to show interest in Gianfrancesco Pico's life and works. However, it is only during the last three decades that the attention on the lord of Mirandola started to increase exponentially, mostly due to two different lines of research: studies on the modern sceptical tradition on one side and studies on the history of witchcraft in Europe on the other. Both fields, sometimes overlapping,¹¹⁰ brought remarkable advancement in the contemporary state of research. Among those who designated Gianfrancesco Pico as a pioneer of the modern sceptical tradition, two remarkable scholars of the last generation need to be mentioned: Luciano Malusa and Gian Mario Cao. One of the merits of Malusa's work on Pico, *Models of the History of Philosophy: From its Origins in the Renaissance to the 'Historia Philosophica'* (1993), is that of enlarging and structuring Walker's and Yates' idea of Gianfrancesco as the protagonist of a proper counter-narrative of the Renaissance. Like Walker and Yates before him, Malusa described Pico as a leading figure of a wide network of intellectuals that, at the beginning of the 16th century, contributed to the dissenting voice that challenged Ficino's and Giovanni Pico's idea of *prisca theologia* as it was being consolidated, thus introducing a contrary view during the very period when the idea of continuity between antiquity and the Renaissance was being celebrated.¹¹¹ Moreover, Malusa not only succeeded in expanding what Schmitt had done by underlining the sceptical tradition that originated through Pico's *Examen Vanitatis*, but also managed to highlight another fundamental aspect of Gianfrancesco Pico's philosophy, that is, its Augustinian

¹¹⁰ It is most certainly the case of Walter Stephens. See Stephens in Brian P. Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America* (2013). 101-21.

¹¹¹ Malusa in Bottin et al., "Models of the History of Philosophy: From Its Origins in the Renaissance to the 'Historia Philosophica'." 39.

roots.¹¹² Thanks to this intuition, Malusa introduced a new interpretation of Pico's philosophy that still needs to be properly analyzed.

Gian Mario Cao is currently one of the most active scholars in the rediscovery of Gianfrancesco's intellectual heritage. His main project, born with the idea of compiling a catalogue of Gianfrancesco Pico's numerous borrowings from Sextus Empiricus, has centered on the role of Pico in the skeptical tradition, thus following the work Popkin. His judgment on the subject is monolithic: insofar as modern scepticism must maintain and endorse the main tenets of its ancient counterpart,¹¹³ in *Scepticism and Othodoxy: Gianfrancesco Pico as a Reader of Sextus Empiricus* (2007), Cao states that Gianfrancesco Pico cannot be considered the first Renaissance sceptic, as Pico's attitude towards skepticism merely amounted to a negative attitude towards philosophy.¹¹⁴ More importantly, according to Cao, Pico's interpretation of the concept of διαφωνία (disagreement or dispute) ignored the historical making of disagreement, enabling him to take advantage of an essential feature of philosophy – namely its plurality – in order to annihilate it in favor of religious unity. The skeptical principle of δύναμις αντιθετική, the ability to set out opposition, by which the more they set arguments in opposition to each other, the more they acknowledge the lack of criteria of truth, is employed by Pico because of his very trust in the Sceptics' "meekness." In his view, skeptical criticism would straighten out any residual ambition among philosophers and support the unfolding of the only criterion of truth that could escape the regress ad infinitum: the Revelation.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Lodi Nauta, "Lorenzo Valla and Quattrocento Scepticism," *Vivarium* 44, no. 2/3 (2006). 375-6.

¹¹⁴ Gian Mario Cao, *Scepticism and Othodoxy: Gianfrancesco Pico as a Reader of Sextus Empiricus* (Pisa: F. Serra, 2007). 2.

¹¹⁵ "Inter Alias Philosophorum Gentium Sectas, Et Humani, Et Mites: Gianfrancesco Pico and the Sceptics," in *Renaissance Scepticisms*, ed. Gianni Paganini and José Maia Neto (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009). 142.

Cao's uncompromising – and yet well grounded – position has the merit of reopening the debate on Gianfrancesco Pico and the essence of Early Modern scepticism. Almost five years before his monumental attack on Pico, however, another eminent scholar, Walter Stephens, introduced a new narrative that could associate coherently scepticism and religious contempt: that of demonology theory. In his book *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex and the Crisis of Belief* (2002), Stephens builds an interesting case on Pico, resituating him among the first generation of “witchcraft theorists,” who, roughly between 1430 and 1530, composed the essentials of the Early Modern notion of the witch. Basing his argument on the writings of Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, Heinrich Kramer (1430 – 1505), Johannes Nider (1380 – 1438), Jean Vineti (c.1470), Alonso Tostado (1400 – 1455), and Bartolomeo Spina (1475 – 1546), Stephens convincingly argues that the witch figure emerged after 1400 from a conglomerate of ideas about the activities of heretics, necromancers, and exorcists in the context of theological speculation about the possibilities of human contacts with demons.¹¹⁶ Albeit focusing almost equally on all the authors aforementioned, Stephen's vision of this generation of theorists is mostly founded on the figure of Gianfrancesco Pico and his revival of the sceptical tradition. For Stephens, these witchcraft specialists were proto-atheists, though unwilling ones. “But the thought”, he writes, “was lurking in the logic of their arguments and actions,”¹¹⁷ thus explaining their use of ancient scepticism in order to eradicate doubt and promote an unquestioning adhesion to Christian faith. After *Demon Lovers*, Stephens continued his research on Gianfrancesco Pico, further developing his thought on the role of Gianfrancesco as a philosopher, as a skeptic, and as a witchcraft theorist. In his contribution to Brian P. Levack's *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in early*

¹¹⁶ Walter Stephens, *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2002). 8-11.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* 366.

Modern Europe and Colonial America (2013) Stephens goes further in his entwining of Early Modern Scepticism and Witchcraft theory:

Witchcraft, in short, was a problem that involved not only criminology, but also medicine, philosophy, and, above all, religion. Scepticism about its reality was manifested variously by lawyers, physicians, and theologians; these were the three major disciplines of the medieval university, but even the uneducated sometimes expressed scepticism, particularly when they refused official call to denounce witches in their communities. All these dimensions have in common the fundamental problem of epistemology, that is, how we know what we think we know – the question of proof. Witchcraft and scepticism are concepts that depend vitally on questions of proof and the acquisition of reliable knowledge. [...] Far from being a ‘medieval’ concept, the definition of witchcraft as conscious, willing collaboration with demons in order to harm others arose in the early modern period, and many important thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries still professed belief in the same forces that witchcraft presupposed. Some of them defended the reality of witchcraft and the necessity of prosecuting and punishing it; others questioned or denied it.¹¹⁸

Among the figures analyzed in his *Demon Lovers*, Stephens designates Gianfrancesco Pico as the living embodiment of such duality as a Renaissance humanist who used Pyrrhonian scepticism in his fight against witchcraft.¹¹⁹ Stephens’ work of reference in this instance is Pico’s *Strix sive de ludificatione daemonum* (1523),¹²⁰ a book that has progressively gained the attention of many experts in the field of witchcraft since the influential contribution of Peter Burke in 1977,¹²¹ and that still inflames the debate on demonology and witchcraft in Early Modern Europe, as we will see in the third and fourth chapter of this dissertation.

¹¹⁸ Stephens in Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*. 101

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* 105

¹²⁰ Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola and Julius Caesar Flaminus, *Dialogus in Tres Libros Divisus: Titulus Est Strix Sive De Ludificatione Daemonum, Ejusdem De Reformandis Moribus Oratio, Ejusdem Pro Asserendis a Calumnia Libris Dionysii Areopagitae Epistola, Ejusdem Ad Excitandum Genus Humanum a Vitae Hujus Somno Ad Futurae Vigilia Carmen; [Suivi De:] Julius Caesar Flaminus Jo. Fran. Pico Mirandulae Domino S* (Bononiae: a H. de Benedictis, 1523).

¹²¹ Peter Burke and Sydney Anglo, “Witchcraft and Magic in Renaissance Italy: Gianfrancesco Pico and His Strix,” in *The Damned Art: Essays in the Literature of Witchcraft*, ed. Sydney Anglo (Routledge, 1977).

In order to conclude this broad overview of the evolution of the role of Gianfrancesco Pico in the contemporary metanarratives of the Renaissance, it is necessary to bring our attention to Wouter J. Hanegraaff's recent and outstanding treatise entitled *Esotericism and The Academy* (2012).¹²² The book constitutes a vivid intellectual history of how scholars from the 15th century to the present have imagined the field now known as Western esotericism. Its originality and significance lie above all in the claim that "Western esotericism is ultimately grounded in a historiographical concept, rather than in a common philosophical or religious worldview, a specific approach to knowledge, or a 'form of thought'."¹²³ In accord with this insight, Hanegraaff proposes a new metanarrative based on a succession of historiographic paradigms. Among these, of course, we find the "ancient wisdom discourse," a narrative that includes the idea of *prisca theologia* and the related systems that tried to describe the origin and transmission of true religion and philosophy. On this subject, Hanegraaff emphasizes how the debates over Renaissance Platonism and Hermeticism hinged on contending visions of the history of the "wisdom of the pagans" and its compatibility with Christianity.¹²⁴ He argues that, in fashioning a historical framework to validate the synthesis of pagan wisdom and Christian theology, the architects of the ancient wisdom narrative, such as Plethon, Ficino, Pico, Agrippa, and Steuco, created the foundation of Western esotericism's "referential corpus."¹²⁵ Building on the ideas first developed by Walker and Malusa, Hanegraaff, however, argues that, together with the "Christian apologetic theology that derived its vigor and its religious urgency from the intellectual challenge posed by the newly discovered "pagan" literature"¹²⁶ the early modern

¹²² Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Esotericism and the Academy. Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture," (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹²³ Ibid. 73.

¹²⁴ Ibid. 73.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid. 6.

period saw the birth of a mirror counter-narrative. This anti-apologetic discourse, although originating from the writings of George of Trebizond and Savonarola, saw in Gianfrancesco Pico one of its most important protagonists. Even if Hanegraaff considers the late 17th century – when “anti-apologetic” Lutheran scholars, beginning with Jacob Thomasius (1622–1684), undertook a campaign to purify Christianity from the corrupting influence of pagan philosophy, above all Neoplatonism – as a more decisive turning point in the development of this counter-narrative,¹²⁷ he also acknowledges Pico as one of the first intellectuals to understand that a “history of truth” is a self-contradictory concept, and that at the heart of the ancient wisdom discourse that tried to operate a synthesis between Christianity and paganism were the fallible opinions and truths of human beings.¹²⁸

A final, special mention goes to the work of Claudio Moreschini and Lucia Pappalardo, whose recent academic contributions are a great help to the rediscovery of Gianfrancesco Pico’s work within the academic world. With an impeccable monograph and an inspired Italian translation of the well-known *Strix sive de ludificatione daemonum*, Pappalardo is quickly becoming an important point of reference for studies on Gianfrancesco Pico. Her seminal work, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola: fede, immaginazione e scetticismo* (2014), can be considered a staple on the subject, second only to Schmitt’s groundbreaking *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469-1533) and his critique of Aristotle*. Pappalardo’s treatise engages with this legacy, dealing with skepticism and Aristotelianism in Pico’s *Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium*, which was Schmitt’s primary object of research. The chapter in question updates and further elaborates Schmitt’s thesis in an accurate and respectful way, opening a dialogue with Pico’s previous works such as *De studio divinae et humanae philosophiae* and *De rerum*

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid. 82.

praenotione.¹²⁹ The other two chapters investigate fundamental issues of Pico's thought: the relationship between Gianfrancesco's anti-philosophical attitude and the works of Giovanni Pico, Marsilio Ficino and Girolamo Savonarola, as well as the relationship between imagination and faith in Pico's work. All three parts of this philosophically and theologically informed book are to be considered fundamental instruments for future researchers, and a methodological model to follow. This thesis, although initiated in 2013 – one year before the publication of Pappalardo's monograph – owes much to Pappalardo's work. Pappalardo's 2017 Italian translation of Pico's *Strix* also deserves attention.¹³⁰ Built on the example of Alfredo Perifano and his praiseworthy French rendition of Gianfrancesco's treatise on witchcraft,¹³¹ the translation presents a lengthy and noteworthy introduction to the work. This introductory section provides a concise and helpful history of witchcraft in ancient, medieval and Renaissance sources available at Pico's time, as well as a diachronic account of the author's philosophy towards witchcraft, and an enlightened analysis of the *Strix* itself.

Carlo Moreschini's recent tribute to Gianfrancesco Pico's theology and poetry in *Rinascimento Cristiano* represents, I believe, a turning point in the studies dedicated to the lord of Mirandola and Concordia.¹³² The celebration of the young lord of Mirandola by one of the most influential experts of our time in the field of late ancient Platonism, patristics and apologetics brings, without a doubt, further recognition on Pico's work. The two chapters that Moreschini dedicates to Pico provide a lively and extremely well-informed discussion on Pico's

¹²⁹ Lucia Pappalardo, *Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola: Fede, Immaginazione E Scetticismo* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2014). 237-347.

¹³⁰ See Pico della Mirandola and Pappalardo, *La Strega (Strix) Di Gianfranco Pico*.

¹³¹ See Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola and Alfredo Perifano, *La sorcière: dialogue en trois livres sur la tromperie des démons* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007). Perifano's work, the first modern translation of Pico's *Strix*, deserves attention and praise. Its philological premises and paratextual apparatus will most certainly act as a foundation for all the translations to come.

¹³² See Claudio Moreschini, *Rinascimento cristiano: innovazioni e riforma religiosa nell'italia del quindicesimo e sedicesimo secolo* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2017). 3-69; 163-218.

reception of late ancient as well as contemporary philosophical and theological sources. Even more importantly, Moreschini's section on Pico's poetry finally brings proper acknowledgement to a part of his production that has been often considered minor with respect to his philosophical and theological treatises.¹³³ Moreschini's work on Pico's poetic production deeply inspired the last stages of this thesis, and it has been widely cited.

5. Thesis Objectives, and Main Topics

In the last section, my aim has been to gather the opinions of most of the authors that directly contributed to the rediscovery of Gianfrancesco Pico, not merely to highlight the evolution of academic enquiry about the author, but rather to identify the narratives that have already been orbiting around this enigmatic figure. As we also saw earlier, the role of Gianfrancesco Pico is shifting rapidly from oblivion to a role of primary importance in the Renaissance. Thanks to the studies of many scholars, including those mentioned, Pico is now recognized as a crucial witness and a leading figure, especially in contrast to the authors and the ideas that still characterize many narratives of the Renaissance, from the Burckardian Grand Narrative to Walker and Yates' interest in esoteric traditions. Moreover, Pico is also acknowledged as a prominent protagonist in the development of the skeptical and demonological tradition of the Early Modern period. Gianfrancesco Pico, therefore, is increasingly seen as a crucial witness in several of the Renaissance narratives elaborated in recent historiography.

The aim of this dissertation is to continue this promising trend of research, analyzing Gianfrancesco Pico's metanarrative of antiquity through some of his least analyzed works: his

¹³³ With the notable exception of Matteo Soranzo, "Un'identità religiosa nel primo cinquecento," *Italian Studies* 70, no. 1 (2015).

poems. The reasons behind the choice to focus my analysis on such writings rather than on other equally worthy literary works by Pico are manifold. First, the collection of Gianfrancesco Pico's poems opens an interesting parenthesis on the subject of Renaissance poetry and hymnography. Secondly, Pico's poems are a strategic testimony to his thought, as they are often conceived as a message to explain Pico's philosophy to his friends and benefactors, and as such, they contain most of Pico's arguments regarding knowledge, religion, *et cetera*. The question of the Renaissance hymn, as I will explain in the third chapter, is a matter of primary importance in understanding the radical changes and the religious, philosophical and literary experiments that grew progressively in the Italian lands between the 15th and the 16th centuries. Similarly to the world of the visual arts, the poetic tradition is one of the artistic contexts where the influence of ancient culture created some formidable innovations. The field of hymnography, more importantly, evolved in an even more audacious way.

Thanks to the impact of Ficino's and Giovanni Pico's Neoplatonic attempts to unite pre-Christian theurgy¹³⁴ to Biblical Revelation, the hymn, the poetic genre closest to prayer, developed into some interesting examples of religious hybridization.¹³⁵ Beginning with Marsilio Ficino's theurgic chants in imitation of Orpheus and Proclus,¹³⁶ the Renaissance hymn became more and more of a poetic experiment, aiming to revive ancient rituals in light of a Neoplatonic

¹³⁴ See Sarah Iles Johnston, "Theurgy," in *Brill's New Pauly. Antiquity volumes* ed. Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider (Brill Online, 2015): "(Θεουργία/theourgía), from Greek 'divine' (theîos) and 'work' (érgon): 'divinely oriented actions'. During the first few cents. AD, there arose a number of religious movements that combined elements of Platonic philosophy, practices drawn from traditional cult, and newer doctrines that adherents claimed were revealed to them directly by the gods."

¹³⁵ See Baer, "History and Religious Conversion."

¹³⁶ On this subject, see D. P. Walker, "Orpheus the Theologian and Renaissance Platonists," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 16, no. 1/2 (1953). To inquiry on the tradition of Orpheus in the centuries before the Renaissance, see John Block Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970). For the nature of Proclus' hymns, see R. M. van den Berg, *Proclus' Hymns: Essays, Translations, Commentary* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2001).

Christendom, which often saw deities as aspects and archetypes of God,¹³⁷ in full agreement with Hermes Trismegistus,¹³⁸ Proclus¹³⁹ and the tenets of the *prisca theologia*.¹⁴⁰

Gianfrancesco Pico's poems, I argue, served as a counter-chant to battle Renaissance astrology and Neoplatonism on both the fields of philosophy and poetry. As many authors following Ficino wrote hymns in order to awaken planetary forces apt to intervene in their favor toward God, Pico's poems, I claim, gathered the influences of Savonarola, Heinrich Kramer, and the Church Fathers in order to banish such prayers and exorcise Christianity from their malevolent effect. Such poetical exorcisms illustrate a series of peculiar traits in perfect harmony with Gianfrancesco Pico's philosophy. Among them, there are three aspects that I wish to analyze in depth: the negation of pagan allegories as a literary or rhetorical device able to convey

¹³⁷ See James Hankins, *Ficino, Avicenna and the Occult Powers of the Rational Soul* (Firenze: Olschki, 2007). 35 – 52.

¹³⁸ For further inquiry on the figure of Hermes Trismegistus, see Roelof Van Den Broek, "Hermes Trismegistus I: Antiquity," in *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, et al. (Leiden; Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2005)., Paolo Lucentini, "Hermes Trismegistus II: Middle Ages," *ibid.* and Antoine Faivre, "Hermes Trismegistus III: Modernity," *ibid.*

¹³⁹ Along with the *Corpus hermeticum* and the collection of hymns attributed to the mythical poet Orpheus, which had been widely circulating in manuscript form since 1424 until their first printed edition in 1501, Ficino's views on the nature of prayer were shaped by Proclus (412-485 AD) – a late ancient composer of treatises, commentaries and, most importantly, hymns. According to Proclus and his followers based in Athens, in his dialogues *Phaedrus* and *Parmenides*, Plato himself had envisioned philosophy as a form of hymn-singing, by which he would have meant a form of meditative prayer, the goal of which is turning the human soul toward the cosmic intelligences. Proclus' views on and performance of hymns were closely related with his general conceptions regarding the position of human beings in the cosmos. More optimistic interpreters of Plato such as Plotinus, more precisely, had argued that human beings could aspire to lift their minds to the sphere of Intellect (*nous*) without the need of intermediaries. Proclus, on the contrary, argued that a wide gap existed between the human soul and the sphere of the Intellect (*nous*), so that humans could aspire to reunite themselves with the One (*enosis*) only by means of apposite ceremonies and invocations addressed to higher gods (*theurgia*). And since the will of the gods, according to Neoplatonic ethics, cannot be moved by human prayers, Proclus' hymns were not petitions but meditations, by which the soul can convert (*epistrophe*) away from the material world toward her heavenly cause. For Proclus, and consequently for Ficino, praying was thus a central exercise in an authentic philosophical life. Of this spiritual practice, the hymn was the archetypal form. See Berg, *Proclus' Hymns: Essays, Translations, Commentary*. 24-6, 33-4, 70-6, 87-8.

¹⁴⁰ See Ficino, as quoted by Christopher Celenza, "The Revival of Platonic Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. James Hankins (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). 85: "Among philosophers he [Hermes Trismegistus] first turned from physical and mathematical topics to contemplation of things divine, and he was the first to discuss with great wisdom the majesty of God, the order of demons, and the transformations of souls. Thus, he was called the first author of theology, and Orpheus followed him, taking second place in the ancient theology. After Aglaophemus, Pythagoras came next in theological succession, having been initiated into the rites of Orpheus, and he was followed by Philolaus, teacher of our divine Plato. In this way, from a wondrous line of six theologians emerged a single system of ancient theology, harmonious in every part."

hidden, divine meanings; the transformation of ancient mythology and philosophy into the renewed Christian paradigm of demonology; and the banishment of the pagan Other through a poetic ritual of counter-evocation and invocation of Christian holy figures and practices.

The outcome of this analysis, I argue, is to show that Gianfrancesco Pico meant not merely to relocate the ancient pagan tradition to the place where the Church Fathers and the Apologists managed to put it, but also to break the bridge that the followers of the *prisca theologia* were attempting to build. Pico's poetic attack against ancient mythology and philosophy, therefore, can be interpreted as an attack against the very essence of Renaissance philosophy that was founded on the concept of *pax philosophica*,¹⁴¹ especially against that very Neoplatonic tradition which tried to fill the gap between their age and antiquity.

In order to better address this topic, one must first acknowledge Pico as an accomplished intellectual, deeply rooted within the culture of the Italian Renaissance. This thesis will thus provide an historical framework apt to show how Gianfrancesco's ideas were not the ramblings of an outcast, unable to accept the new tenets of an age of pre-enlightenment, but rather ideals representative of an important counterculture that went against the principles of concord among philosophies that we see too often attributed to Renaissance humanism. The Neoplatonic *pax philosophica* was a point of view that, in hindsight, revealed itself unable to win over the scriptural urges of the Reformation and the conservative rebuke of the Counter reformation. Pico's teachings, on the other end, were well received in the contexts of Reformation, and, in many ways, foreshadowed the fears and desires for Catholic purity that would animate the

¹⁴¹ Term often attributed to Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. See Ernst Cassirer, "Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola: A Study in the History of Renaissance Ideas," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 3, no. 3 (1942). For Pico's ideas of theological concord see also Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Renaissance Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). For Pico's preoccupation with the idea of a universal concord of doctrines and his stress in the *pax unifica* see Giovanni di Napoli, *Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola e la problematica dottrinale del suo tempo* (New York: Desclée, 1965).

Council of Trent. Gianfrancesco Pico, therefore, must not be seen as a retrograde, solitary conservative incapable of understanding his age, but rather as a pioneer of an age to come.

Since this dissertation focuses on a metanarrative of antiquity of the 16th century, it is necessary to venture in the dangerous waters of a concept that still divides the experts in Renaissance studies: the idea of Renaissance paganism.¹⁴² “The pagan Renaissance is a historical cliché,” states John Monfasani in his influential 1992 article ‘Platonic Paganism in the Fifteenth Century.’¹⁴³ Rejecting the legacy of many 19th – 20th century historians of the Renaissance, Monfasani offers a clear-cut vision of the Renaissance where paganism is almost completely out of the picture,¹⁴⁴ and where the new task in early modern historiography is “to find religious purposes and sources for much of what was once considered distinctly pagan manifestations of Renaissance culture.”¹⁴⁵ His thesis – although based on a binary concept that defines only someone that “no longer considered himself a Christian and embraced instead what he believed to be a specifically pagan world view”¹⁴⁶ as pagan – had the merit of shaking the academic community on the fate of a concept often considered faulty and obsolete. Monfasani’s article acted like a landmark in the process of rejuvenating a debate that continues to be active. The controversial book, *The Pagan Dream of the Renaissance* (2002), by Joscelyn Godwin tried somehow to answer to Monfasani’s statement. Godwin’s intriguing thesis sees Renaissance paganism not as a religion, but rather as a state of mind typical of 15th – 16th century Italy “during which, although no one believed in the gods, many people acted as though they

¹⁴² For an effective synopsis of the debate on Renaissance paganism in the last century, see Kocku von Stuckrad, “Visual Gods: From Exorcism to Complexity in Renaissance Studies,” *Aries* 6, no. 1 (2006). 59-63.

¹⁴³ John Monfasani, “Platonic Paganism in the Fifteenth Century,” in *Reconsidering the Renaissance*, ed. Mario Di Cesare ([Binghamton, NY]: [State University of New York Press], 1992). 45.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 46: “If we understand a Renaissance neo-pagan to have been someone who no longer considered himself a Christian and who embraced instead what he believed to be a specifically pagan world view, then I know of no Italian humanist whom present-day scholarship would confidently label a neo-pagan.”

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 46.

existed.”¹⁴⁷ Godwin’s idea of paganism as a collective fantasy and fascination for antiquity – echoing Ernst Gombrich and Fritz Saxl¹⁴⁸ – generated a certain interest in the academic world.¹⁴⁹ Among the scholars who devoted themselves to the analysis of Godwin’s work, the historian Kocku von Stuckrad deserves special mention. In his article “Visual Gods,” in fact, the expert in history of religions not only gives a clear synopsis of the state of the term ‘Renaissance paganism’ up to Joscelyn Godwin, but also introduces a reflection on early modern paganism as a *pagan discourse* coexisting with an *esoteric discourse*. Quoting Von Stuckrad: “The persistence of pagan divinities in Renaissance culture – from Plethon’s exclusive polytheism to the scholarly revaluation of Hermes Trismegistus – is an expression of religious conflicts that ultimately fostered a pluralization of identities.”¹⁵⁰

Where does this chapter posit itself in the contemporary debate on Renaissance paganism, then? My vision of Renaissance paganism relies greatly on historians like Kocku von Stuckrad and Wouter J. Hanegraaff, who have recently contributed to the rethinking of European religious history as crossed by current alternatives or even characterized by a constant situation of pluralism, in contrast to a traditional vision European religious identity as evenly Christian and directed towards a progressive process of secularization.¹⁵¹ During the Renaissance, not only was Christianity involved in a continuous dialogue with Judaism and Islam, but the same

¹⁴⁷ Joscelyn Godwin, *The Pagan Dream of the Renaissance* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002). 1.

¹⁴⁸ E. H. Gombrich, *Symbolic Images* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1985). 175-79; F. Saxl, “Pagan Sacrifice in the Italian Renaissance,” *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 2, no. 4 (1939). 363.

¹⁴⁹ David Hemsoll, “Dreaming About the Renaissance,” *Art history*. (2003). 755-56: “[Godwin] may have given too much weight to the esoteric and arcane but he must surely be right to see the revival of the pagan gods as having played a fundamental part in defining Renaissance art, and as something more than just a manifestation of classical learning. The book therefore performs the great service of bringing this whole question once again to prominence, and it may mark a beginning of a new appraisal of Renaissance art that will once again take up the mantle of such illustrious past scholars as Gombrich, Panofsky and Wind. As such, therefore, it represents a timely foretaste of what could well become a very rich and productive debate.”

¹⁵⁰ von Stuckrad, “Visual Gods: From Exorcism to Complexity in Renaissance Studies.” 64.

¹⁵¹ Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy. Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture*. 3-76; Kocku von Stuckrad, *Locations of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Esoteric Discourse and Western Identities*, (2010). 18-23;

Christian identity of the Renaissance could be influenced by a wide selection of different forms of “orthodox” devotion, as well as a set of philosophical traditions retrieved and perceived as compatible with the Sacred Scriptures, such as Neo-Platonism, Hermeticism or Orphism: pagan theologies rediscovered by the humanists of the 15th century.¹⁵²

I personally believe that the matter at hand is not that of understanding if Renaissance paganism truly existed or not, but rather that of describing how the idea of paganism affected the religious experience of those who lived during the period that we define as the Renaissance. How the pagan *other* was translated in aesthetic choices, in theological debates, in experiences of religious hybridism. This dissertation thus aims to interpret Gianfrancesco Pico’s poems as a narration of Renaissance paganism proper to the author himself, a metanarrative of religious identity destined to compete in a field, that of the 16th-century religion, characterized by a variety of options and alternatives. Regardless of whether or not paganism truly existed in the Renaissance, in the religious discourse of humanists like Gianfrancesco Pico, Renaissance paganism not only existed, it was so strong and pervasive that it threatened the very core of Christian faith.

6. Thesis Structure

Aside from this first introductory chapter, all other chapters will share a similar structure. Each will be dedicated to one of the poetic works that Pico published between 1503 and 1513, his most fecund decade of poetry writing. The poems will be organized in a diachronic structure in order of publication, to show the evolution – or in some cases, the persistence – of certain

¹⁵² Soranzo, “Un’identità religiosa nel primo Cinquecento.” 56; Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy. Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture*. 12-17; Stuckrad, *Locations of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Esoteric Discourse and Western Identities*. 8-11.

themes in Pico's attack on pagan antiquity. All chapters will be divided in two parts: the first section for the description of historical, philosophical, and social contexts in which the poetic work was conceived, whereas the second part will be dedicated to the analysis of some of the poems' main topics with regards to Pico's depiction of antiquity. These two parts are equally important, as they provide vital information about the social background in which Pico's poems were supposed to operate, and the instruments with which Pico planned to impress on society. Analyzing Pico's poems without the proper historical context, would mean dissecting them without acknowledging their true nature, which was that of fighting paganizing trends within the author's society in order to foster the conversion of the elites towards a Savonarolan form of piety.

The second chapter deals with Pico's first published poem, his 1506 *Staurostichon*. The text is extremely important for many reasons. It is, first of all, one of the few, if not the only poetic account of the *Kreuzwunder*, the red rain of crosses that hit some German regions between 1501 and 1502. Secondly, it is a text dedicated to Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I, and it was meant to be used as a tool to captivate the emperor's favor, and to push him toward a more Savonarolan form of devotion. Thirdly, the poem incorporates Pico's theory on astrology and prophecy found in his long treatise *De rerum praenotione*, which should be considered at least second in importance among Pico's theological production, after the famous *Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium*. As such, the poem contributes to the Renaissance quarrel on astrology, enriching the discussion with a Savonarolan humanist point of view. The first section of the chapter deals with the numerous accounts of the *Kreuzwunder* and their various interpretations. The second will provide the bibliographical context of the work, while the third will concisely describe Gianfrancesco Pico's position in the wide Renaissance diatribe on astrology and

prophecy and its evolution from its two main sources, Giovanni Pico and Girolamo Savonarola. The fourth section of the chapter will describe the historical context in which the poem was conceived, that is the court of Maximilian I. The fifth section, opening the second part of the chapter, provides an analysis of Pico's poetic attack against astrology contained within his *Staurostichon*. The sixth and seventh sections, instead, will be dedicated to Pico's own interpretation of the *Kreuzwunder* through the Christian symbols *Arma Christi* and the medieval devotion to Christ's blood.

The third chapter of the dissertation will focus on the 1507 collection of hymns known as *Hymni heroici tres*. Quite well received in the context of Reformation, these hymns are meant to act as an example against the growing hymnic tradition that, especially in Italy, was the site for several attempts at hybridism and syncretism with newly rediscovered ancient forms of belief. Together with the rebirth of ancient religious practices such as theurgical operations and ritual recitations of prayers found in the works of Iamblichus and Proclus, the Renaissance saw the rebirth of a new form of apologetic discourse, born by re-embracing the legacy of St. Augustine, Tertullian and the other Church fathers. The Italian Renaissance therefore, I argue, saw the resurgence of two apologetic movements: a wave of inclusivist apologetics, which is the philosophical intellectual wave that orbited around Ficino, Giovanni Pico and the concept of *Prisca Theologia*, and a counter-wave of exclusivist apologetics that saw in Savonarola and his follower, Gianfrancesco Pico, its symbolic initiators.¹⁵³ Both these traditions competed directly through poetry, the first trying to enrich, with the example of ancient poetry, a genre considered by many as stale and barren; the other by trying to offer a viable alternative without pagan

¹⁵³ For a better understanding of these two terms in light of modern philosophy of religion, see Harold A. Netland, "Exclusivism and Inclusivism," in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Chad V. Meister and Paul Copan (London; New York: Routledge, 2007).

analogies and motifs. The issue of the Renaissance hymns is quite effective in describing the dialogue between these two different currents. On this subject, the third chapter will draft a portrait of the ways in which the philosophical dialogue between positive and negative apologists deeply influenced the genre of hymnography. In order to describe such interchange, I will take into consideration the influence that Ficino and Savonarola had in the development of such a tradition, and I will proceed by briefly introducing some of the authors who well represent the chasm between the two lines of Renaissance apologetics.

This chapter, moreover, wishes to examine Pico's transformation of non-Christian mythology and philosophy into a renewed Christian paradigm through a process called demonization. In this chapter, I intend to prove how such process allowed Pico to create a useful concept of the *Other* in order to negotiate a definite, and yet battled, Christian identity. Christianity and Antiquity, therefore, become two opposing entities, necessary to define each other. A close reading of Pico's hymns, especially the *Hymnus Christi*, will help prove such statements. This chapter takes into account, implicitly, the concept of "Other" and applies it to the poems of Gianfrancesco Pico, following the example of Sergio Zatti's *The Quest for Epic*.¹⁵⁴ In his paper, Zatti, employing a psychoanalytical perspective, manages to legitimate a unique point of view in which the two armies in Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* become symbols of a hegemonic struggle between two antithetical systems of values: the pagans, representing the ideals of Renaissance humanism, and the Christians, voice of the authoritarian religious aspirations of Counter-Reformation Italy.¹⁵⁵ This chapter aims to use such approach, though oriented towards a more philosophical-anthropological point of view, in order to analyze the struggle between Identity and Alterity in Pico's poems.

¹⁵⁴ Sergio Zatti, Dennis Looney, and Sally Hill, *The Quest for Epic from Ariosto to Tasso*, (2006).

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 136-7.

The first section of the chapter deals with the difficult relationship between the priest Girolamo Savonarola, and poetry, underlining his complex position on the subject, and how such ever-shifting opinion inspired the short-lived, but important literary genre of Savonarolan poetry. On this subject, section two tackles the idea of Savonarolan poetry itself, its common goals, and the authors that created this specific genre. Section three will introduce Gianfrancesco Pico as a Savonarolan poet, in order to present how Savonarolan belief shaped his own conception of sacred poetry. The fourth section of the chapter will introduce the issue of the Italian hymnic tradition that, in the 15th and 16th centuries, revolutionized the concept of religious hymn imitating classical and late ancient hymnography. I will first briefly describe Marsilio Ficino's use of theurgic rituals in light of his rediscovery of neoplatonic philosophers like Iamblichus and Proclus. Then, in section five of the chapter, I will briefly summarize the impact that the rediscovery of late ancient neoplatonic sources had in authors like Lodovico Lazzarelli (1447–1500) and Michael Marullus Tarcaniota (1458 – 1500). Section six provides a concise bibliographical analysis of the Hymni and their fortune during the 16th century. Section seven provides a synopsis of the three main hymns, as well as an overview of the remaining content, and the exegetical paratext provided by the 1507 *editio princeps*. The second part of the chapter is a detailed analysis of Pico's metanarrative of antiquity, and its function in attacking other forms of hymnography. Section eight briefly deals with the spiritual content of the hymns, while section nine tackles the difficult question of Pichian demonology. Section ten provides a reconstruction of Pico's 'historical' account of antiquity as a mean to attack Ficino's idea of equality between pagan and Christian philosophy, prophecy, and poetry. Section eleven, moreover, continues this discourse by showing how Pico's depiction of the Christian victory over paganism was meant to debunk and criticize the newest trends in poetry and philosophy,

such as the rediscovery of the Jewish Kabbalah, the cult of the Magi, and the use of pagan myths as sources of knowledge and entertainment.

The last chapter of the dissertation is meant to continue my analysis on Pico's demonization of the pagan world introduced in chapter three. The main focus of this analysis is the 1513 poem *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis*. Written in response to Pico's visit to the Belvedere Garden in the Vatican, the poem reexamines the author's depiction of the ancient world and addresses its influence in the world of Renaissance aesthetics and love. The importance of Pico's poetical blame of the statue of Venus and Cupid is manifold. On one hand, it introduces a form of dialogue with antiquity based on the idea that pagan symbols and philosophies must be condemned and reconducted to a Christian paradigm under the servile role of sin, heresy, and idolatry. On the other hand, the poem is a rare and beautiful specimen of early 16th century anti-Platonic literature, aiming to shame the platonic metaphor of *Venus Urania* and *Venus Pandemia*, together with the idea that the mundane beauty of art could inspire the beholder to inspect divine beauty. Another important topic analyzed is the spiritual and mental procedure introduced in Pico's poem to free someone from the nefarious influence of pagan imagery. Pico's *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis*, in fact, was not composed with the sole objective of reviling the pagan gods of love and desire, and the philosophical ideas that came with them. The final purpose of the author was that of educating his readers on the battle against worldly desires, and the beauty of eternal salvation.

The introductory section delineates the return of pagan aesthetics in the Italian Renaissance, while the second section will provide a synthesis of the poem's bibliographical history and legacy, together with a synopsis of the text itself. Section three investigates the return of pagan aesthetics through the success of the figure of Venus in Renaissance art and literature,

and the negative response that it received from a growing part of the Italian intellectual elite before and after the Counter-reformation. The fourth, instead, provides a concise account of the revival of the platonic idea of the twofold Venus, a symbol indicating the link between mundane and spiritual beauty/love. This part will mainly deal with the success of Ficino's reading of Plato's *scala amoris* in the Italian cultural milieu. Section five will build upon such premises to show how Pico, in his *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis*, tries to mock and debunk Ficino's idea of Venus Urania and Pandemia in order to attack, not only Ficino's philosophy, but also Ficino himself. The seventh part of the chapter tackles, once again, the issue of Pico's demonology, showing how demonization is used by the author to show the weakness and idiocy of the pagan past, and how the pagan gods become useful in incarnating Christian negative values like lust and worldly desire. Section eight, instead, is dedicated to an analysis of Pico's remedies against desire found in the poem itself, and the way in which the author reverses and incorporates the Platonic concept of *scala amoris* as a downward spiral towards hell, counterposed to a ladder of purity and divine love. The section deals also with the mental and physical practices described by the author in order to create a suitable opposition to the return of the pagan 'carpe diem' and the enjoyment of worldly life.

Chapter 2

αἱματοέσσας δὲ ψιάδας κατέχευεν ἔραζε
παῖδα φίλον τιμῶν, τόν οἱ Πάτροκλος ἔμελλε
φθίσειν ἐν Τροίῃ ἐριβόλακι τηλόθι πάτρης.¹⁵⁶

Iliad XVI, 458-461

Anima quae declinaverit ad magos et ariolos et fornicata fuerit cum eis ponam faciem meam
contra eam et interficiam illam de medio populi sui.¹⁵⁷

Leviticus 20,6

Crosses from the Sky: Astrology, Prophecy, and Antiquity in Gianfrancesco Pico's

Staurostichon

1. Raining Blood: The Kreuzwunder in the Imaginary of the 16th Century

On May 18, 1501, fifteen days after the Feast of the Holy Cross,¹⁵⁸ Jean de Hornes, Bishop of Liege (1450 – 1505), sent an alarming report to the Holy Emperor Maximilian I: since Easter, a frightening number of cross marks had started to appear on churches, houses, and public squares. According to the prelate, dark red crosses were raining from the sky at night, marking not only the buildings of the diocese but also the clothes and head dresses of its inhabitants. The individuals he witnessed were marked by a series of Christian symbols: holy

¹⁵⁶ “[Zeus] poured bloody drops earthwards, honoring his own [beloved] son, whom Patroclus was soon to destroy in fertile Troy, far from his homeland.”

¹⁵⁷ “The soul that shall go aside after magicians, and soothsayers, and shall prostitute to them: I will set my face against that soul, and destroy it out of the midst of its people.”

¹⁵⁸ Following the 16th century Catholic and Gallican calendar.

crosses, drops of Christ's blood, and symbols of the Order of the Holy Sepulcher.¹⁵⁹ Many women took shelter in the nearby churches and reported that they had had visions. A nineteen-year-old girl, for instance, saw a gleaming white woman announcing the coming of the apocalypse lest the human race repents and reconcile with God.¹⁶⁰

According to another witness – Libertus of Broechem, a Franciscan monk at the service of Jean de Hornes – on 13 May 1501, a few days before the bishop's testimony, a young woman from a village near Maastricht was caught in a downpour of what seemed to be rain made of "pure blood," which left stains on her veil or headdress in the shape of crosses. She washed the garment, but a week later the stains reappeared, this time taking the form of crosses and various symbols of the Passion, usually referred to as *Arma Christi*. Worried, she turned the veil over to the church, and it came into the possession of the bishop of Liege, who already owned several such relics.¹⁶¹ In the letter sent to Maximilian I, the bishop's opinion on the subject is clear. All the signs pointed to one explanation only: the Emperor was hereby summoned by God to fight the Ottomans and free the Empire from their threat.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Johannes De Horne, "Ri Xiv, 3.2 N 15362," http://www.regesta-imperii.de/id/1501-05-18_1_0_14_3_2_2634_15362.: "1501 Mai 18, Maastricht. Johannes de Horne, Bf von Lüttich, an KM: Der Bf erinnert an die Gespräche, die er mit KM über den Türkenkrieg geführt hat, und an die Bemühungen, die Reichsfürsten zum Kreuzzug anzuspornen. -- Der Bf berichtet KM in diesem Zusammenhang, daß seit Ostern an verschiedenen Orten seiner Diözese öffentlich in Kirchen, auf Plätzen, in Häusern Kreuzzeichen erschienen sind, und zwar von schwarzer und roter Farbe, daß man sie für wirkliches Blut halten könnte. Es sind meist einfache Kreuze, mitunter mehrfach in der Gestalt des Abzeichens des Ordens vom Hl. Grab."

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.: "[...] In Malhorne zu Limburg, in der Lütticher Diözese, behauptet ein neunzehnjähriges Mädchen eine (Marien-)Erscheinung gehabt zu haben. Eine strahlend weiße Frau sei dem erschreckten Mädchen erschienen und habe ihm gesagt, sie habe durch ihr Gebet den Zorn Gottes bisher versöhnt, aber wenn das sündhafte Menschengeschlecht nicht Buße tue, werde die Welt zugrunde gehen."

¹⁶¹ Libertus et al., *Uslegung Vn[D] BetüTnus Der Cruz So Yetzo Fallen* (Basel: Michael Furter, 1503).

¹⁶² De Horne, "Ri Xiv, 3.2 N 15362".: "[...]Diese Zeichen mahnen dazu, sich mit KM zur Vertreibung der Türken zu erheben und aus freien Stücken das Kreuz zu nehmen. Wenn diese Kreuze nur die Frauen auszeichnen und nicht die Männer, so ist dies ein ewiger Vorwurf. -- Der Bf fordert auf, den heiligen Vorsatz KMs durchzuführen, denn der Türke schlägt bereits an die Pforten des Röm. Reiches."

After thorough consultation of documents and collections,¹⁶³ the letter of the bishop of Liege appears to be the first of many testimonies regarding the phenomenon of the red rain that allegedly fell on German lands and Netherlands between 1501 and 1503, an event commonly called *Kreuzwunder*. Due to the peculiarity of the event and all its possible interpretations, in the first half of the 16th century, the rain of crosses generated a deluge of pamphlets and chronicles, both in manuscript and print. Early representations of this extraordinary episode are present in the works of Joseph Grünpeck (1473 – 1530), astrologer and biographer of Emperor Maximilian I. The *Kreuzwunder*, as a matter of fact, appears already in Grünpeck’s 1502 manuscript entitled *Prodigiorum, portentorum, Ostentorum et monstrorum, que in seculum Maximilianense inciderunt*,¹⁶⁴ as well as in his later works *Ein neue auszlegung seltzamen wunderzaichen und der wunderpurden know ain zeyther im Reich als vorpoten des Almechtigen gottes [...] erschienen sein* – published in 1507 and republished in 1515¹⁶⁵ – and *Speculum Naturalis, caelestis et propheticae visionis omnium Calamitatum, tribulationum et anxietatum*, printed in 1508 and promptly translated into German the same year.¹⁶⁶ According to these texts, Grünpeck seems to agree with Jean de Hornes and many other testimonies of the time in saying that, falling from the sky, were not only holy crosses, but an entire arsenal of symbols related to the Passion of Christ sent by God to carry His divine will.¹⁶⁷ Another aspect the court biographer seems to share with

¹⁶³ Especially the collections better known as *Regesta Imperii* and *Monumenta Germaniae Historiae*.

¹⁶⁴ Joseph Grünpeck, “Prodigiorum, Portentorum, Ostentorum Et Monstrorum, Que in Seculum Maximilianense Inciderunt Queque Aliis Temporibus Apparuerunt, Interpretatio,” (Universitätsbibliothek Innsbruck, 1502?). 2r.

¹⁶⁵ Joseph Grünpeck, *Ein Neue Auszlegung Der Seltzamen Wuuderzaichen Und Wunderpurden So Ain Zeyther Im Reich Als Vorpoten Des Almechtigen Gottes, Auffmannende AuffrüStig Ze Seinn Wider Die Feindt Christi Und Des Hailigen Reichs Erschienen Sein an Al Kurfürsten Vund Fürsten So Auff Dem Reichs Tag Zu Costnitz Versamelt Seinn Gewesen* (Augsburg: Oeglin, 1507). Title page.

¹⁶⁶ Joseph Grünpeck and Georg Stuchs, *Speculum naturalis caelestis et propheticae visionis: omnium calamitatum tribulationum et anxietatum: quae super omnes status; stirpes & nationes Christianae Reipublice; presertim quae cancro & septimo climati subiecte sunt; proximis temporibus venture sunt* (Impressum Nürnberg: per me Georgiu[m] Stuchs, 1508).

¹⁶⁷ Francesco Lucioli, “Poesia e profezia nello Staurostichon di Giovan Francesco Pico Della Mirandola,” *Archivio italiano per la storia della pietà* XXV (2012), <http://digital.casalini.it/18243789>. 276-82.

the bishop is the interpretation of the event, as they both believe it a divine call to arms against the Turks.

During the same period, the Swabian historian Johannes Nauclerus (c. 1425 – 1510) decided to finish his academic masterpiece describing the astonishing consequences of the *Kreuzwunder*. In his *Memorabilium omnis aetatis et omnium gentium chronici commentarii* (1516) – published posthumously in Tübingen with a foreword written by Johann Reuchlin – Nauclerus delves deeper into the subject by means of a comprehensive narration of the miraculous rain, a description that closes his book as a reminder of the unstoppable power of Divine Will.¹⁶⁸ Beginning with the facts of Liege as narrated by Johannes de Hornes and Libertus of Brochem, the historian adds several important details to the story. Among these, the most interesting – due to its connection with late medieval blood piety¹⁶⁹ – is the idea that once the holy blood had been in contact with the chin and lips of the witnesses, it would change of color and take the taste of honey.¹⁷⁰ During the same time period, the French poet, chronicler, and composer Jean Molinet (1435 - 1507) published his monumental treatise *Les Chroniques*,

¹⁶⁸ Johannes Nauclerus, *Memorabilium Omnis Aetatis Et Omnium Gentium Chronici Commentarii a Joanne Nauclero... Digesti in Annum Salutis Md: Adiecta Germanorum Rebus Historia De Suevorum Ortu, Institutis Ac Imperio* (Tübingen: opera Thomas Anselmi Badensis, 1516).

¹⁶⁹ The examples available on this subject are numerous. Saint Aelred of Rievaulx (d.1166), for instance, describes the body on the cross, pierced by the soldier's lance, as pure honey and urged the female recluses for whom he wrote not only to contemplate it but also to eat it in gladness: "Hasten, linger not, eat the honeycomb with your honey, drink your wine with your milk. The blood is changed into wine to inebriate you, the water into milk to nourish you." – Aelred, Anselm Hoste, and C. H. Talbot, *Aelredi Rievallensis Opera Omnia* (Turnholti: Brepols, 1971). 671; trans. M.P. Macpherson, "Rule of Life for a Recluse," in *The Works of Aelred of Rievaulx* (Spencer, Mass: Cistercian Publications, 1971). 90. For further information on the subject, see Caroline Walker Bynum, "The Blood of Christ in the Later Middle Ages," *Church History* 71, no. 4 (2002). And *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). 122-24. See also Marsha Dutton, "Eat, Drink, and Be Merry: The Eucharistic Spirituality of the Cistercian Fathers," in *Erudition at God's Service*, ed. John R. Sommerfeldt, *Studies in Medieval Cistercian History* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1987). 9.

¹⁷⁰ Nauclerus, *Memorabilium Omnis Aetatis Et Omnium Gentium Chronici Commentarii a Joanne Nauclero... Digesti in Annum Salutis Md: Adiecta Germanorum Rebus Historia De Suevorum Ortu, Institutis Ac Imperio*. Fol. 304r. For the medieval roots of the idea of Jesus' blood as honey, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). 1-9.

where he dedicates an entire chapter to the *Kreuzwunder* and its antecedents. The interpretation given by Molinet, although similar to the one given by Jean de Hornes, is here converted into a French call to arms for the glory of Louis XII, father of the people (1462 – 1 January 1515).¹⁷¹ Interestingly enough, though, Molinet adds a curious detail to the facts already narrated by the bishop of Liege and his attendants, as he states that a certain number of sources believed the cross-marks to be a fraudulent account devised to convince the Catholic princes of Europe to begin a new Crusade.¹⁷²

Another contemporary anonymous recount, appearing in the collection of texts known as *Monumenta Germaniae Historiae*, tells the story of the miracle a Benedictine priest witnessed in Niederaltaich in 1503:

[...] There were cross-shaped signs of a citrine color – some even bloody – on the garments of the townsfolk; they fell on the naked body of some. These were burned as if a burning coal had been put on their bare body. Some also died from it. Those who worshiped these characters suffered no injury, but the ones who treated them without reverence were punished. Also, signs in the shape of a serpent appeared on some people's neck, and some of these marks were alive and even needed food. Likewise, many other symbols were seen. These were made because of men's wickedness and for the sake of amendment and warning.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Jean Molinet and J. A. C. Buchon, "Chroniques De Jean Molinet," (1827). 145-46.

¹⁷² Ibid. 146: "[...] Et à ceste cause maintenoient plusieurs personnaiges que lesdites croix s'amonstrèrent miraculeusement pour inciter le peuple à donner secours à la chresptieneté; et autres soustenoient que icelles croix estoient artificiellement faicles par aucuns subtils painctres, qui bien les scavoient imprimer sur les vestemens des femmes, affin que la nouvelle en fusist hastivement espadue par les régions, affin aussi d'amener les princes de la terre à faire aulcune bonne croisée, comme firent an chiennement ceulx qui, par extrême proesse et vaillance, conquirent la saincte cité de Jhérusalem, Constantinople et autres forts quasi inagressibles, possesiez lors des faulx chiens mescréans." Although the source here used is a 19th century transcription, two rare manuscripts of this work can be found in the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris (français, 5618) and in the Biblioteca Apostolica del Vaticano (Reginensi latini, 1323, f. 86v-87v). See Laurent and Jacques E. Merceron Brun, "Jean Molinet."

¹⁷³ VV.AA., *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (Hannoverae: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1826). 425: "Kal. Iunuar. Obit reverendus in Christo pater et dominus Bernhardus huius loci abbas, vir certe mansuetus ac per omnia humanus. Et rexit presentem locum ebdomadamus; cuius anime pacis propicietur largitor. – Ceciderunt signa in modum crucis super vestimenta hominum coloris citrine, aliqua etiam sanguinolenta, aliquibus etiam hominibus ceciderunt super nudo corpore. Hii arserunt, ut si carbo ignites ponitur super nudo corpore. Aliqui etiam exinde mortui sunt. Et si qui venerati sunt ea, nil lesionis acceperunt, si qui vero irrevecius se erga ea habuerunt, puniti sunt. Apparuerunt etiam signa ad modum serpentum in collis hominum et aliqua signa serpentum viva fuerunt cum aliquibus et indiguerunt etiam refectionem; et quoque plura alia visa sunt. Hec facta propter maliciam hominum et ob emendationem et pro admonitione."

Even Albrecht Dürer, in his book of memories, seems to recall with great emotion a *Kreuzwunder* that happened in 1503, an event he called “the greatest miracle that I have seen in my entire life.”¹⁷⁴ According to the painter, the crosses he saw seemed to descend more often on children than on other people. Among such bloody symbols, the artist saw one resembling a crucifixion scene. It was on the linen shirt of a maid of Nuremberg who was crying and moaning because she feared that it was a sign of her imminent death.

¹⁷⁴ Willy Pastor, *Das Leben Albrecht Dürers* (Projekt Gutenberg). II, 1. Follows the complete quotation in German: “Das größt Wunderwerk, das ich all mein Tag gesehen hab, ist geschehen im 1503 Johr, als auf viel Leut Kreuz gefallen sind, sunderlich mehr auf die Kind denn ander Leut. Unter den allen hab ich eins gesehen in der Gestalt, wie ichs hernoch gemacht hab. Und es was gefallen aufs Eyrers Magd, der ins Pirkamers Hinterhaus saß, ins Hemd, in leinenes Tuch. Und sie war so betrübt drum, daß sie weinet und sehr klagte. Dann sie forcht, sie muß dorum sterben. – Auch hab ich ein Komet am Himmel gesehen.”



Albrecht Dürer, Gedenkbuch (Memorial Book), verso, bpk / Kupferstichkabinett, SMB / Jörg P. Anders. Von Lynne Tatlock, Gedenkbuch. Enduring Loss in Early Modern Germany: Cross Disciplinary Perspectives. 105.

Later sources show a persistence of the event in the imagination of German authors. In his *Libri mirabilium septem* – published in 1532 by the bishop Friedrich Grau – the humanist Frederick Nausea, for example, tells a very similar episode:

Oh everyone, who in his own good faith will we interrogate on this event? Constantly, with evidence and conscience (many) bear witness of it, that many times during the whole year, especially in July and August, they noticed, not without a certain terror and horror, forms

in the shape of the cross and of other instruments of Jesus Christ's passion in the sky, completely bloody.¹⁷⁵

The German bishop adds a precious detail to the description of this rain of miraculous symbols falling from the sky: the crosses and the instruments of the Passion of Christ were bloody, leaving marks on clothes and on bodies that caused terror and horror. Unlike many of his predecessors of the early 16th century, Nausea does not venture in presages of Holy wars. On the contrary, he prefers to suspend his judgment on the topic, confessing that he could not find a rational explanation for the event, which claims to be recalled and confirmed by more than one witness.¹⁷⁶

The several volumes of wonders published during the first half of the 16th century are not the only texts referring to this miracle: many records, diaries, chronicles, reports, even poems, texts of different origin and year period, agreed in their representation of this mysterious rain that hit the regions of current-day Germany and the Netherlands, in the years 1501-1503.¹⁷⁷ Although most of the literature dedicated to the *Kreuzwunder* appears to be published in the first half of the 1500s, the success of the ominous event continued until the end of the century and beyond. The event, in fact, is reported once again in the 1557's *Prodigiorum ac ostentorum chronicon* of Conrad Wolffhart, better known as Konrad Lykosthenes (1518 – 1561): “In many regions of Germany the marks of the Lord's cross and the banner of the Lord's passion appeared

¹⁷⁵ Fridericus Nausea, *F. Nauseæ... Libri Mirabilium Septem* (Ff. 76. P. Quentell: Coloniae, 1532). XLlr: “Plærique omnes, quos ipsi bona fide de hac re interrogavimus? Constanter testeque conscientia testantur se hoc pariter anno aliquoties præcipueque mense Julius et Augustus caelo animadvertisse non absque quodam et terrore et horrore figuras ad modum crucis et aliorum Jesu Christi passionis instrumentorum atque eas plane sanguineas.”

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. “Harum sane causam an vel naturalem potius quam supernaturalem dixerim non satis scio: quandoquidem utraque subesse possit.”

¹⁷⁷ Konrad Lykosthenes, *Prodigiorum Ac Ostentorum Chronicon, Quæ Praeter Naturæ Ordinem, Motum, Et Operationem, Et in Superioribus & His Inferioribus Mundi Regionibus, Ab Exordio Mundi Usque Ad Haec Nostra Tempora, Acciderunt* (Basileae: Per Henricum Petri, 1557). 510: “In Germania multis in locis notae Dominicae crucis et in signum passionis Domini vestimentis et corporibus tam virorum quam mulierum inopinato apparuerunt. Unde multi fidei ac religionis mutationem significare iudicarunt.”

unexpectedly on the garments and bodies of both men and women. Whence, many declared it meant a change of faith and religion.”¹⁷⁸

In his treatise, Lykosthenes continues by saying that two years later, in 1503, “Recently in German lands crosses appeared on garments and wheat bread for the second time,”¹⁷⁹ thus suggesting that, according to his sources, the red rains continued sporadically until 1503.

Lykosthenes’ work includes many cases of miraculous or prodigious rains, from rains of blood to those of stones, of frogs, and of cereals or legumes. According to the author, however, this phenomenon appears to be rather less common, as Lykosthenes seems to remember very few incidents prior to 1501 to 1503, and no case thereafter.¹⁸⁰ As we see, Lykosthenes’ interpretation of the event did not follow the example of the overwhelming majority of humanists of the early 1500s. He rather adapted his vision to legitimize the spreading of the Reformation in German lands. For Lykosthenes, in fact, if in ancient episodes the appearance of crosses on clothes were mostly linked to catastrophic events such as plagues and famines, the *Kreuzwunder* was a call to conversion to the Protestant cause.¹⁸¹

Following Lykosthenes’ idea, the Puritan John Foxe, English historian and martyrologist,¹⁸² includes the *Kreuzwunder* in his *Acts and Monuments* (1563) – an account of

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. 512: “in Germania nuper cruces iterum in vestimentis et in pane similaceo apparent.”

¹⁸⁰ See *ibid.* 276. The author recounts a prodigious event happened in AD 367: “*Sed aliud etiam accessit miraculum, nam proxima nocte sua sponte vestes Iudaeorum crucis signis radorum instar conformatis sunt consignatae. Itaque omnes vestitum tanquam stellis variegatum et lanifica arte atque solertia distinctum habuere, quo illucescente die viso elevere atque detergere crucis notas conati nihil egere.*” See also *ibid.* 331. Lycostenes tells about a miracle happened Italy in AD 746: “*In Calabria, Sicilia et aliis quibusdam locis in vestibus hominum et in velis ecclesiarum apparuerunt cruciculae, quasi oleo designatae; et eo anno secuta est horrenda pestis, quae in Sicilia incepit ac deinde sensim omnes maris insulas ac totam Graeciam invasit.*” Other two testimonies of similar events can be found at *ibid.* 336 and 364. The first is related to an eclipse happened in AD 784, the second explains the sudden appearance of crosses on people’s clothes in AD 996, and the terrible famine that followed.

¹⁸¹ Luciola, “Poesia E Profezia Nello Staurostichon Di Giovan Francesco Pico Della Mirandola”. 276.

¹⁸² For further inquiry on John Foxe, see D. M. Loades and Colloquium John Foxe, “John Foxe: An Historical Perspective” (Brookfield, Vt., 1999). Christopher Highley and John N. King, “John Foxe and His World” (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT, 2002). And D. M. Loades, *John Foxe and the English Reformation* (Aldershot, Hants, England; Brookfield, Vt., USA: Scolar Press, 1997).

Christian martyrs throughout Western history legitimizing the struggles of English Protestants and proto-Protestants from the 14th century through the reign of Mary I – and describes the rain of crosses as follows:

Hetherto pertayneth also a strange portente and a prodigious token from heauen, in the yeare of our Lord. 1505 [sic]. In the which yeare, under the reigne of Maximilian Emperour, there appered in Germany, upon the vestures of men as well of Priestes, as lay men, upon womens garmentes also, and upon theyr rockes as they were spynning, diverse printes and tokens of the nayles, of the sponge, of the spayre, of the Lordes, coate, and of bloody Crosses. &c. All which were seene upon theyr cappes and gownes, as is most certainly testified and recorded by divers, which both did see & also did write upon the same.¹⁸³

Among the many testimonies of the bloody rains dating from the beginning of the 16th century, however, one source stands out for its lyricism and the success it encountered over the following centuries: Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola's *Staurostichon*, a Latin poem in hexameters published between 1506 and 1507. One year after the first *Kreuzwunder* in Maastricht, Gianfrancesco Pico, count of Mirandola and nephew of the celebrated humanist Giovanni Pico, started a long voyage over the Alps to meet the Emperor. After a time-consuming struggle against his brothers Lodovico and Francesco over the property of the lands of Mirandola and Concordia, Gianfrancesco was forced to abandon his dominions and go into exile.¹⁸⁴ In order to seek help from the Emperor, Gianfrancesco started his journey towards Vienna. During his travel, the count may have been able to witness one of the numerous red showers that occurred in German lands during the first three years of the 16th century. According to the poem, it is possible that Gianfrancesco Pico may have observed such prodigy on his way to Innsbruck,

¹⁸³ John Foxe, "The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online or Tamo (1576 Edition)," (Sheffield: HRI Online Publications, 2011). VII, 9.

¹⁸⁴ See Chapter One.

where he later observed a religious city procession. There, the holy, dark red symbols descending from the sky provoked a resurgence of religious zeal and social unity in the people, something he interprets as a miracle and a premonition:

It is now good to shed tears, many cities | ask for forgiveness of sins together with their bishops, | Innsbruck is also shaken, its citizens walk on | barefoot celebrating a procession: so much could religion do. | The color of crimson, and the color never even similar | to darkness, I myself saw, glowing with red spots of blood | on the sacred vests, the emblem of the triumph, | slightly tempered with the nectar of Actaeus. | Sometimes the brightness struggled with Phoenician red; | now and then I saw a cross blackening in a cloud of darkness, | once mixed up with a shade of bright red. | And there was not difference of ways: the priest and the layman | carried on themselves the mysterious signs, | senators and children, officials of both sexes. | And on churches and vests, from the Emperor's highest palace | down to the humble villages, to the rough huts of the countryside, | one could see the sign brought down from the spotless sky.¹⁸⁵

As we read to the dedicatory letter that opens the *editio princeps* of Gianfrancesco's

Staurostichon, the poem was inspired precisely by this miraculous event, which the author had the opportunity to discuss with Maximilian, while also examining further proofs of it preserved in the Emperor's collection of relics acquired in the previous months.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Staurostichon*, vv. 263-279 "Iuuat lachrymas effundere, multae / Implorant ueniam scelerum cum patribus urbes / Aeni concutitur pons, illius accola nudis / Incedit pedibus celebrans amburbia, tantum / Religio potuit, Minio color, et color atro / Nonnunquam similis, sacris mantilibus ipsi. / Sanguineis rutilans maculis insigne triumpho / Vidimus, Actaeo confusum pene liquore. / Puniceo interdum fulgor certauerat ostro: / Interdum fuscis nigrantem nube coloris, / Permixturemque crucem rubro spectauimus olim. / Nec morum discrimen erat: sacer atque prophanus / Iam conspersa sibi gestabant mystica, patres / Conscripti et pueri, conscriptus sexus uterque, / Et templa et uestes, a summa Caesaris aula / Ad uicos, ad dura mapalia ruris, / Cernere erat liquido deductum ex aethere signum."

¹⁸⁶ Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Staurostichon*, introductory letter: "Monstrasti, dum essem apud te in Germania, cruces, clavas, lanceas et alia pleraque, coelesti quadam nec visibili pluuiam corporibus delineata, et quae hac de re tibi etiam literis significata fuerant, qua es facilitate, dignatus es et Germanica in Latinam linguam interpretari. Vidi et ipse quamquam ad tua Maiesta discessi in Italiam rediturus, multa, quae non modo fidem rei iam vulgatae adstruerent, sed maiorem multo demirationem incuterent et universam pene Germaniam ad coelestia prodigia religionis ergo commoverent." [You showed me, while I was with you in Germany, cruciform staves and lances and many things besides, traced upon bodies with a certain heavenly, yet not visible, rain; and, as you possess the facility, you deigned to translate into the Latin tongue from the German those things which were also signified to you in letters about this matter. I myself, although I left your Majesty to return to Italy, saw many things, which not only added conviction to this by now commonly known affair, but also inspired a much greater wonderment, and therefore stirred up almost all of Germany to the celestial portents of religion.]

The poem in question is the primary topic of this chapter. The *Staurostichon*, in all its 422 verses, is a complex, multifaceted work of prophecy and devotion. It is my contention that Pico wrote this text in the attempt of “saving” – at least in the author’s view - Emperor Maximilian I from the fraudulent astrologers of his court – some of whom were already exploiting the encomiastic potential of the *kreuzwunder* - by showing him the possibilities of a form of holy prophecy in line with the preaching of Girolamo Savonarola. This chapter intends to show how and in which way the *Staurostichon*, in light of its historical and philosophical context, contributes to the Renaissance *querelle* on astrology and prophecy. Pico’s contribution on the subject, I argue, is extremely precious. The *Staurostichon*, in fact, is not only a rare poetical rebuke of astrology but also an even more rare example of Pico’s unique system of prediction applied to an astro-meteorological event.

I intend to deal with the *Staurostichon* in multiple ways. First, I will provide its bibliographical context, explaining its title, its publishing history, and its fortune over the years. Secondly, I mean to concisely describe Gianfrancesco Pico’s moral and philosophical position toward astrology and prophecy. In order to do so, I will briefly summarize the resurgence of learned astrology in Italy during the Renaissance and the lively diatribe that such revival originated. I will then focus my attention on the two authors that contributed to Gianfrancesco Pico’s idea of holy and unholy premonition – Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Girolamo Savonarola – to better describe the ideas Gianfrancesco expressed in the *Staurostichon* and his treatise *De rerum praenotione*, both officially published in 1507. Thirdly, I intend to describe the historical context where the *Staurostichon* was conceived, i.e. the court of Maximilian I. The poem, in fact, was dedicated to the Holy Roman Emperor himself, and reflects Pico’s fears and hopes toward his alliance with the Emperor. Maximilian’s penchant for astrology was – I

contend – one of the main reasons that brought Pico to write about the *Kreuzwunder* and against any astrological interpretation of it. Once its historical context is described, I will begin a textual analysis of the *Staurostichon*. First, I will concentrate on Pico’s praise of the Emperor and criticism against astrology. I will then concentrate on the signs that Gianfrancesco Pico offers as a valid alternative to astrological charts in analyzing the *Kreuzwunder*: holy blood and the symbols better known as *Arma Christi*. Both these elements have a long story in medieval Christian devotion and still survived in Gianfrancesco Pico’s time. Savonarola, as we will see, often used blood and the sign of the cross as signs of things to come. The same can be said about his loyal follower Gianfrancesco Pico, who filled his *Staurostichon* with bloody omens derived from the Sacred Scripture and the Lives of the Saints.

2. *Staurostichon*: The Bibliographical Context

The *Staurostichon, heroicum carmen de mysteriis Dominicae crucis nuper in Germaniam delapsis* is a poem in Latin hexameters written by Gianfrancesco Pico in 1502-1503 and dedicated to Emperor Maximilian I. The title *Staurostichon* derives from a neologism created by the author himself that combines the Greek words σταύρος (cross) and στίχος (verse/hexameter), describing both the theme and the heroic/hymnic nature of the poem.¹⁸⁷ Printed for the first time by Joannes Knobloch in Strasbourg between 1506 and 1507 as part of the complete edition of

¹⁸⁷. Describing the poem in a letter to his friend Ercole Strozzi, Pico writes: “[...] σταύρος καί στίχος, ex quibus Staurostichon coagmentavimus, ut enim alii acrosticha et caetera id genus Graeca licentia, sic nos de cruce carmen (he does not call it “hymn” after all), id enim operi propositus finis, ex quo sumere appellationem philosophis placuit, in anima non mutavimus.” Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Opera Omnia*, ed. Luigi Firpo, vol. II, Monumenta Politica Philosophica Humanistica Rariora (Turin: La Bottega d'Erasmus, 1972). 1357.

Pico's works,¹⁸⁸ this text was reissued several times during the sixteenth century¹⁸⁹ and it was also published in a separate edition with a commentary by Jacob Spiegel in 1512.¹⁹⁰ If the poem has thus been the object of several publications, it was also being circulated in manuscript form at least since 1505, as the letters the author wrote to Ercole Strozzi, Reuchlin, Wolf, and Zasius show.¹⁹¹ In the letter to Strozzi, Pico introduces the poem explaining the origin of the title and asks for Ercole's and his father Tito Vespasiano's opinion on the quality of the hymn.¹⁹² Written during a particular moment of reinvigorated theological and poetic inspiration,¹⁹³ and designed as an encomiastic poem to win Emperor Maximilian I's approval, the text developed into a labyrinthine path towards the Emperor's political approval and moral conversion. In order to achieve such objective, Pico managed to compose what Thomas Wolf defines as an audacious heroic poem, capable of fascinating the contemporary reader not only with its rhymes and harmonies but also with its theological and philosophical content.¹⁹⁴

In Pico's *Staurostichon*, the poetic account of the *Kreuzwunder* constitutes a *leitmotif* that elegantly unites several digressions on the New Testament, a long tribute to Tacitus' *Germania*, and the promise of victory and salvation of humanity through a new crusade. Underneath this structure, however, lies a series of violent rebukes against astrology, paganism, and ancient philosophy meant to warn the Emperor against superstition, and to guide him toward the truth of holy prophecy. Gianfrancesco Pico's choice to write an encomiastic/moralistic hymn under the

¹⁸⁸ G. F. Pico della Mirandola, *Staurostichon, de mysteriis Germaniae heroico carmine*, Argentorati, Ioannes Knoblochus imprimebat, 1507.

¹⁸⁹ See Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola (1469-1533) and His Critique of Aristotle*. 196.

¹⁹⁰ See Steven Rowan and Gerhild Scholz Williams, "Jacob Spiegel on Gianfrancesco Pico and Reuchlin: Poetry, Scholarship and Politics in Germany in 1512," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 44, no. 2 (1982). 293-98.

¹⁹¹ G. F. Pico della Mirandola, *Opera omnia (1557-1573), con una introduzione di C. Vasoli*, 2 voll., Hildesheim, Olms, 1969, II. 834, 864, 866, 1357.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ G. F. Pico della Mirandola, *Opera omnia (1557-1573)*. 354.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 1344.

guise of an astrological poem is not devoid of meaning. It is rather the result of a thoughtful strategy that demonstrates his deep awareness of the Emperor's taste in poetry and astrology, an awareness he may have owed to Johannes Reuchlin, who gave him useful advice, as the verses 246-247 seem to suggest.¹⁹⁵ While opting to write about an astrological/meteorological phenomenon, the aim of the *Staurostichon* was not to praise the Emperor through the astrological arts. On the contrary, in Pico's hands the *Kreuzwunder* became an opportunity to present himself as a new *poeta vates*, able to convert the sovereign to divine prophecy – the only true form of divination according to the author¹⁹⁶ – and save him from the influence of his courtly astrologers.

This should not come as a surprise since Pico considered astrology, paganism, and demonic worship to be indissolubly linked.¹⁹⁷ As it can be evinced from the author's *De Rerum Praenotione* – a systematic treatise dedicated to prophecy in the context of epistemology –, the only real form of precognition was divine inspiration and, only subsequently, the transmission of such inspiration to the power of reason.¹⁹⁸ Gianfrancesco Pico also believed that the existence of other forms of divination was only due to a corrupted mystification of the Devil. Holy prediction, in fact – however, perfect and irreproducible, either through pure rationality or by the

¹⁹⁵ Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Staurostichon*, 241-247: “The brooks sensed it (*i.e. the miraculous cross*), the seas sensed it from afar: / seas frozen by solid ice underneath the stars / of Arcton. More closely the spring of Danuvius saw it, / the mighty fountains by the very walls of Ulm saw it, / accustomed to the wars of the Count of Svevia, / and Pforzheim gifted with the honor of Latin language, / to whom is sacred the name celebrated in the three traditions”. Reference to Reuchlin, who was born in Pforzheim and indeed discussed the name of God as transmitted in Latin, Greek and Hebrew.

¹⁹⁶ Popkin, “The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle.” 21.

¹⁹⁷ In his *De rerum praenotione*, Pico supports such theory by quoting Thomas Aquinas: “in the *Expositio in symbolum Apostolorum*” he writes “St. Thomas says that not only those who believe that the heavenly bodies could influence the will of man, but also those who in their actions observe certain times and take auspices prove themselves to be *de facto* polytheists.” See Pico della Mirandola, *Opera Omnia*, I., p. 556; 1507, f. L 6' (I. V, cap. 7) “[...] Divus Thomas in expositione Symboli affirmat eos factis ostendere plures deos se credere qui non solum putant coelestia corpora imprimere in voluntatem hominis posse, sed et illos etiam qui in factis suis certa accipiunt tempora [...]”

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. 382; 1507, f. A5' (I. I, cap. 5): “[...] Praenotionem itaque ad veram divini luminis radiationem primarie et per se referimus, dein ad congenitum rationis fulgorem propagamus [...]”

observation of ever-changing natural events – can be “forcefully extended, although illegally, at the shadowy and adulterous dusk of superstition.”¹⁹⁹ From this “darkness of superstition” – says Pico – originated all occult arts, from magic to astrology and chiromancy: these were all practices based on madness, ignorance and demonic influence meant only to spread the deceits of the master of lies himself, the Devil.²⁰⁰

Notwithstanding its harsh critique against astrology and the revival of other ancient forms of thought and practice at a time when those arts thrived in most European churches and courts, Pico’s *Staurostichon*, as we have seen, had an immediate success, especially in German lands. Gianfrancesco’s admonitions on the moral decay of the Church and ethical sloppiness among lay rulers, in fact, found an eager audience on the other side of the Alps. This is mostly due to the fact that his system of thought was probably more accessible and understandable to Northern scholars – who were generally in line with the ideas of Thomas Aquinas – than were the philosophical experiments of Ficino’s Neoplatonic school or the syncretistic mindset of his uncle Giovanni.²⁰¹ The fact that Gianfrancesco Pico’s writings were published in twenty-three separate editions in northern Europe between 1504 and 1550, while they only enjoyed fifteen editions in Italy (mostly produced by the author’s printing house in Mirandola), can be seen as an indication of the affinity between Pico’s viewpoint and 16th-century German thought.²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.: “[...]mox ad obumbratum et adulterinum superstitionis crepusculum extendi, quamquam illegitime posse putamus.”

²⁰⁰ Ibid.: “Caeterum et prenoscere multi praesumunt, nec divini, nec naturalis luminis adiumento, sed ope daemonis et tenebris superstitionis. Hinc magi insaniunt, necromantici furiunt, astrologi divinarores fabulantur et decipiunt, geomantici nugantur, chiromantici delirant et quicumque ex his, vel propagatione, vel adoptione in insani erroris haereditatem adsciti in stultitiae praecipitia labuntur: praenosse omnes dicuntur, sed non recte atque legitime nisi qui aut divino lumine praesciunt, aut natura coniectantur. Reliqui sive astrologi, sive arioli, sive auspices, haruspicesque [sic], sive augures, sive divini, aut pythonici phanaticive, sive alio quocumque nomine appellentur, divinare omnes rectius quam praescire et praenosse dicendi sunt. Fallax enim eorum praesensio et praedictio fallatior a fallacissimo daemone mendacii parente originem ducens.

²⁰¹ Rowan and Williams, “Jacob Spiegel on Gianfrancesco Pico and Reuchlin: Poetry, Scholarship and Politics in Germany in 1512.” 293.

²⁰² Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola (1469-1533) and His Critique of Aristotle*. 203-8.

The success of Gianfrancesco Pico's *Staurostichon* endured for more than a century, becoming one of the most important sources for later researches on the *Kreuzwunder*. A clear testimony to the continued interest of historians for Pico's work can be found in Cesare Baronio's *Annales Ecclesiastici*, first published between 1588 and 1607. In describing the *Kreuzwunder*, in fact, Odorico Rainaldi – one of the authors that continued Cesare Baronio's work²⁰³ – considered Pico's poem as the most significant textual source, and privileged it over the testimony of the historian Johannes Nauclerus and his student Nikolaus Basellius.²⁰⁴ Another late witness of this text's fortune can be found, for example, in the *Rerum Germanicarum Scriptorum* edited in 1717 by Marquard Freher, Burkhard Gotthelf Struve, and Stefan Alexander Würdtwein. This collection of literary works dedicated – or related – to the late Holy Roman Emperors contains, as a matter of fact, a remarkable edition of Gianfrancesco Pico's *Staurostichon*, combined with Pico's dedication to the Emperor and an introduction to the work written by Struve. The introductory remarks to the poem are a fascinating recollection of Renaissance sources related to the facts narrated in Pico's hymn, with the notable mention of Thiremius, Nauclerus, and Johann Faber (1478 - 1541). Such short treatise does not only testify to the continuous interest around the red rains of 1501-1503 but also shows the importance and durability of the *Staurostichon* in defining the imaginary of the *Kreuzwunder*.

²⁰³ Nelson H. Minnich, "Councils of the Catholic Reformation," in *The Church, the Councils, and Reform: The Legacy of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Gerald Christianson, Thomas M. Izbicki, and Christopher M. Bellitto (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008). 54.

²⁰⁴ Cesare Baronio et al., "Annales Ecclesiastici," XXX (1864). 337-340. Nikolaus Basellius (1470-1532) was a Benedictine priest and humanist. His most famous work is the continuation of the unpublished *Chronica* of Tübingen's University Rector Johannes Nauclerus († 1510), from 1501 to 1515. Nicholas Basellius continued, edited and published the *Chronica* in 1516 as a collective work, with a foreword by Johannes Reuchlin. See Wilhelm Kuhlmann and Achim Aurnhammer, "Killy Literaturlexikon: Autoren Und Werke Des Deutschsprachigen Kulturraumes," (2012). 506.

3. Gianfrancesco Pico on Astrology and Prophecy: A Vision Between Giovanni Pico and Savonarola

From the Late Ancient to the Early Modern period, astrology often played a central part in the official Western scientific and religious models of the time. This is especially true during the Renaissance, when learned astrology enjoyed a long period of success. Mundane astrology (*revolutiones*) – which concerned general predictions about political power and changes of government, warfare, what would happen to nations, regions, and classes of people²⁰⁵ – had often been used as an instrument of power consolidation and propaganda. The same can be said about Natal astrology, which uses a person’s natal chart to draw conclusions about their character and life.²⁰⁶ At the center of this movement of astrological research and propaganda were the Italian courts and the universities, where astrological studies developed in relation to those of poetry, astronomy, and medicine. As we will see with the case of Maximilian I, astrology was also popular in the German-speaking world during the 15th and 16th centuries. All Habsburgs were adepts and patrons of this art: Frederick III (1440-1493) was frequently surrounded by astrologers, among whom we also find Johann Lichtenberger (died 1503).²⁰⁷ Ferdinand I had the horoscope of his firstborn, the future Emperor Maximilian II, drawn up by the very same Joseph Grünpeck who served Maximilian I. Charles V’s astrology teacher was Petrus Apianus (1495 – 1552), and it was said that his decision to abdicate was associated with the appearance of a comet in 1555.²⁰⁸ Maximilian II, in turn, supported the astrologer Cyprian Leowitz (1524-1574).

²⁰⁵ Annelies Van Gijzen, “Astrology I: Introduction,” in *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, et al. (Leiden; Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2005). 109.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ For more info on the subject, see: Dietrich Kurze, *Johannes Lichtenberger (+1503): Eine Studie Zur Geschichte Der Prophetie Und Astrologie* (Lübeck [u.a.]: Matthiesen, 1960).

²⁰⁸ See Gordon Campbell, “Apianus, Petrus,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Renaissance*, ed. Gordon Campbell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Among others, Rudolf II employed important figures such as Tycho Brahe (1546 – 1601) and Johannes Kepler (1571 – 1630) to read his future in the stars.²⁰⁹

Mundane astrology – the aspect of learned astrology that leans the most toward popular astrology – gave rise in the era of printing to a vast production of predictions, annual prognostications, calendars, almanacs, lunaries, and broadsheets of popular astrological medicine, often printed in many thousands of copies.²¹⁰ The theory of Great Conjunctions, articulated by the ninth-century Arab astrologer Albumasar²¹¹ and abridged by Alcabitius,²¹² was considered a valid astrological tool in the medieval and Renaissance periods,²¹³ as it traced momentous historical events back to the conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn, providing a cyclical system for understanding history.²¹⁴ Although often at odds with the Christian providentially inspired view of history and its emphasis on God’s direct involvement in human events, Conjunctionism – especially when adopted by learned prelates such as Paul of Middelburg, Bishop of Fossombrone - could occasionally become an instrument for the Catholic Church and

²⁰⁹ Ornella Pompeo Faracovi, “Astrology Iv: 15th-19th Century,” in *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, et al. (Leiden; Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2005). 128-29.

²¹⁰ Ibid. 130. On this subject see Ottavia Niccoli, *Prophecy and People in Renaissance Italy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990).

²¹¹ Abū Ma‘shar, Ja‘far ibn Muḥammad al-Balkhī, 787 – 886 AD. Albumasar’s text is available in modern edition and translation, see Ma‘shar Abū et al., *Kitāb Al-Madkhal Al-Kabīr Ilā ‘ilm Aḥkām Al-NujūM = Liber introductorii maioris ad scientiam judiciorum astrorum* (Napoli: Istituto universitario Orientale, 1995). See also Ibn-Muḥammad Abū-Ma‘shar Ġa‘far, Charles Burnett, and Adelardus, *The Abbreviation of the Introduction to Astrology: Together with the Medieval Latin Translation of Adelard of Bath* (Leiden u.a.: Brill, 1994).

²¹² Abu al-Saqr Abd al-Aziz Ibn Uthman Ibn Ali al-Qabisi l-Mawsili, 967.

²¹³ For further inquiry, see Jan R. Veenstra and Laurens Pignon, *Magic and Divination at the Courts of Burgundy and France: Text and Context of Laurens Pignon's Contre Les Devineurs (1411)* (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1998). And Laura Ackerman Smoller, *History, Prophecy, and the Stars: The Christian Astrology of Pierre D'ailly, 1350-1420* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).

²¹⁴ Quoting Boudet Jean-Patrice, “Astrology,” (James Clarke & Co). “The Sasanid doctrine of the great conjunctions of Saturn and Jupiter, known in the Byzantine Empire from the 8th c., standardized by the Iranian astrologer Albumasar in the 9th c. and transmitted to the Latin West in the 12th, exercised considerable influence on the whole Christian world, in the field of the interpretation of major natural, political or religious events: hypothetical tempests of 1186, linked to the presence of all the planets in the sign of Libra; Black Death of 1348 and Great Schism of 1378, interpreted after the event as the consequences of the conjunctions of 1345 and 1365, etc. As for comets, they usually foretold catastrophes, notably the coming death of some king or prince, and had done so since the early Middle Ages.”

the Protestant Reformation, used for pinpointing the dates of the great events announced by biblical prophecies, and interpreting them in their favor.²¹⁵ Even if the age of prophetic astrology linked to the theory of great conjunctions in Catholic lands ended with the inclusion of several astrological texts in the *Index librorum prohibitorum* of 1558, and after the papal bulls *Coeli et Terrae* (Sixtus V, 1586) and *Inscrutabilis* (Urban VIII, 1631), astrological prophetism was very much alive at the time of Gianfrancesco Pico.²¹⁶

During the Renaissance, the problematic relationship between astrology, an art meant to calculate and predict the future, and Catholicism, a religion that predicates humanity's free will, brought to a long and lively *querelle* on the legitimation of astrology in light of Christian revelation.²¹⁷ Gianfrancesco Pico's *Staurostichon* and *De rerum praenotione* are just two examples of the massive quantity of treatises dedicated to the subject.²¹⁸ The lord of Mirandola, in fact, seemed well aware of this controversy, as he built his own judgment about the

²¹⁵ On this subject Paul of Middelburg's predictions of 1486 were especially popular: repeated in 1488 by Johann Lichtenberger, they treated the effects of the great conjunction observed in the sign of Scorpio on November 25, 1484. This conjunction was interpreted as announcing the proximate appearance of a false prophet and of a religion of great sanctity, which would lead to new laws suppressing the privileges of the nobility and succoring the miseries of the populace. This was taken in contrary ways by Protestants and Catholics, as the former saw Luther as the renovator, the latter as the false prophet. See Pompeo Faracovi, "Astrology IV: 15th-19th Century." 130. For further reading on astrology and religion in the Renaissance, see Kocku von Stuckrad, "The Brill Dictionary of Religion: Revised Edition of Metzler Lexikon Religion," (Boston: Brill, 2006). 144. See also Paola Zambelli, "'Astrologi Hallucinati': Stars and the End of the World in Luther's Time" (Berlin; New York, 1986).

²¹⁶ In contrast, from the second half of the 16th century, astrology flourished in reformed Europe, despite Luther's skepticism and Calvin's clear opposition. Pompeo Faracovi, "Astrology IV: 15th-19th Century." 130.

²¹⁷ Such controversy is not always against astrology. Often a full accord is noted between astrology and theology. Moreover, in the beginning of the modern era, a certain number of pontiffs believed in astrology and protected it. Towards the end of the 15th century, for example, Sixtus IV had introduced the teaching of astrology in the Roman university, employing the scholar and editor of Manilius, Lorenzo Bonincontri. Paul III was so pleased with the predictions of Luca Gaurico, who had foretold his papacy, that he conferred upon the Campanian astrologer the title of bishop of Civitate. A century later, and in a rather less favorable cultural climate, Urban VIII appealed to the renowned astrological competence of Campanella in order to interpret the obscure predictions about his looming death, widely circulating in Rome. Ornella Faracovi, "The Return to Ptolemy," in *A Companion to Astrology in the Renaissance*, ed. Brendan Dooley (Leiden: Brill, 2014). 96.

²¹⁸ See Eugenio Garin, *Lo zodiaco della vita: la polemica sull'astrologia dal Trecento al Cinquecento* (Roma; Bari: Laterza, 1976)., Robin Bruce Barnes, *Astrology and Reformation* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016). See also Remo Catani, "Girolamo Savonarola and Astrology," *The Italianist* 18, no. 1 (2013).

astrological arts from two of the main protagonists of such quarrel: his uncle Giovanni Pico and his mentor, the Dominican revolutionary Girolamo Savonarola.

Savonarola's treatise *Tractato contra li astrologi*, together with Giovanni's *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*, became, I argue, the backbone of both Gianfrancesco Pico's *Staurostichon* and his *De rerum praenotione*, the philosophical treatise that lies as foundation to the poem. In Gianfrancesco Pico's *De rerum praenotione*, as we will see, we find many of the arguments used by Savonarola, who in his *Tractato* refers abundantly to Thomas Aquinas in order to demonstrate the fallacy and immorality of astrology.²¹⁹ Both authors, moreover, felt compelled to demonstrate the Thomistic conception of prophecy as pure grace, a divine gift conferred by God as a sign of his providence toward the human race, and thus impossible to explain with the tools of human reasoning. In Gianfrancesco Pico's work, however, still survives Giovanni's intent to debunk the idea of astrology as science with a process of humanist inquiry. This does not mean that Gianfrancesco, in both his *Staurostichon* and *De rerum praenotione*, embraced Giovanni's cause in its entirety. For Giovanni Pico, in fact, the inquiry on the veracity of astrology must be inserted in the philosophical context of the harmonious order of the sciences that could bring a certain understanding of reality – both natural and human – in order to ascend to the highest level of knowledge that is the mysterious and ineffable mercy of the divine.²²⁰ For Gianfrancesco, just like Savonarola before him, the problem with astrology has not merely to do with the “knowledge” it brings, but more importantly with deep theological concerns regarding the spiritual wellbeing of humanity on Earth, before its ascension in heaven or its fall in Hell.

²¹⁹ On this subject, see Gian Carlo Garfagnini, “La questione astrologica tra Savonarola, Giovanni e Giovan Francesco Pico,” *Rinascimento: Rivista dell'Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento* 44 (2004). 29.

²²⁰ *Ibid.* 34.

Facing the failure of natural and human reason, Gianfrancesco Pico embraces Savonarola's optimism with absolute faith, in the blind trust that God never abandons His people.²²¹

Giovanni Pico's most important treatise on the subject is the controversial *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem* of 1493–94. The *Disputationes* were published by Gianfrancesco Pico in Bologna in 1496, perhaps to defend his uncle from charges of heresy,²²² during a momentous period in which Girolamo Savonarola was preaching about astrology, claiming the latter to be a diabolical invention against Christian Truth and the Sacred Scripture.²²³ Although extensively remodeled by Gianfrancesco and Giovanni Mainardi,²²⁴ the *Disputationes* remain a precious instrument for understanding Giovanni Pico's later thought on astrology, and the consequent influence that such position had on Gianfrancesco Pico's philosophy. The *Disputationes*, a text that sought to demystify astrology and expose it as an instrument of error and false knowledge, is considered to be a big break from Giovanni Pico's past position on magic and natural sciences in general.²²⁵ In the treatise, in fact, Giovanni Pico considers and debunks all the astrological doctrines of the medieval masters including Arabs, Jews like Abraham Savasorda, and the Latins who defended the latter, from Albertus Magnus

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Graziella Federici Vescovini, "The Theological Debate," in *A Companion to Astrology in the Renaissance*, ed. Brendan Dooley (Leiden: Brill, 2014). 131.

²²³ Gian Carlo Garfagnini, *Questa è la terra tua: Savonarola a Firenze* (Tavarnuzze (Firenze): SISMEL edizioni del Galluzzo, 2000). 251-291.

²²⁴ On the diatribe related to the influence of Gianfrancesco Pico on the last version of the *Disputationes*, see Garfagnini, "La questione astrologica tra Savonarola, Giovanni e Giovan Francesco Pico."

²²⁵ A clear example of this change can be found in Giovanni's introduction to the *Apologia*, written three years after the publication of the *Conclusiones* in 1486. Here, Giovanni celebrates a twofold idea of magic: one that consists in demonic pacts, and another that helps the understanding of natural philosophy. The first kind of magic, he states, is condemned by all religions as the most fraudulent of all arts, while the other is approved by all the most important thinkers and theologians, and considered the highest and most divine philosophy. To the young Giovanni Pico, therefore, natural magic was the most noble and practical part of the natural sciences, capable of uniting man and world in a unique bound. See Pico della Mirandola, *Opera Omnia*, I. 120. See also Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Bohdan Kieszkowski, and Erlangen Universitätsbibliothek, *Conclusiones sive theses dcccc romae anno 1486 publice disputandae, sed non admissae. Texte établi d'après le ms. d'erlangen (e) et l'editio princeps (p), collationné avec les manuscrits de vienne (v et w) et de munich (m), avec l'introd. et les annotations critiques par Bohdan Kieszkowski* (Genève: Droz, 1973). 78-80, 120.

and Roger Bacon to theologians like Thomas Aquinas,²²⁶ Pierre d’Ailly²²⁷ and physicians like Pietro d’Abano.²²⁸ In the *proemium* of the treatise, Pico concentrates his attention on the concept of astrology as a form of deceit that thrives thanks to humanity’s natural fear of the unknown. Such fear, states Giovanni Pico, instigates men to listen to any kind of proactive interpretation of the future, especially when veiled with a fake rigor stolen from other sciences (in this case, astronomy) and covered with a basic knowledge of the philosophy of the time.²²⁹ Born under the sign of deceitfulness, astrology for Giovanni Pico is the work of no one else than the great deceiver himself: Satan. Due to its corrupting nature, able to defile any art, science, and civil

²²⁶ See Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* (Alba: Editiones Paulinae, 1962). Ia q. 115 a.4; IIa IIae q. 95 a 5: “Nullum autem corpus potest imprimere in rem incorpoream, unde impossibile est quod corpora caelestia directe imprimant in intellectum et voluntatem”. See also St. Thomas Aquinas et al., *Summa Contra Gentiles* (Notre Dame [Ind.]: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975). III, cap. 87.

²²⁷ See Federici Vescovini, “The Theological Debate.” 131: “Pico attacks the conjunctionist astrology of Pierre d’Ailly with the most ferocity, especially the pretense of finding a confirmation for religious truths in the great astronomical revolutions. Pico ridicules Abraham Savasorda’s prediction of the timing for the future redemption of Israel as well as Pierre d’Ailly’s arguments to demonstrate Christ’s horoscope ascendant to be in Libra rather than in Virgo. The ascent of a child dressed in white in the first decan of Virgo, he goes on, is a mere fable, a fantastic image invented by the Oriental doctrines of the decans, originating in ancient Egypt. «Who has ever seen these images? Who in the silence of experience has discovered them by the hidden paths of reason? Where did Ptolemy or any other Ancient ever speak of them?»“

²²⁸ Pietro d’Abano (1257 – 1316) published the influent *Conciliator differentiarum medicorum et astrologorum*, a voluminous summa of the medicine and philosophy of the 14th century, redacted probably before 1303 and revised in the years from 1303–1310. The work would be eclipsed only in the 17th century as a consequence of the discoveries of Vesalius and the dissolution of Ptolemaic astronomy. See *ibid.* 131.

²²⁹ Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Eugenio Garin, *Disputationes Adversus Astrologiam Divinatricem* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1946). I, 40-42: “[...] in sinu habens, in praecordiis alens insaniam, praefert speciem habitumque sapientiae ut, si minus inspectes vel per transennam, forma capiaris, si cominus admoveris oculum exploratorem, ipsam videas umbram aut quasi larvam, et sub aperta luce fallaciam tenebrarum abomineris. Ita est certe, ita per rationes manifestissimas luce clarius fiet, nullam esse maiorem fallaciam, nullam perniciosiorem; ostendit procul caelum et planetas, unde facile credas in tam sublimi, tam lucido spectaculo nihil non posse verissime praevideri. Mox, ubi attentius consideraveris, vides et sublime adeo esse speculum ut imagines illuc terrenarum rerum non ascendant, et ita lucidum ut ad eius fulgorem nostra calliget infirmitas; tum, propius cum accesseris, videbis intextam illius peplo, pro caelestibus, portentuosas effigies, et stellas in animalia transformatas, et plenum fabulis caelum, immo, pro vero caelo, commentitium caelum, non factum a Deo, sed ab astrologis fictum. Sic instructa videtur omni firmamento dogmatis comprobati, quae simul et libros circumferat magnis nominibus praetitulatos, et rationes tam multas decretorum suorum, et praeter rationem, experimenta tam diuturnis observationibus, tam diligentibus annotamentis corroborata, tum ab usu tot saeculorum et tam multarum aetatum approbatione recepta. Mirum quam, per caligines istas et nubulas oculis imperitia offensis, et speciosam et venerabilem et seriae plenam auctoritatis imaginem sui repraesentat; quas ubi tenebras et praestigia radio rationis et diligenti tractatione discusseris, videbis in illis libris nihil esse libratum, in auctoribus nullam auctoritatem, in rationibus nihil rationale, in experimentis nihil consonum, nihil constans, nihil verum, nihil credibile, nihil solidum, sed pugnantia invicem, falsa, vana, ridicula, ut vix credas qui scripserunt fidem adhibuisse his quae scribebant.”

law, astrology, states Pico, astrology well deserved the blame and disapproval of the brightest minds of all times. On this subject, Pico mentions Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Ptolemy, Plotinus, Albert the Great, Nicolas Oresme, Niccolò Leonicensis and many others as open detractors of the seditious art of astrology.²³⁰ Moreover, if the good philosophers had always despised and disproved astrology, the biblical prophets had also condemned it as an example of idolatry. After their passing, their teachings were collected by the Church Fathers such as Saint Ambrose, Augustine of Hippo, and Basil of Cesarea, who marked their condemnation of astrology in the tenets of canon law as the Christian Emperors did through their civil laws.²³¹

As we have already seen, Gianfrancesco Pico had an important role in the editing and re-writing of the *Disputationes*, a process that provided a superior and thorough knowledge of the treatise. Helped by his mentor and friend Giovanni Mainardi (1462 – 1536),²³² the Lord of

²³⁰ See *ibid.* 46: “Pythagoram astrologiae fidem non praestasse, tum auctor est Theodoretus, tum Laertius quoque Diogenes et Plutarchus iucli caverunt;” 48: “Plato et Aristoteles, philosophiae principes, inclignam putaverunt de qua verbum aliquando facerent, rota sua philosophia plus eam silendo quam quisque voce scriptisve condemnantes;” 52-54: “Plotinus in platonica familia primae fere auctoritatis habetur: eum, scribit Porphyrius, cum diligentem astrologiae operam dedisset, comperissetque tandem artis vanitatem falsitatemque, praedictionum omnem astrologis fidem abrogasse, quare libro quoque dicato, cui titulus de stellarum officia, dogmata astrologorum asseverate risit et confutavit;” 54: “Alexander de Aphrodisiade, summus auctor in aristotelica philosophia, de jato librum ad Caesares Severum primum et Antonium filium scribens, et fati reiecit necessitatem et de astrologicis siluit;” 56: “Averrois, ceber in eadem familia philosophus et rerum naturalium gravis aestimator, ubique astrologiam lacerat, damnat, insectatur: [...] Avicenna, vir magnus in omnibus disciplinis, ultimo suae primae philosophiae libro, multis rationibus comprobavit ab astrologis praevideri futura non posse, quare nec eorum praedictionibus ullam fidem adhibendam;” 58: “Nicolaus Oresmius, et philosophus acutissimus et peritissimus mathematicus, astrologicam superstitionem peculiari commentario indignabundus etiam insectatur, nihil ratus ille fallacius, nihil detestabilius, nihil omnibus quidem ordinibus, sed principibus maxime viris esse pestilentius;” *Ibid.* “Paulus Florentinus, in medicina quidem, sed praecipue in mathematicis graece latineque doctissimus, quotiens de ista professione rogabatur, totiens eam incertam fallacemque asseverabat, afferens inter cetera se ipsum evidens experimentum qui, cum quinque et octuaginta iam impleret annos, in sua tamen genitura, quam examinat diligentissime, vitalem nullam constellationem repperisset;” 60: “Forte vero nee Nicolai Leonicensis nostri iudicium super hac re dissimulandum; is, cum mathematicam, ut omnes liberales scientias, fideliter teneat, ita tamen bene vanam iudicat prophetantem astrologiam, ut nee illos qui scripserunt, praesertim doctores, fidem putet adhibuisse his quae scribebant.”

²³¹ *Ibid.* 60. “Quod si omnis ratio recta vel prudentia regitur, vel philosophia perficitur, vel divini splendoris radiis illuminatur, erit profecto astrologia omni recto iudicio profligata, quam et prudentissimi legum latroes exterminarunt, et doctissimi philosophorum confutaverunt, et viri divini atque sanctissimi abominati sunt.”

²³² For further information on Giovanni Mainardi/Manardi/Manardo, see Margherita Palumbo, “Manardi, Giovanni,” *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* 68 (2007), [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-manardi_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-manardi_(Dizionario-Biografico)/). See also Paola Zambelli, *L'apprendista Stregone: Astrologia, Cabala E Arte Lulliana in Pico Della Mirandola E Seguaci*, Saggi (Venezia: Marsilio, 1995). And “Giovanni Mainardi e la polemica sull'astrologia,” in

Mirandola managed to put together the fragments left by his uncle and publish the treatise two years after Giovanni's death.²³³ Although what we could call Gianfrancesco Pico's "first philosophic phase" was probably been closer to his uncle's position on astronomy and natural magic,²³⁴ the Gianfrancesco that edited the *Disputationes* was not the same one who wrote the *Staurostichon* and its related treatise, the *De rerum praenotione*. In the five-year period that separates the publication of the *Disputationes* and Gianfrancesco Pico's visit to Emperor Maximilian I, the count of Mirandola lost both his beloved spiritual guide – Girolamo Savonarola, burnt at the stake in 1498 – and his lands, besieged and conquered by his brothers. Galvanized by the idea of continuing the sacred mission that Savonarola bestowed upon his followers after his short-lived republic in Florence, Pico began a long process of intellectual growth, a process well represented by the *Staurostichon* and the *De rerum praenotione*.

Savonarola's conception of prophecy, rooted in the Bible and innervated in the teachings of Scholasticism,²³⁵ did not include any other potential source of inspiration than God himself. Either spontaneous or mediated through the Sacred Scriptures, all prophetic experiences had to be related to a direct experience of the divine.²³⁶ As a celestial gift of pure charity, prophecy

L'opera e il pensiero Di Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola nella storia dell'umanesimo; Convegno Internazionale (Mirandola: 15-18 Settembre 1963), ed. Istituto nazionale di studi sul Rinascimento (Firenze: 1965).

²³³ Walter Cavini, "Un Inedito Di Giovan Francesco Pico Della Mirandola: La Quaestio De Falsitate Astrologiae," *Rinascimento* 13 (1973). 134.

²³⁴ Paola Zambelli, *L'ambigua natura della magia: filosofi, streghe, riti nel Rinascimento* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1991). 185-86.

²³⁵ Garfagnini, *Questa è la terra tua: Savonarola a Firenze*. 162-63. See also Giulio Cattin, *Il primo Savonarola: poesie e prediche autografe dal Codice Borromeo* (Firenze: Leo Olschki, 1973). 160.

²³⁶ Girolamo Savonarola, Gian Carlo Garfagnini, and Eugenio Garin, *Scritti Filosofici* (Roma: A. Belardetti, 1982). 207: "Utrum theologus possit sine logica perfecte divina cognoscere. Respondeo quod si intelligis de theologo qui quondam quodammodo experientiam divina cognoscit, idest per lumen quoddam interius mirabile in quo altissima divinorum cognoscit sicut cognoscebant sancti, potest sine logica, idest sine cognition figurarum et modorum syllogismorum, perfectius divina cognoscere quam qui est optimus logicus et philosophus et theologus per studium. In tali enim cognitione non fit discursus, sed omnia videntem tanquam in speculo. Si autem intelligis de eo qui theologiam addiscit per studium, cum dicat Augustinus quod logica est alligata sacrae Scripturae sicut nervi sunt alligati corpori animalis et tota theologia doctorum sacrorum hodie sit plena argumentis et dialectica, manifestum est quod non potest perfecte haberi scientia divinorum sine dialectica."

belongs to the world of supernatural, understandable through reason only in its interpretation.²³⁷

For Savonarola, therefore, the prophet is the biblical entity on which God bestows his gift in service of his community and in order to carry the divine word.²³⁸ Since any form of desecration of such gift from human arts or sciences ought to be considered abominable, for Savonarola the presumption to understand the Divine Will brought forth by human byproducts such as poetry and astrology was a condemnable error:²³⁹

[Savonarola's opponent asks] "Thus, such [prophetic spirit] exists because you must be born under a certain constellation which makes you apt to this, and because the influence of some planet or fixed star makes you think, and talk, and fathom many future events." Therefore, I answered: "Father, it is foolish to believe that the influence of the skies may allow us to understand future events. Thus the Philosopher said: «The truth about things to come is not defined», and that of certain people is neither science nor art. No wise philosopher, neither Greek nor Latin, nor ancient or modern, ever followed this divinatory astrology, although some quote Albert the Great because of some spurious works attributed to him for sake of authority. If you all will study this art (if one can call it "art") thoroughly, you will understand that it has no foundation nor proof whatsoever. The facts they foolishly affirm are so easy to debunk by anyone, that they seem more like a bunch of old wives' tales instead of scientific facts. [...] Briefly, the Sacred Scriptures demonstrate that knowing the future is divine prerogative only. Only God knows. God and the people He decides to reveal it to. [...] Therefore, all those people that persist in

²³⁷ Garfagnini, "La questione astrologica tra Savonarola, Giovanni e Giovan Francesco Pico." 21.

²³⁸ See "La Polemica antiastrologica del Savonarola ed i suoi precedenti tomistici," in *Questa è la terra tua: Savonarola a Firenze* (Tavarnuzze (Firenze): SISMELE edizioni del Galluzzo, 2000). 162-63.

²³⁹ See, for example, Girolamo Savonarola, "Apologeticus De Ratione Poeticae Artis," in *Scritti Filosofici*, ed. Gian Carlo Garfagnini and Eugenio Garin (Roma: A. Belardetti, 1982). 266-72: "Modus itaque artis poeticae, qui nunc fere ab omnibus servatur, christiana est fugiendus. [...] Quia enim *littera occidit, spiritus autem vivificat*, christianus debet omni studio, relicta carnali sensibilibus delectatione, quantum potest ad spiritum trahere seipsum. Haec autem carmina ad sensum et ad aurium pruritus trahunt hominem a spiritu revocantes. [...] Hic, credite mihi, modus scribendi solum pascit aures et mentes vacuas relinquit, et quamquam haec studia sequentes videantur exterius moribus ornati, intus tamen a superbia lacerantur. Sciant tales quod superbiae rabies tanto magis depascit hominis interiora, quanta exteriora sunt magis ornata. [...] *Quia igitur scientia in flat, charitas autem aedificat*, Deus, qui linguas fecit disertas, noluit Scripturas suas ornari facundia paganorum. Unde et sanctus Hieronymus, qui nobis eas latinas fecit saeculari eloquentia facundissimus, a Spiritu sancto permissus non fuit ut divinas historias sententiasque verbis tullianis et virgilianis decoraret. Sciebat enim quod sic animas detinuissent in verbis quod mens non pasceret in medulla, et quod ex eis potius homines inflarentur quam discerent. [...] Hortor igitur vos, o poetae, ad superiora conscendere et ne velitis semper inter pueros commorari. Vanissimam idolorum superstitionem fugite, et ad Christi crucem ac simplicitatem humilitatemque convolate, et gloriam ab eo percipietis aeternam." See also Girolamo Savonarola, Angela Crucitti, and Girolamo Savonarola, *compendio di rivelazioni: testo volgare e latino, e Dialogus de veritate prophetica* (Roma: Belardetti, 1974). On the subject of poetry, Gianfrancesco Pico and Savonarola clearly diverged. As clearly stated in his introduction to the Staurostichon, Pico believed that the heroic poem has been sanctioned, since Moses himself composed in hexameters. See Chapter 3.

these divinatory superstitions sin deeply, because, by lying, they are usurping God's prerogative.²⁴⁰

In 1497 – one year before the publication of Lucio Bellanti's *Defensio astrologiae contra Ioannem Picum Mirandulam*, an astrological treatise in open contrast with Pico's *Disputationes*²⁴¹ – Savonarola published the text *Tractato contra li astrologi*, a re-elaboration of the 1480's *Quaestio de cyromantia*²⁴² preserved in the famous *Codice Borromeo*.²⁴³ In this work, Savonarola proceeded with an incorporation of Giovanni Pico's *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem* with the Thomistic²⁴⁴ approach that characterized his *Quaestio* in order

²⁴⁰ Girolamo Savonarola and Franco Buzzi, *Compendio di rivelazioni; trattato sul governo della città Di Firenze* (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 1996): "Dunque questo [spirito profetico] debbe essere perché tu se' nato sotto qualche constellazione la quale ti inclina a questo, e la influenza di qualche pianeta o di qualche stella fissa ti fa pensare e parlare e indovinare molte cose future [dice il suo oppositore]. Risposegli allora: Padre, questa è cosa da stolti credere, che la influenza del cielo facci conoscere le cose contingente future, dicendo el Filosofo: «De futuris contingentibus non est determinata veritas», et quod de talibus non est scientia neque ars; onde niuno dotto filosofo si truova che abbi seguitata questa astrologia divinatoria, né greco né latino, né antiquo né moderno, benché alcuni alleghino Alberto Magno in alcuni libri li quali sono stati composti da altri e per dare loro autorità attribuiti a lui. E se diligentemente considererete questa arte (se arte però si può chiamare), intendere che ha fundamento veruno e non pruova cosa che la dica, e piuttosto mi parrebbe leggere fabule da semplice vecchierelle che cose di scienza, perché così facilmente si possono nefare da ogni uomo, come loro le affermono senza ragione [...] E breuiter la sacra Scrittura dimostra che cognoscere le cose future contingente è proprietà divina: e però dolo Dio le conosce, e quelli a' quali lui si degna rivelarle. [...] E però quelli che seguitano queste superstitione divinatorie peccano gravemente, usurpandosi la proprietà divina falsamente."

²⁴¹ In Bellanti's treatise, Pico's *Disputationes* is reduced to a work of political propaganda only meant to defend Savonarola's authority and beliefs concerning astrology. See Matteo Soranzo, *Poetry and Identity in Quattrocento Naples* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014). 112-13.

²⁴² The *Quaestio de cyromantia* is preserved in the Milanese Borromeo manuscript (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, S.P. II.5, fols 10v–11v) and was analyzed by Giulio Cattin: it was a form of answer to a text identified by Cattin with the anonymous treatise *Chiromantia*, edited for the first time in Venice around 1480. See Cattin, *Il primo Savonarola: poesie e prediche autografe dal Codice Borromeo*. 164–68. The transcription of the *Quaestio* is on pp. 272–74.

²⁴³ My thesis agrees with that of Garfagnini, who states that chapter 1, 2 and 4 of Book I and chapter 1, 3, 7 and 8 of Book II of the *Tractato* fully reproduce the arguments of the *Quaestio*, shifting from the condemnation of chiromancy to the reprobation of astrology. See Garfagnini, "La Polemica Antiastrologica Del Savonarola Ed I Suoi Precedenti Tomistici." 169. See also Lorenza Tromboni, "Girolamo Savonarola's Critique of Astrology through the De Doctrina Aristotelis," *Medieval Sermon Studies Medieval Sermon Studies* 59, no. 1 (2015). 29.

²⁴⁴ See the definition given in R. Janz Denis, "Thomism," ('Oxford University Press'). "The word Thomism refers to a school of thought in Christian theology that seeks to represent, defend, and build on the work of Thomas Aquinas (c.1225–1274). Through the centuries, representatives of this school have differed widely on what they take to be the fundamental and distinctive teachings of Thomism. The hallmark doctrines of this school have changed from one historical context to the next, and even within a single historical period there has been great debate over precisely which positions are authentically Thomist. Because of this, many historians are now abandoning the older attempts to define Thomism by listing distinctive teachings. These historians simply accept as Thomist all who understand

to accomplish the political and pedagogical objectives of bringing Pico's lofty ideas to the common citizen.²⁴⁵ One of the most important points that Savonarola wanted to make with his *Tractato* is that prophecy and astrology cannot be considered the same, condemning therefore the many attempts made by several astrologers of his time to collide celestial grace and astrology.²⁴⁶ The observation of the skies, the calculations and the natal charts are, for Savonarola, malfunctioning instruments applied without success in the material world, and with much damage to the spiritual world, where astrology reveals its sinful and presumptuous nature.²⁴⁷

4. *Against the Stars: Staurostichon and De Rerum Praenotione*

After the death of both his mentors and the sudden gain and loss of his lands, Gianfrancesco Pico found himself in a complicated position, having to regain his secular power while staying true to his Savonarolan belief in the need for a political and moral reformation of all Christendom. Bound to both Savonarola's moral reformation and the need for political allies in order to retake the county of Mirandola, Gianfrancesco Pico went to Maximilian I's court with the idea of finding a political ally in the Emperor while also making him reject the astrological

themselves to be such. The further task then is to make qualitative judgments about how well various Thomists represent the actual teaching of Thomas Aquinas. It is in this sense that the word is used here."

²⁴⁵ This is clearly stated in Savonarola's prologue to the *Tractato*: "Considerando io molte volte quanto sia pernicioso alla religione cristiana la vanità della astrologia divinatoria, massime vedendo li uomini che sono in alto stato costituiti essere involti in questo errore, dalli quali imparano di errare li inferiori, pubblicamente già molti anni l'ho detestata predicando al popolo e con molte ragioni reprobata, dimonstrando tale invenzione non solamente essere contraria alia sacra Scrittura, ma etiam essere tutta vana, e non avere in se alcuna solidità ne essere degna di nome di scienza o di arte, rna piuttosto di fallacia umana e superstizione diabolica. Ora, essendosi pubblicato el libro delle disputazioni del Conte Giovanni Pico dalla Mirandola contra questi superstiziosi astrologi e avendolo letto, [...] mi sono acceso di fare quello io per li uomini vulgari che lui ha fatto per li dotti. E perché altrimenti bisogna parlare alli uomini dotti e altrimenti alli indotti, non intendo di tradurre el libro suo in volgare, né di scrivere tutto quello che lui ha scritto, né di servare l'ordine suo perché questo non saria forse utile alli uomini indotti. Ma mi sforzerò di abbassare quello che e alto e di fame capace ogni vulgare, aggiugnendo e minuendo a quello che lui ha scritto, secondo che a me parrà utile alli mediocri ingegni." Savonarola, "Tractato Contra Li Astrologi." 275-77.

²⁴⁶ Ibid. I, 4: "questa loro presunzione iustamente è ancora dannata dalli canoni perché è molto nociva alla religione cristiana, attribuendo li misterii della grazia alli cieli e facendo li profeti astrologi."

²⁴⁷ Garfagnini, *Questa è la terra tua: Savonarola a Firenze*. 171.

arts and thus convert him to a Savonarolan form of *pietas*. This twofold task generated two works: a treatise, the *De rerum praenotione*, and a heroic poem, the *Staurostichon*. Considering the way in which both texts mirror one another, it is clear that they both served the same purposes, that is, to rebuke astrology and contribute to spreading a Savonarolan conception of sacred and untainted prophecy.²⁴⁸

In his *De rerum praenotione* – and the related poem *Staurostichon* – Gianfrancesco Pico, although recognizing his tribute to Savonarola and his uncle Giovanni,²⁴⁹ showed his intellectual growth, developing a philosophical position that goes beyond the diatribe on the validity of astrology discussed in *puris naturalis*.²⁵⁰ In Gianfrancesco Pico's system of thought, Giovanni Pico's lesson on the astrological arts is both supported and surpassed by Savonarola's divine inspiration. *De rerum praenotione*, in fact, does not limit itself to a mere rebuke of astrology

²⁴⁸ See Pico della Mirandola, *Opera Omnia*, II. *De rerum praenotione*, XI, 703-704: "Abundantur autem plurimi supercoelesti gratia, et ne copiam exuperantis luminis intueantur conuiuent, quotus enim quisque ad celebre illud miraculum paulo ante Germaniae monstratum oculos aperuit, cum ob Christi passionem nobis, ut uereor, mandatam obliuioni, cruces, lanceae, clauis, spinae coronae, & quae alia ille pertulit coelo demissa sunt: haec quasi pluuiatiles guttae pannis et carni hominum illabebantur: rubro plurimum colore, quandoque nigro. Sed et rebus etiam in animis affigebant, qua de re quadringentos & amplius heroicis uersus, quibus titulus *Staurostichon* scripsimus, et Maximiliano Caesari dedimus, qui superiore anno dum essem apud eum in Germania nobis plurima id genus miracula ostenderat. Sed iam unde abieram redeo: Consideranda sunt diligenti examine quae reuelantur ribi, cauendumque ne lumen, quod in te est, iuxta Domini uerbum tenebrae sunt, illudque considerato illum non esse Deum, sed pacis. Quapropter si probi illi et docti uiri fuerint, quos consulis, aut consentient, aut non reclamabunt, si lumine scilicet eius didiceris quod patefacis, si uero doctus ipse fueris, reuelationes tuas ad sacras literas, ut ad indicem lapidem argentarii fabri monetam solent, examinato, sic prudentissimus theologus Gerson disseruit, et praeter alia quae diximus, caue ne sub inuolucris aenigmatum, uel amphibologiae, uel Barbarorum nominum deludaris a daemone, ita enim facile quicquam falsi irreperet, quod a diuina reuelatione procul est."

²⁴⁹ Ibid. 468-470: "[...] solebat Joannes Picus patruus noster superstitionis divisiones afferre alias quam ii quos imitate sumus invexerint [...] quoniam ille aduersus superstitionis pauca admodum schedis commiserat praeterquam aduersus astrologiam duodecim libros quos post eius obitum publicauimus. Quapropter volumini huic meo *De rerum praenotione* parum aemolumenti ex illius operibus poterit accedere, praeterquam in libro Quinto, qui de disputationibus eius aduersus astrologiam pene conflabitur." See also ibid. 506: "In primum autem quemque non moveat Picum ipsum patrum et in quaestionum apologia et in eleganti illa oratio quam Romae fuerat habiturus, astrologiam non confutasse, atque eius etiam quandoque testimoniis usum, quoniam valde diuersum est, si aliud agens quipiam alienum dogma proferat in mediumt aliud cum eo de dogmate quid sentiendum sit ex proposito institutoque decernit; quare quod ille adolescens non confutauit, annis sequentibus ob id maxime, quia eo ipso religionem nostrum laesum ita advertebat, penitus aboleuit. Preiudicio hoc mille auctorum defendi posset, qui aliud ec florescente iuuenta, aliud maturioribus annis edidit, qui et in seipsos etiam scripsere sua interpretantes amplificantesque sententias, se et easdem corrigentes et improbant, quod equidem clarum in Augustino sua retractante placita."

²⁵⁰ Zambelli, *L'ambigua natura della magia: filosofi, streghe, riti nel Rinascimento*. 195.

through a humanist inquiry of natural philosophy, it also condemns it – together with any other form of sanctioned and unsanctioned magic and divination – as demonic worship.²⁵¹

Another important part of Gianfrancesco Pico's system of thought that can be found in *De praenotione* is the strict relationship that the humanist creates between unorthodox practices often related with the *philosophia naturalis* and the sin of idolatry – a conception that would accompany him until the end of his life. This is due most probably to an earlier contact the author had with a new wave of Dominican thinking that developed in Germanic lands a few years before his visit.²⁵² Thanks to his stay in Vienna, Gianfrancesco Pico might have had the opportunity to become acquainted with the ideas of Heinrich Kramer (c. 1430 – 1505) and Jacob Sprenger (1436/1438 – 1495), co-authors of the influential *Malleus Maleficarum* and protagonists of Pope Innocent VIII's bull *Summi desiderantes affectibus*.²⁵³ Even though these authors are not directly quoted, the fifth book of the *De rerum praenotione* seems to suggest that Pico had been influenced by the latest trends in Dominican demonology. In this book, Pico

²⁵¹ Pico della Mirandola, *Opera Omnia*, II. 381-82: “Et Cornelius Nepos scribit facile existimari posse prudentiam quodammodo esse divinationem, sed humana haec et a naturae lumine proficiscentia: ideo vel non usque quaque certa, vel crebro vacillantia, vel quandoque falsa. Namque nec astronomicis supputationibus ad liquidum semper conversionis coelestis ordo respondit, quod motuum ad hanc diem indeprehensa varietas. Maximo indicio est praeter fidem experientiae, et medicos (ut constat) saepe fallunt pronostica, et nautis ex insperato procella ingruit, et agnolationibus aut pluvia aut siccitas opportuna credita praedictaque quandoque non advenit, quandoque non favet et viri prudentes interdum hallucinantur. Divina autem illa, quibus veri prophetae futura et praesciunt et praemonstrant, certa, fixa, stabilia sunt, de quibus longa disputatione in processu operis agendum. Caeterum et prenoscere multi praesumunt, nec divini, nec naturalis luminis adiumento, sed ope daemonis et tenebris superstitionis. Hinc magi insanunt, necromantici furiunt, astrologi divinarores fabulantur et decipiunt, geomantici nugantur, chiromantici delirant et quicumque ex his, vel propagatione, vel adoptione in insani erroris haereditatem adsciti in stultitiae praecipitia labuntur: praenosse omnes dicuntur, sed non recte atque legitime nisi qui aut divino lumine praesciunt, aut natura coniectantur. Reliqui sive astrologi, sive arioli, sive auspices, haruspicesque [sic], sive augures, sive divini, aut pythonici phanaticive, sive alio quocumque nomine appellentur, divinare omnes rectius quam praescire et praenosse dicendi sunt. Fallax enim eorum praesensio et praedictio fallatior a fallacissimo daemone mendacii parente originem ducens. Praenotionem itaque ad veram divini luminis radiationem primarie et per se referimus, dein ad congenitum rationis fulgorem propagamus, mox ad obumbratum et adulterinum superstitionis crepusculum extendi, quamquam illegitime posse putamus.” For a concise reconstruction of Pico's philosophical claims in his *De rerum praenotione*, see Pico della Mirandola and Pappalardo, *La Strega (Strix) Di Gianfranco Pico*. 136-47.

²⁵² Zambelli, *L'ambigua natura della magia: filosofi, streghe, riti nel Rinascimento*. 200-01.

²⁵³ See *ibid.* 198. For a complete translation of the bull, see Montague Summers, *The Geography of Witchcraft* (Evanston Ill.: University Books, 1958). 533-36.

provides several quotes from famous interpreters of the divine, canonic and civil laws of the past in order to prove their unanimous rejection of astrology.²⁵⁴ In this context, his interpretation of Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas seems possibly mediated by the experience of the Dominican demonologists.²⁵⁵ Indeed, it is my contention that the chapter in question clearly shows how Gianfrancesco Pico meticulously employed the works of the two theologians in order to demonstrate that astrology is not only a form of superstition, but also and most importantly, a pagan cult of the stars that finds its source in demonic worship and in the lies of the Devil himself. In his *De rerum praenotione*, therefore, Pico moves a strong critique on all non-sacred forms of divination such as astrology or magic by debunking their effectiveness, and re-establishing its origin in a system that carefully employs the Fathers of the Church and the latest Dominican theologians in order to re-establish the traditional function of angels and demons, heaven and hell.²⁵⁶ It is very important to stress how vital this point is in order to understand the

²⁵⁴ Pico della Mirandola, *Opera Omnia*, II. 546: “Quod divina lex eiusque interpretes theologi, lex item pontificia et lex civilis astrologiam damnarint.” As previously noted by Zambelli, in *ibid.* 557 we find a set of quotations from several canonic document and the Parisian theologians that, together with being repeated in the manuscript *Quaestio de falsitate astrologiae* (see Cavini, “Un Inedito Di Giovan Francesco Pico Della Mirandola: La Quaestio De Falsitate Astrologiae.” 163), has no precedent in Giovanni Pico’s *Disputationes*. See Zambelli, *L’ambigua natura della magia: filosofi, streghe, riti nel Rinascimento*. 200.

²⁵⁵ Pico della Mirandola, *Opera Omnia*, II. 556: “At inquam nonnulli: non ita posteriores theologi absolute atque simpliciter astrologiam damnare, quemadmodum er prisci: non Thomas Aquinas, non alii. Falsum hoc quidem, ut ostenditur [...] Divus Thomas in expositione Symboli affirmat eos factis ostendere plures deos se credere qui non solum putant coelestia corpora imprimere in voluntatem hominis posse, sed et illos etiam qui in factis suis certa accipiunt tempora, damnatque astrolabia, quae tamen asusum vere mathematicae in deprehendendis stellarum moribus et magnitudinibus pertinent. Idem in libro *De sortibus* et in secundo volumine *Theologicae summae* partis secundae, introducit Augustinum secund *Super Genesim ad litteram* contra mathematicos decernit: si quando ab eis verum praenunciatur fieri id ipsum occultissimo immondorum spirituum instinctu quem nescientes humane mentes patiuntur. Eudemque secundo *De christiana doctrina* libro citat asserentem ad pacta quaedam cum daemonibus inita id ipsum pertinere. Idem quoque in libro *De iudiciis astrorum* fretus Augustini autoritate, pronunciat diabulum immiscere se operationibus eorum, qui iudiciis astrorum intendunt.”

²⁵⁶ On this subject, see *ibid.* 497: “Multae enim apud eos [daemones] praenotiones ex doctrina superior, revelantibus scilicet bonis angelis volente Deo ex revelatione daemonum [praestantiorum], et ex propria natura, tum per suam essentiam, tum per inditas rerum species. Boni autem angeli cognitione alia praeclarior omnibus pollent, qua scilicet et verbum divinum et res in eos contuentur. Hac autem privati daemones praeter revelationes (ut diximus) naturalem possident cognitionem, qua freti plurima praenosse conestaneum est quae absconditur hominibus. Nam cum rerum naturas agnoscant, praesciunt multa in sui causis, priusquam humano intellectu praecipiantur, nec in suis etiam causis praenosse eos voluit Magnus Antonius, nisi quae iam ec illis fluunt, quippe cum ita referente Athanasio decernit: non enim ea quae nondum caepa sunt referunt, qui a Dominus solus est conscius futurorum, sed quorum conspiciuntur in actu initium eorum sibi tanquam fures apud ignaros vendicant notionem. Norunt quoque et

Staurostichon, as this interpretation of astrology, as we will see, is the one that permeates the entire poem.

5. *The Emperor and the Stars: Maximilian I and Astrology*

As previously stated, the figure of Gianfrancesco Pico cannot be fully grasped without bearing in mind his political and moral aims. Indeed, in order to really understand his works in their proper context, one must bear in mind Gianfrancesco Pico's devotion to the Savonarolan cause and his plan to convert the Italian and European elite to Savonarola's religious reformation. The mature phase of Gianfrancesco Pico's system of thought and literary production bears a profound relationship with the two trips he did to the court of Maximilian I in 1502 and in 1505.²⁵⁷ When the exiled Count of Concordia arrived at the court of Emperor Maximilian I, he soon realized how difficult it would be to spread his ideas regarding a Savonarolan conversion. As we will see, in fact, Maximilian I considered astrology as one of the most important tools of government, and he purposely surrounded himself with humanists with astrological inclinations. Sebastian Brant (1457 – 1521), the imperial *vates*, went from writing about the Virgilian allegories of pagan gods in his youth to penning works that made a cunning use of judicial astronomy, with vivid descriptions of how the signs related to the elements and other ominous events – notably the Ensisheim meteorite of 1492 – were to be interpreted in Maximilian's favor.²⁵⁸ Joseph

affectiones humanas inclinationesque naturae, ex quibus saepe conienctant et tanto hominibus exactius quanto sublimius eorum ingenium est. Experimentatissimi item sunt a primo aevo et indelebili rerum memoria, qui fit ut ex praeteritis investigare et coniierte futura minime difficulter possint. Dolo enim saepenumero praeoccupant et quasi dixerim antevortunt hominum mentes, ut quae ipri acturi sunt praenuncient prius, quae praedictio videatur impleta: ea item quae iam facta sunt cum sublimitate naturae perspicacitateque intelligant priusquam homines, quos et tempus et distantia impedit locorum, annunciant tamquam futura (ut veridici appareant) praesentia enim ipsis sunt et iam facta, remota autem ab hominum cognitione ideoque futura existimata.”

²⁵⁷ Cao, *Pico Della Mirandola Goes to Germany: With an Edition of Gianfrancesco Pico's De Reformandis Moribus Oratio*. 465.

²⁵⁸ One of the earliest examples of this cycle of propagandistic poems involves the most impressive event of all: the fall of a massive meteorite near Ensisheim, twenty miles outside Basle, in 1492. On November 7 of that year, a 127-

Grünpeck,²⁵⁹ Maximilian's biographer and court astrologer, defined his life work by the study of Conjunctionism – that is the study of the recurrent conjunction of major planets, especially

kg stony meteorite fell at Ensisheim in Alsace after an explosion that was heard at a distance of 150 km over the upper Rhineland. On November 26 (by the Julian calendar) the young Maximilian I rode into Ensisheim, on his way to combat the French. Considering his astrological upbringing, Maximilian became very interested in the stone, and he ordered for it to be moved to his royal castle near the city wall, where he could deliberate with his advisors about the true meaning of the event. After a lively debate, the commission decided that the stone must be a wonder of God and a signal of his favor to Maximilian. At this point Maximilian, galvanized by the good news, ordered to carve two fragments, one for himself and one for his friend Archduke Sigismund of Austria. He then returned the stone to the people of Ensisheim with an order that they should preserve it intact in their parish church as eternal testimony to this miraculous event. This Emperor's enthusiasm for what happened in Ensisheim induced Brant to write the *De fulgetra anni XCII*: an imposing broadsheet of twenty-two Latin elegiac couplets on the left, matched by forty-four German verses on the right, and twenty-two more German verses surmounted by the German eagle at the bottom. In the broadsheet, Brant celebrated the comet as a prophecy of triumph, and as a sign that Maximilian would soon inherit the imperial crown and scepter. With his interpretation he thus incited Maximilian to attack the French without delay in order to fulfill his destiny. After Maximilian won his battle against the French, the stone and the poem both grew in fame, making it one of Brant's most famous and politically effective works. See Dieter Wuttke, "Sebastian Brant Und Maximilian I: Eine Studie Zu Brants Donnerstein-Flugblatt Des Jahres 1492," *Die Humanisten in ihrer politischen un sozialen Umwelt / hrsg. von Otto Herding und Robert Stupperich. Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*. (1976). 163-166. On this subject, see also E. L. Harrison, "Virgil, Sebastian Brant, and Maximilian I," *modelangrevi The Modern Language Review* 76, no. 1 (1981). On Brant's treatment of pagan deities, see Edwin H. Zeydel, *Sebastian Brant* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1967). 64.

²⁵⁹ Although Sebastian Brant's use (and misuse) of astrology drew on Maximilian's penchant for the astrological sciences, no one managed to master astrology as a lure for the Emperor's favor as much as the humanist Joseph Grünpeck. Born in 1473 in Burghausen, in 1487 Joseph Grünpeck was admitted to the University of Ingolstadt as a pauper, where he studied rhetoric with Conrad Celtis (1459 – 1508) [For further inquiry on Celtis, See Lewis William Spitz, *Conrad Celtis, the German Arch-Humanist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957).] and medicine with Wolfgang Peyser. After obtaining his degree in 1491, he went to Pavia to further his studies in medicine, before moving to the University of Krakow in order to combine the study of medicine with astrology. Grünpeck remained in Krakow only a short time before returning to Ingolstadt in early 1495, where he tutored Latin rhetoric to students from the University of Ingolstadt. That summer the plague broke out in Ingolstadt, and Grünpeck, alongside the whole university, was forced to flee to Augsburg. After a brief trip back to Italy, where he encountered the French Disease, Grünpeck returned to Augsburg and resumed tutoring the exiled university students. Thanks to this unfortunate encounter, in 1496 Grünpeck produced a work that would soon attract the attention of the Emperor: the *Tractatus de pestilentiali scorra, siue mala de Franzos: originem remediaque eiusdem continens*, a work he quickly translated into German. The treatise – together with his two astrological *prognostica* of the same year – was written in accordance with Maximilian's political and military plans, in order to attract the Emperor's attention just like Sebastian Brant had done before him. Like Sebastian Brant's predictions, Grünpeck's prophecies rested on a political use of astrology and prophecy, whose basis conveniently lied in the theory of the great conjunctions in order to foment the idea of Maximilian I as the Emperor of prophecy. [see M. Moore and H. C. Solomon, "Joseph Grünpeck and His Neat Treatise (1496) on the French Evil: A Translation with a Biographical Note," *The British Journal Of Venereal Diseases* 11, no. 1 (1935). 16-20.] From that initial success onwards, Grünpeck made a name for himself in the court of the Habsburg, where he served for the rest of his life.

Jupiter and Saturn²⁶⁰ – as a tool for the justification of imperial authority.²⁶¹ The strong presence of astrologers such as Brant and Grünpeck at the court of Maximilian I certainly inspired the structure and motives underlying Pico’s poem, *Staurostichon*. In order to understand Pico’s poem, therefore, it is vital to understand who was the Emperor to whom Gianfrancesco Pico dedicated not only the poem *Staurostichon*, but also the 1501 philosophical treatise *De imaginatione*.²⁶²

On November 2, 1503, Emperor Maximilian I wrote a missive to call all his subjects to a new Crusade in defense of Christianity and the Holy Roman Empire. In order to convince his people to join the cause, the sovereign decided to share a prophetic vision with them. According to the Emperor, God’s wrath and fair punishment were fast approaching due to the internal

²⁶⁰ According to Albumasar’s theory, many significant and wide-scale events on Earth are bound to the conjunction of the outer planets, mainly Jupiter and Saturn. The astrologer Albumasar distinguished four types of conjunctions according to their frequency. Following the first conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter in the sign of Aries, minor conjunctions occurred every 20 years, as the two planets in the different signs of the first triplicity or related zodiacal signs. According to Albumasar, there are four triplicities, each related to one of the four elements: earth, air, water and fire. After 60 years, the two planets conjoin once again in Aries in what the astrologer calls a great conjunction. The third of such conjunctions happens every 240 years, when Saturn and Jupiter shift out of the first triplicity and meet in the first sign of a new one. This conjunction was called a greater conjunction. After 960 years, when the greater conjunction is repeated through the four triplicities, the two planets meet once again under the sign of Aries. (J. D. North, “Astrology and the Fortunes of Churches,” *CNT Centaurus* 24, no. 1 (1980). 181-211.) See also Federici Vescovini, “The Theological Debate.” 105-06: “[The Conjunctionist theory] is based on the idea that the conjunctions of Saturn and Jupiter occur successively in the different signs of the same triplicity at the rate of 12 conjunctions for each triplicity, which after four cycles of 12 conjunctions would bring the two planets back to the point of origin of the revolution, fixed at zero degrees of Aries [...]. Mashallah had set out the definitions of great, medium and small conjunctions, as well as of triplicity, without however joining the latter concept to the former. Albumasar’s contribution was to articulate the connection. Two planets are in conjunction when they have the same longitude, whatever might be their latitude. Triplicity (*triplicitas*) is the Latin translation of *trigona* or *triquetra*, terms that indicated the harmonic aspect between signs of the same element, considering that the signs were subdivided according to the four elements: fire, air, water, earth. Thus the triplicity of fire included Aries, Leo, Sagittarius; of air, Gemini, Libra, Aquarius; of water, Cancer, Scorpio, Pisces; of earth, Taurus, Virgo, Capricorn. The twelve signs were then divided into four equilateral triangles and the two major planets Jupiter and Saturn presided as Lords (Domini) over each triangle, and to them was joined a third faster planet as a companion (socius) according to the theories of a planet’s exaltation, house and fall. These last doctrines were variously elaborated by Mashallah, Al Kindi, Albumasar, Alchabitius and other Arab and Medieval Latin astrologers, not always in agreement among one another.”

²⁶¹ See Darin Hayton, *The Crown and the Cosmos: Astrology and the Politics of Maximilian I* (Pittsburgh University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015). II. See also Paul A. Russell, “Astrology as Popular Propaganda: Expectations of the End in the German Pamphlets of Joseph Grunpeck (D. 1533?),” in *Forme e destinazione del messaggio religioso: aspetti della propaganda religiosa nel Cinquecento*, ed. Antonio Rotondò (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1991).

²⁶² See Pico della Mirandola and Caplan, *On the Imagination*. 16-21.

turmoil within the empire, a dissension that brought many people to underestimate the many signs sent on Earth to communicate God's will:

The horrors of our time and God's terrible punishments warn us to strive for change. These warnings, however, are heeded all too little. In light of the phenomena which follow, heavy punishments are to be feared. During the campaign against the French, Kaiser Maximilian witnessed a meteorite crash to Earth in front of his eyes. He subsequently had the meteorite displayed in the church of the nearby village of Ensisheim. Through this meteorite, God sought to warn Kaiser Maximilian that Christendom had to correct its sinful ways. God also gave him luck and victory as a sign that he should continue his campaign against the French throne. Kaiser Maximilian spread this warning to the electors, princes, nobles and subjects of the Empire so that they would help him fight against the enemies of the faith, however, he was unable to reach any accordance. At this point, God sent a special punishment to Christendom. Namely, the French from which many hundreds of thousands of people died due to the fact that this terrible disease was not taken to be a punishment from God; a further warning presented itself around the lower Rhine in the form of thousands of people displaying physical signs of the suffering of Christ. For these reasons Kaiser Maximilian called for a gathering in Augsburg and implored the foreign delegates to pay attention to the divine warnings and to struggle against unbelievers and topple all worldly vice in order to save Christendom from heresy. But even this was of no help. Even though all matters of Christianity and the empire were splendidly considered, the devil sowed the seeds of discord and, as such, the unity of faith and empire could not come to pass and the enemies of the faith were able to exercise their force more than ever. To refrain from resisting these developments would be shameful to the Christian nobility in the eyes of Kaiser Maximilian and would represent a major reason for damnation for us all on judgment day. In order to convert the Christian world and the German nation, God has had the cross and other symbols of his divine suffering (mostly blood colored crosses) appear on the bodies and clothes of men, women, and children in the high German lands. These phenomena are manifesting themselves especially in Swabia and Franconia. This has been seen by many trustworthy witnesses as well as the Emperor himself. Owing to the fact that these signs are more prevalent among the innocent than amongst sinners, Kaiser Maximilian believes that they aren't just appearing because of the sins of the German nation but rather they are appearing in order to provoke this most powerful Nation into initiating a struggle against unbelief, raising the flag of the cross and bringing all Christian nations under it.²⁶³

²⁶³ Maximilian I Habsburg, "Ri Xiv,4,1 N. 17881," http://www.regesta-imperii.de/id/1501-05-18_1_0_14_3_2_2634_15362.: "KM an alle Kfsten, Fsten, Stände und Untertanen des Reiches: (1) Die Übel der Zeit und Gottes schreckliche Strafen mahnen zur Besserung, werden aber leider zu gering geachtet. Aufgrund folgender Erscheinungen sind noch schwerere Strafen zu befürchten: Während des Feldzuges gegen die Franzosen mahnte Gott KM durch einen etwa zwei Zentner schweren Stein1) (=Meteorit), der vor ihm auf einem Feld niedersauste und den KM in der Kirche des nahen Ensisheim aufhängen ließ, die Christenheit von ihrem sündigen Leben zu bekehren. Gott gab ihm damals auch Glück und Sieg zum Zeichen, daß KM sein Unternehmen gegen die frz. Krone forsetzen soll. KM hat diese göttliche Mahnung dann den Kfsten, Fsten und Ständen des Reiches eröffnet, damit sie ihm gegen die Feinde des Glaubens helfen, aber keine Zustimmung erlangen können. Darum hat Gott nun

As the excerpt above shows, the three “miracles” Maximilian used to ground his apocalyptic prediction are the fall of a meteorite near the town on Ensisheim, the spreading of the French disease (Syphilis), and the recent showers of bloody crosses in all German lands.²⁶⁴ The Emperor’s letter is especially interesting for two main reasons: firstly, the letter is a public declaration of Maximilian’s belief that meteorological and astronomical events can be interpreted as the prophetic signs of a superior will; secondly, the precise choice of these three events helps to symbolically pinpoint the names of the humanists that influenced the Emperor in his prophetic discourse. I am referring to Sebastian Brant, the court poet who wrote the famed *De fulgetra anni MCDXCII* – a poem that depicts the asteroid of Ensisheim as a sign of divine favor for the Habsburgs – Joseph Grünpeck, courtier and astrologer, author of a treatise on the syphilis and its astrological causes titled *Tractatus de pestilentiali scorra*, and Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, who discussed the meaning of the *Kreuzwunder* in depth with the Emperor himself, an exchange that inspired the production of his *Staurostichon* dedicated to Maximilian.²⁶⁵

eine besondere Strafe in die Christenheit geschickt, nämlich die schwere Krankheit der beesen blatern (Syphilis), an der viele hundertausend Menschen sterben. - (2) Weil diese schreckliche Krankheit aber nicht für eine Strafe Gottes gehalten wurde, hat sich vor kurzem am Niederrhein tausenden Menschen eine weitere größere Gottesmahnung von pluott und totfarben creuzen seines hailigen leidens gezeigt. Deshalb hat KM zu Augsburg (1500) der Reichsversammlung und den (auswärtigen) Gesandtschaften erneut diese göttliche Mahnung und diese Wunderzeichen vorgehalten und Hile gegen die Ungläubigen und zur Abstellung aller weltlichen Übel gefordert, um die Christenheit vor den Ungläubigen zu erretten. - (3) Aber auch das half nichts, denn obwohl auf dem Augsburger Tag anfänglich alle Angelegenheiten der Christenheit und des Reiches trefflich erwogen wurden, säte letztlich der Böse (=Teufel) doch den Samen der Zwietracht, so daß Christenheit und Reich bis zum heutigen Tag uneinig sind und die Feinde des Glaubens wie des Reiches mehr denn je ihre Gewalt ausüben können. Ihnen nicht Widerstand zu leisten, wäre für KM und die christlichen Stände schmäählich und am Jüngsten Tag für sie alle ein Hauptgrund zur Verdammnis sein. - (4) Um die christliche Welt und die Deutsche Nation zu bekehren, läßt Gott jetzt abermals die Kreuz- und anderen Zeichen seines heiligen Leidens, meist rot- und blutfarbig, an Leib, Kleidern und anderen Stellen von Männern, Frauen und Kindern in den hochdeutschen Ländern, vor allem in Schwaben und Franken, erscheinen, was viele glaubwürdige Augenzeugen berichten und auch KM selbst gesehen hat. - (5) Weil diese Zeichen mehr bei den Unschuldigen als bei den Schuldigen auftreten, glaubt KM, daß sie sich nicht allein wegen der Sünden der Deutschen Nation ereignen, sondern damit diese als mächtigste und vor allen anderen dazu berufene den Anfang im Kampf gegen die Ungläubigen macht, die Kreuzzugsfahne aufwirft und dadurch die anderen christlichen Nationen mitreißt.”

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ As discussed above, Grünpeck wrote about the *Kreuzwunder* as well.

As we will see, all these three authors had a certain importance in shaping the sovereign's mind with respect to prophecy. Gianfrancesco Pico's influence, despite its limits when compared with that of Brant and Grünpeck – two intellectuals who made most of their career at the service of the Habsburgs – cannot be overlooked. Indeed, Pico's *Staurostichon* was not just a mere attempt to gain the Emperor's favor in order to win his political and military support, but also, and more importantly, an instrument meant to "convert" the sovereign, that is to have him renounce astrology in favor of holy prophecy. The author's aim, therefore, was to use Savonarolan arguments in order to challenge court thinkers who, following Maximilian's penchant for the astrological arts, built most of their prophetic arguments on astrology. What Gianfrancesco Pico wanted to show the Emperor in his *Staurostichon* was an alternative way to interpret celestial signs: a sacred, Savonarolan form of holy prophecy that would have granted him the same results in terms of political propaganda.²⁶⁶

The 1501 *Kreuzwunder*, as many other astrological and meteorological wonders before it, invited astrologers and prophets of all types to provide their interpretation, independent of the theoretical approach suggested by those who witnessed or analyzed the event. As the news of the miracle began to spread in the Empire, it was clear to many that the event needed to be both explained and interpreted. Similar to what the prince-bishop Jean de Hornes reported to the Emperor, many saw in the rain of crosses a call for a new crusade against the Turks. Others began considering the event as a divine warning against the moral corruption of customs and religious beliefs. Even in the closed circle of the Emperor's court, Gianfrancesco Pico and his poetic interpretation of the *Kreuzwunder* had to face great competition. One of the main reasons

²⁶⁶ On this subject, the *Staurostichon* is also the story of a partial failure, as Maximilian I never rejected astrology despite all of Pico's efforts. The Emperor's interpretation of the *Kreuzwunder* in the missive, however, agrees completely with Pico's prophecies, which seems to suggest a certain open-mindedness towards his precognitive abilities.

for this was Maximilian I's systematic use of astrology as an instrument of propaganda and self-justification. Maximilian, in fact, was a strong supporter of astrology, and welcomed several of the most reputed astrologers at his court, just as his father the Emperor Frederick III had done before him.²⁶⁷ Throughout his rule, Maximilian served as patron for several astrologers such as Joseph Grünpeck, Johannes Stabius, Andreas Stiborius, Georg Tannstetter, and Andreas Perlach.²⁶⁸ Moreover, the Emperor firmly stated his support of astrology in his autobiographical novel entitled *Weisskunig* (1505-1506), in which he narrates the process through which he learned "the science of the stars:"

And now after the young *Weisskunig* had studied the occult knowledge of the natural world and had learned it sufficiently, as previously mentioned, he then considered how in the future it would be necessary for him to recognize the stars and their influences as well as their effects; otherwise, he might not understand correctly human nature, a topic that was almost completely lacking from the occult sciences. No matter the level of zeal he brought to the task, the science of the stars remained impenetrable to him. Therefore, he summoned the most learned doctor of astrology. And very diligently he learned this art from the doctor and, in fact, recognized the influence of the heavens and the effects of the stars – whence people receive their disposition and character – and also the arrangement of the planets and the zodiac.²⁶⁹

Maximilian I's interest for astrology also found its source in his proper education and upbringing. His own father, Emperor Frederick III, had a life-long interest in astrological phenomena, an interest that increased after his coronation. During Maximilian I's youth, Georg von Peurbach (1423 – 1461) – one of the best humanists, scholars, and mathematicians active at

²⁶⁷ See Hayton, *The Crown and the Cosmos: Astrology and the Politics of Maximilian I*.

²⁶⁸ "Astrologers and Astrology in Vienna During the Era of Emperor Maximilian I (1493-1519)" (2004). 2-3.

²⁶⁹ Ibid. 1-2: "Nachdem und der jung weiß kunig nun das heimlich wissen der erfahrung der welt bewegt und zu gueter maß funden het, wie vor davon geschriben ist, da gedacht er in im selbs, wie ime kunftiglichen notthun wurde, die stern und einflus mit irer wirkung zu erkennen; sonst mocht er die natur der menschen nit volkumenlich erlernen, das im in dem heimlichen wissen der erfahrung der welt ain mangle sein wurde. Wie mit sonderm vleyss hat er aus ime selbs das bewegt, das andern verporgen ist! A uf solichs beruefet er zu ime den gelertisten doctor des sternsehens und lernt gar emsiglichen von ime dieselb kunst und vernam gar aightlichen des himels einflus und der stern wirkung, davon die menschen ir natur und wesen emphahen, auch die ordnung und zirkl des himels."

the University of Vienna during the 15th century²⁷⁰ – and his disciple Regiomontanus (Johannes Müller von Königsberg, 1436 – 1476) were often at the Emperor’s service. For nearly a decade, Peurbach provided his astrological expertise to Frederick III’s as well as to Frederick’s relatives, King Ladislaus Posthumus and Sigismund of Tyrol.²⁷¹ Regiomontanus even cast birth charts²⁷² for the young Maximilian and his mother, Leonore of Portugal.²⁷³ Throughout Maximilian’s youth, Frederick frequently consulted astrologers to learn about Maximilian’s future accomplishments and the threats he might encounter.²⁷⁴ On this subject, Peurbach and Regiomontanus both had an important role in defining the young Emperor’s inclinations for astrology. Throughout the decade following Maximilian’s birth, in fact, Frederick continued to cultivate his relationship with them and asked them for advice on political, social, and economic matters.²⁷⁵ Moreover, Johannes Lichtenberger, the most famous of the fifteenth-century prophetic authors, had long served the Emperor, designating him – and his son Maximilian after 1488²⁷⁶ – as the prophetic last Roman Emperor.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁰ Ernst Zinner, *Regiomontanus, His Life and Work* (Amsterdam; New York; New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: North-Holland; Distributors for the U.S. and Canada, Elsevier Science Pub. Co., 1990). 29

²⁷¹ Hayton, *The Crown and the Cosmos: Astrology and the Politics of Maximilian I*. 14

²⁷² A birth/natal chart is a diagram that represents the positions of the planets at the moment that a person was born. It is the central tool for the practice of natal astrology, which holds that information about a person’s life can be determined by examining the positions of the planets at the precise moment of their birth.

²⁷³ Zinner, *Regiomontanus, His Life and Work*. 31-34

²⁷⁴ See Joseph Grunpeck, “Historia Frederici Iv Et Maximiliani I,” in *Osterreichische Geschichtsforscher I*, ed. Joseph Chmel (1838). 81-82: “Nec tamen imperator his coniecturalibus saciatus iudiciis, atque extemporariis (ut dici solet) coniectorum fabulis filioli ambigua fata, multarum ob rerum commoditatem certa sciencia complexurus peritos genetliacos consuluit, quid de Maximiliani sentirent futuris aut prosperis aut adversis successibus, qui haud constanter ex veris siderum motibus efficaces rationes conicientes in medium affirmaverunt inter caetera, eius vitam in ultimum halitum variis et prope assiduis fortune casibus atque inequali mixtura iam sublimibus exaltatam condicionibus jam humilibus depressam obnoxiam fore, at cui nunquam essent turn plebis studia turn fortunarum incrementa defutura, in caeteris fata eius essent eiusmodi incertitudinis involucris aglomerata, quod nec candidum nec nigrum quis inde expromere posset.”

²⁷⁵ Hayton, *The Crown and the Cosmos: Astrology and the Politics of Maximilian I*. 14

²⁷⁶ Grünpeck was surely aware of this when he composed his *prognostica* in the middle 1490s. See *ibid.*

²⁷⁷ Regarding the origins and eschatological nature of this Medieval European legend, see Paul J. Alexander, “The Medieval Legend of the Last Roman Emperor and Its Messianic Origin,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 41 (1978).

During his reign, Maximilian I not only decided to follow his father's footsteps in regard to astrology, but went further by enforcing and incorporating the astrological arts in every aspect of his reign. To that fact, Darin Hayton writes:

[According to Maximilian I's idealized court depicted in the *Weisskunig* and *Theuerdank* (1517)] the prince should attract experts from whom he would learn the science of the stars. These learned astrologers would not simply teach the prince but also be actively engaged in advancing the science so that it could better serve politics. But education alone was not sufficient. These same astrologers should also serve as advisers to the prince, accompany him on journeys, offer advice at tournaments and jousts, and predict dangers in recreation as well as in combat.²⁷⁸

During his rule, Maximilian often showed a clear preference for literary works that mixed astrology with propaganda. The motives behind this predilection are manifold. For starters, his family's claim to the crown had always been weak, and Maximilian's hold on the imperial title was continuously endangered either by his enemies or by the most rebellious of his subjects. The Habsburg claim on the Holy Roman Empire, in fact, was anything but certain. Even though the family had been an influent house within the empire, they did not succeed in gaining the imperial title until Maximilian's father, Frederick III, was elected in 1452. Despite his election, Frederick was never secure on his throne, as he had to struggle with a continuous opposition from the electors and his brother Albert VI. Maximilian's own claim to the throne rested more in his marriage to Mary of Burgundy and her family's immense wealth than it did in his own Habsburg lineage. But even her wealth and heritage did not protect Maximilian. The early years of his reign were marked by failed efforts to reform the government and to centralize the authority in the empire. Moreover, Maximilian was forced to make concessions to a powerful association of princes and bishops, who were opposed to his reforms and who undermined his efforts to extend

²⁷⁸ Hayton, *The Crown and the Cosmos: Astrology and the Politics of Maximilian I*. 34-35.

his control. Moreover, due to a diplomatic instability with the Vatican, Maximilian never managed to obtain the papal coronation and struggled to be declared Emperor until 4 February 1508, when he accepted the title of “Emperor-elect” conferred with the consent of Pope Julius II.²⁷⁹ Consequently, the Emperor needed to find ways to confirm the legitimacy of his bloodline so that he and his relatives be reaffirmed as the rightful heirs to both the Eastern and the Western Roman Empires. Maximilian found the device of legitimacy he needed in astrology and in the astrologers he gathered around himself.²⁸⁰

At the time of Maximilian’s ascension to the throne, astrology had already been used for a long time by Emperors, as it afforded much more “flexibility” when it came to interpretation, as opposed to historical records.²⁸¹ Due to his effort in using astrology as a tool of reference and justification, Maximilian attracted to his court and to the University of Vienna a number of talented astrologers, whom he appointed to important positions and whose expertise he enlisted in his political projects. Amongst these, we find such important names as Joseph Grünpeck, the Emperor’s first biographer and personal secretary; Johannes Stabius (1450 – 1522), who created a number of astrological instruments and celestial maps for the Emperor and who edited and wrote various astrological texts; Andreas Stiborius (1465 – 1515), who built for Maximilian an astrolabe designed to work at the latitude of Vienna and who wrote a set of canons that he presented to the Emperor; and Georg Tannstetter (1482 – 1535), who produced yearly *practica* and *judicia* as well as the wall calendars that accompanied these texts.²⁸² Thanks to the work of these astrologers, the Emperor’s image began to take shape around a set of astrological and

²⁷⁹ Hermann Wiesflecker, *Kaiser Maximilian I. Das Reich, Österreich Und Europa an Der Wende Zur Neuzeit* (München: R. Oldenbourg, 1971). 6-15.

²⁸⁰ Hayton, “Astrologers and Astrology in Vienna During the Era of Emperor Maximilian I (1493-1519).” 31

²⁸¹ On this subject, see: Tamsyn Barton, *Power and Knowledge: Astrology, Physiognomics, and Medicine under the Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

²⁸² Hayton, “Astrologers and Astrology in Vienna During the Era of Emperor Maximilian I (1493-1519).” 35-36.

messianic events. Maximilian's lineage was traced back to important Biblical and Classical figures such as Noah,²⁸³ Hector, and Aeneas in order to strengthen his claim as Emperor of both the Western and the Eastern Roman Empires.²⁸⁴ Comets, miraculous rains, celestial and earthly oddities: everything was recorded, interpreted, and fitted into the master narration built around the idea that Maximilian was the chosen one, and that his empire was guided and blessed by divine will.²⁸⁵

6. For the Emperor, Against the Astrologers.

As we have seen, Pico had a personal contempt towards astrology and wished to steer the Emperor away from it. The humanist, however, seemed well aware that a simple poetical work that denounced what he perceived as unholy divination would have little effect on Maximilian I. This is why he decided to ground his poem in the celebration of the Emperor through the holy symbols that appeared in the sky not long before his arrival. The choice of the topic in question, the *Kreuzwunder*, was strategic: according to Gianfrancesco's dedication to Maximilian, Pico discussed it directly with the Emperor during his stay in Vienna.²⁸⁶ Gianfrancesco Pico's dedicatory letter to King Maximilian I – as mentioned earlier - retraces the original inspiration of

²⁸³ See Maximilian I's *Kaiser Maximilians Weisskunig*, vol. 1: *Textband* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1956), 225 in *The Crown and the Cosmos: Astrology and the Politics of Maximilian I*. 37: "As a youth, the young Weisskunig often asked about his royal ancestry, for he would have liked to know the origins and history of such a royal and princely family, though as a youth he could not find out. Further, he was often annoyed that people paid so little attention to history. And so as an adult, he spared no expense but rather sent out scholars to do nothing other than to sift through the monasteries, cloisters, and books, and to ask all the learned scholars for information about the royal and princely house. And he had everything written down for the glory and praise of the royal and princely family. Through this research he traced his male lineage from one ancestor to the next back to Noah, which otherwise would have been entirely forgotten and the ancient records would have been lost because they were no longer studied."

²⁸⁴ "Astrologers and Astrology in Vienna During the Era of Emperor Maximilian I (1493-1519)." 30-31.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 35

²⁸⁶ Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Staurostichon*, Dedication to Maximilian I. See appendix.

his work to a conversation with the Emperor himself: “When I was with you in Germany, crosses, nails, lances and many other objects appeared marked on bodies by a certain invisible, heavenly rain, and when you received the report of these things in writing, you were easily able to translate them from German into Latin.”²⁸⁷ This first-hand knowledge of the Emperor’s opinion about the rain of crosses greatly helped Gianfrancesco in his mission to write a piece that would both praise the Emperor *and* condemn his court astrologers.

To start with, the poem displays a particularly focused attention on subject matters that were dear to the Emperor, such as prophecy, ancient legacy, and divine justification. Concerning the latter, Pico partially embraces the theory of bishop Jean de Hornes, who interpreted the *Kreuzwunder* as a divine call for a crusade against the Turks. The Emperor himself also shared this viewpoint, as was made clear when he launched a crusade in 1503 with the objective – one might imply – of finally obtaining the papal coronation.²⁸⁸ In the *Staurostichon*, the holy signs falling from the sky are repeatedly called “banners” (*insignia*) meant to rally all Christians and have them fight in this new holy war under the Emperor’s coat of arms. In order to make his case, Gianfrancesco Pico employs the notion of prophecy, declaring that the rain of crosses constitutes a clear divine message, a message that needs to be heard and followed with faith. In exchange for the Emperor’s recognition of what he calls “gifts from heaven (375), Pico prophesizes the victory of Christianity and the recovery of the Eastern Empire under the sign of the cross and the wings of Maximilian’s imperial eagle: Switching from a narrative to a parenthetic/exhortative mode, explicitly matching the Holy War against Moors and nonbelievers to

²⁸⁷ Ibid.,

²⁸⁸ RI XIV, 4.1 n 17881, in: Regesta Imperii Online, URI: http://www.regesta-imperii.de/id/1503-11-12_2_0_14_4_0_2154_17881 (Accessed on 02.27.2016).

the heroic deeds of Christian martyrs, Gianfrancesco Pico solemnly addresses Maximilian with these words, animated by a strong sense of messianic anxiety:

Let's expiate the guilt, let's straighten / the wrong! It is on us to call for war first of all against / the Moors, then wage war against nonbelievers. / Otherwise we would let the mysterious signs rain down / from heaven in vain; in vain would the ancient heroes / of the sacred faith have thus shed so much blood; or we would end / up accepting that Christ's painful death was nothing for us. / Restrain your subjects, o famous Cesar, from vice: / For indeed the king of Olympus never gave you so many / virtues and wealth exclusively for your good – the chosen / gifts of your mighty right hand. / Strong Cesar, may you discern gifts that are from heaven. / Don't hesitate to caress with your sacred thumb the tortured / beard, these relics are your duties, o Cesar./ Hold the sword for protecting the laws of constant faith, / chase out with the engraved cross the faithless followers / of Mohammed. What has already been given to you, o Cesar, / don't let someone else take it in spite of you. Christ does / not lack of loyal kings; neither does he lack the time / to drive out the shameful customs brought about by Satan, / and expand the empire of the Cross far and wide.²⁸⁹

The rain of crosses, as depicted by Pico, is a miracle that unites all German lands in awe, humility, and devotion. It is a holy symbol representing God's will for the German peoples and electors to stand together as one in support of the true faith and of the holy Emperor, and to dismiss the diabolical cloud of political and theological dissension infesting the imperial court and lands. On this subject, Pico uses the same strategy employed by Brant and Grünpeck with regards to their astrological prognostication. The difference, however, stands in the philosophical/theological sources used by Gianfrancesco Pico. Instead of using Alcabitius and Albumasar, in fact, Pico privileges the Holy Scriptures and the theological works of the Fathers of the Church.

As the first part of the poem recounts the life and death of Christ, the sorrows of the Virgin, and the death of the martyrs, the author also establishes a link of reciprocity between the

²⁸⁹ Gianfrancesco Pico, *Staurotichon*, vv. 364-384.

life and deeds of the Messiah and the great mission of Maximilian.²⁹⁰ Pico's choice to dedicate a large number of verses to the temptation of Christ in the desert looks, in this perspective, far from being arbitrary. Even if not immediately related to the miracle of the *Kreuzwunder*, the lyrical rendering of the episode of the gospels of Matthew and Luke, I argue, reflects the author's hope that the Emperor would use the life of Christ as an example to act against the evil counsels and counselors that are clouding his mind from the real meaning of the event. This would find confirmation in the dedication to the *Staurostichon*, where Gianfrancesco Pico turns passionately against the 'philosophasters' who seek the truth in the writing of Aristotle and Plato but remain ignorant of the divine world.

In doing so, Gianfrancesco Pico was elaborating on the central argument of his philosophical and apologetic works, which consciously rejected his uncle's early approval for the concept of *Prisca theologia*. After his meditation on Christ's birth, life, death and the harrowing of hell, Gianfrancesco exclaims that none of the great orators or philosophers of the pagan past could explain the mysteries of the Christian faith.²⁹¹ The different civilizations that remained without the light of Christ's life and death were condemned to moral deprivation and ignorance. The only possible hope for the empire, therefore, was the rise of a ruler that would accept the divine grace and rare gifts that God had bestowed upon him. This sovereign would wield the cross against the

²⁹⁰ *Staurostichon* vv. 24 – 142.

²⁹¹ For a more detailed description of the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus and its relationship with Pico, see Chapter three. For academic references on the topic, see Alan E. Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993). Chapter 11; Karl Tamburr, *The Harrowing of Hell in Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2007).; George Every, *Christian Mythology* (Feltham: Hamlyn, 1970).; Ann Faulkner, "The Harrowing of Hell at Barking Abbey and in Modern Production," in *The Iconography of Hell*, ed. Clifford Davidson and Thomas H. Seiler (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1992).; D. D. R. Owen, *The Vision of Hell: Infernal Journeys in Medieval French Literature* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press Ltd., 1970).; Herwi Rikhof, "Descensus Ad Inferos," *Bijdragen* 72, no. 2 (2011).; Justin W. Bass, *The Battle for the Keys: Revelation 1:18 and Christ's Descent into the Underworld* (2014). For more information on the Gospel of Nicodemus, see Zbigniew S. Izydorczyk, *The Medieval Gospel of Nicodemus: Texts, Intertexts, and Contexts in Western Europe* (Tempe, Ariz.: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1997).

infidels menacing the realm from abroad as well as the ones menacing from within, that is, the ones who were responsible for the moral decay of the Holy Roman Empire. By posing Maximilian I as the ruler who would combine secular political power with the divine endowment to fulfill the historical and eschatological prophecies, Gianfrancesco Pico plays on virtually all messianic expectations that Sebastian Brant attached to the Hapsburg dynasty for the last two generations. Gianfrancesco is thus proposing himself as a new, sanctified *poeta vates*, free from the pagan inclinations of his competitors and former colleagues.

Next to elements that were first meant to invoke the sympathy of the Emperor, Gianfrancesco also expresses his concerns regarding certain imperial matters. The most prevalent one was certainly his fear of the moral decadence of the Catholic Church and its believers,²⁹² followed by – and connected to – the rebirth of ancient philosophies and rituals, astrology above all. Even though Gianfrancesco Pico proceeds with care when criticizing both the Holy See of Rome and the art of astrology – being aware of the Emperor’s own fondness for astrological predictions – his criticism towards both is nonetheless latent in the entire poem, as evidenced by occasional spikes throughout the text. In order to make his point, Gianfrancesco stresses the importance of a moral reformation before the Emperor begins his crusade. Following the prophecy of his mentor Savonarola, the author explains that a new Babylon was recently born within the empire, when a certain city – namely Rome – decided to indulge in the rediscovery of the occult arts.²⁹³ Among these, Pico underlines the presence of astrology, which he links directly – as in the *De rerum praenotione* – to the work of Satan himself:

²⁹² A current topic for Gianfrancesco Pico, which will dominate his oration *De reformandis moribus* (1520). On this subject, see Rosa Alhaique Pettinelli, “Letterati e riforma Cattolica nella Roma del Quinto Concilio Lateranense,” *Archivio italiano per la storia della pietà* XXII (2009).

²⁹³ See Girolamo Savonarola et al., *Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola Religion and Politics, 1490-1498*, (2006). 68: “Having told you these parables, we shall speak of the renewal of the Church insofar as we have seen, known, and predicted it. And so that you may better understand, you should know that there are two [kinds] of knowledge. The first is when we know by some external sign what that sign means intrinsically. The second [type

Henceforth (*i.e. after the appearance of the Cross in the sky*) the Queen of Evil, shamed by disgrace, now happens | to rush onto battles and wars thirsty for blood, / and Discordia runs before the chariot with torn hair, / if ever the outcome of war were good; there Ambition / bursts, engrossed by favorable events. / And then the infernal love of gold swells, then filthy / Gluttony, and a dirty Venus eagerly smeared through every / limb, who is drawn out by strengths too languid / and makes souls useless, and twists them with dreadful / envy, and wastefully squanders the acquired wealth. / Likewise with seven chains was tied up the degenerate / beast with many heads, by which with fierce assault / we read that was once destroyed the arrogant Babylon: / so that Cyrus would not devastate her with the fierce army, / so that the one hundred doors would not give way to the mighty ram, / so that with false doctrine the deceitful diviner, attentive / to the various course of the stars, would no more cast horoscopes; / unless it had already corrupted the customs of its enemy, / which our times, alas, have long adopted / and which the new Babylon abundantly embraces.²⁹⁴

This direct attack against unholy prediction is the key to understanding the reason why Pico announces that, due to the resurgence of ancient pagan rites and the dissension generated by political and religious turmoil, the world is at risk of being covered once again with the deep mist of Satan's lies, and to witness the rebirth of *Spurca Venus*, a unique figure that we will see in the next chapter, and that Pico associates with the Whore of Babylon:²⁹⁵

Henceforth the mighty queen of evil, deemed unworthy by her depravities, / Thirsty for blood, throws herself in slaughters and wars, / Rushes before the wheels, her hair torn in dissension; / If by chance success smiles upon [her] in battle, it is for this reason: / Swollen

of] knowledge comes through mental images. With regard to the first: when Pope Innocent died, something happened on account of which you used to amuse yourselves about things I had done, since I had said that the Church had to be renewed, and you believed, because of that sign, that I was in great error and that what I had predicted could not come to be. But I, because of that external sign, saw that, yes, indeed, the renewal of the Church had to be carried out, and I based this on what you used to say, which was against me. With regard to the second, which is that of mental images, I saw, through the power of the imagination, a black cross above Babylonian Rome, on which was written: *Ira Domini*, and upon it there rained swords, knives, lances, and every [other sort of] weapon, a storm of hail and stones, and long, awesome streaks of lightning in dark and murky skies. And I saw another cross, of gold, which stretched from heaven to earth above Jerusalem, on which was written: *Misericordia Dei*, and here the skies were calm, limpid, and clear as could be; wherefore, on account of this vision, I tell you that the Church of God must be renewed, and soon, for God is angry, and afterward the infidels have to be converted, and this will be soon.”

²⁹⁴ Staurostichon, vv. 329 – 331. See also Pico della Mirandola, *Opera Omnia*, II. 689: “Ita multi decepti, iusto Dei iudicio, quos in exemplum aliorum legimus falsis uatibus obligasse fidem: sic et apud Esaiam, ut V libro meminimus superba Babylon ab Astrologis decepta est, quae nisi prauos mores admisisset non iacuisset praedae, nec fallaciae praedictentium qua de re in Stauroticho ita me cecinisse recordor.”

ambition bursts upon things to come. / Then the infernal love of riches, then lurid gluttony swells, / And with devotion is brought out in every joint and limb / Foul Venus, which is savored by too languid men / And feeds on ignoble spirits, and torments with atrocious jealousy, / And, wasteful, destroys all wealth acquired. / Thus in the sevenfold chains the beast of many heads / Is thickened, by which [heads] we read that / With ferocious impetus arrogant Babylon was once subdued.²⁹⁶ / [Babylon], which neither Cyrus with his cruel army would have plundered,²⁹⁷ / Neither would he have repeatedly shaken its hundred gates with a ram, / Neither the lying augur, intently observing the manifold courses of the stars / Would have toyed with false beliefs of birth-signs, / If he, before such faithless things, would not have reveled in the ways belonging to the Enemy. / [The ways] which our world – oh, how shameful! – has already summoned not long ago, / And which the new Babylon embraces, indulging in them abundantly.²⁹⁸

In this passage, the author is warning the Emperor about the impending danger linked to a misinterpretation of the rain of crosses: the return of an age of strife and profanity. Throughout the entire poem, Gianfrancesco repeatedly asks his audience how many times in the past God has

²⁹⁶ Revelation 17:1 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke to me. “Come,” he said, “I will show you the condemnation and punishment of the great prostitute who sits on many waters, 2 with whom the kings of the earth committed sexual immorality and the earth’s inhabitants got drunk with the wine of her immorality.” 3 So he carried me away in the Spirit to a wilderness, and there I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. 4 Now the woman was dressed in purple and scarlet clothing, and adorned with gold, precious stones, and pearls. She held in her hand a golden cup filled with detestable things and unclean things from her sexual immorality. 5 On her forehead was written a name, a mystery: “Babylon the Great, the Mother of prostitutes and of the detestable things of the earth.” 6 I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of those who testified to Jesus. I was greatly astounded when I saw her. 7 But the angel said to me, “Why are you astounded? I will interpret for you the mystery of the woman and of the beast with the seven heads and ten horns that carries her. 8 The beast you saw was, and is not, but is about to come up from the abyss and then go to destruction. The inhabitants of the earth – all those whose names have not been written in the book of life since the foundation of the world – will be astounded when they see that the beast was, and is not, but is to come. 9 (This requires a mind that has wisdom.) The seven heads are seven mountains the woman sits on. They are also seven kings: 10 five have fallen; one is, and the other has not yet come, but whenever he does come, he must remain for only a brief time. 11 The beast that was, and is not, is himself an eighth king and yet is one of the seven, and is going to destruction. 12 The ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but will receive ruling authority as kings with the beast for one hour. 13 These kings have a single intent, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. 14 They will make war with the Lamb, but the Lamb will conquer them, because he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those accompanying the Lamb are the called, chosen, and faithful.” 15 Then the angel said to me, “The waters you saw (where the prostitute is seated) are peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages. 16 The ten horns that you saw, and the beast – these will hate the prostitute and make her desolate and naked. They will consume her flesh and burn her up with fire. 17 For God has put into their minds to carry out his purpose by making a decision to give their royal power to the beast until the words of God are fulfilled. 18 As for the woman you saw, she is the great city that has sovereignty over the kings of the earth.”

²⁹⁷ Isaiah 13:20 No one will live there again; no one will ever reside there again. No Bedouin will camp there, no shepherds will rest their flocks there. 21 Wild animals will rest there, the ruined houses will be full of hyenas. Ostriches will live there, wild goats will skip among the ruins. 22 Wild dogs will yip in her ruined fortresses, jackals will yelp in the once-splendid palaces. Her time is almost up, her days will not be prolonged.

²⁹⁸ *Staurostichon*, vv. 314-334.

sent divine prophecies that were ignored by the pagans due to their corruption by Satan, who continuously promotes the spread of ignorance among the faithful even when defeated. This idea is further developed in *De rerum praenotione*, in which Pico explains that such lies are still present in the form of magic, judicial astrology, and any other art that tries to interpret natural signs.²⁹⁹ Echoing his mentor Savonarola's teachings,³⁰⁰ in fact, Pico states that neither ancient philosophy nor astrology has ever been useful to the ancients, as they never were able to provide accurate interpretations of divine signs. Indeed, neither Plato nor Aristotle nor Demosthenes was able to save the Greek civilization – “swollen with pride”, he writes – from dismay, or even to guide its citizen to a true understanding of God.

On this subject, the author warns the Emperor against what he calls “unwarlike men” who “show with scornful contempt idols falsely considered as among praiseworthy things, and for which the ignorant mob swells.”³⁰¹ These prophetic verses hide a concrete political and moral agenda, as they are a direct attack on the humanists that formed many of the European courts of those days: the same scholars who, according to the author, revel in judicial astrology – the

²⁹⁹Pico della Mirandola, *Opera Omnia*, II., p. 644; 1507, f. Q5'Q6' (1. VII, cap. 4); “Hae igitur causae esse non possunt illorum effectuum quos pollicentur magi. Signa autem si dicantur, cum divinitus instituta non sint, quin et divinitus reprobata et a natura abhorrentia, restat ut superstitiosa sint et a daemone inventa vel palam fabricante. vel clam in imaginatione superstitiosorum insussurrante er suggerente; si vero quapiam compositione mixta magia fuerit, eorum procul dubio alterutro daemonum foedere participabit: quae ad expressum [foedus] pertinent ex superioribus, quae ad suppressum spectant ex his quae mox diximus confutantur.”

³⁰⁰ See Savonarola et al., *Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola Religion and Politics, 1490-1498*. 8: “Now I turn to the pagans. Pagan, I ask you: if these matters concerning Christ were predicted so far in advance and have been fulfilled in this man, this then is a sign that they have been predicted not by a man but by God. The astrologer could not predict them because he cannot see particulars; he wants to see a person's natal day and then give his opinion. But of Christ there were predictions hundreds of years before He was born. Go, see that the astrologers said nothing of it beforehand; afterward, yes, because future contingencies cannot be seen except by God, Who is eternal. And so, pagan, acknowledge that this Scripture comes from God, and if it is from God, then it is true, and if it is true, it says that this Christ is the true Messiah. This, then, is the true salvation of human nature, which God has sent and which He had prophesied not only by the prophets but also by sibyls and pagans, and the Apostles, the martyrs, and innumerable people followed after Him, all drawn to living uprightly by Him much more than by the philosophers.”

³⁰¹ *Staurostichon*, vv. 341 – 341.

pagan cult of the planets and constellations denounced by Savonarola,³⁰² Thomas Aquinas and Augustine of Hippo³⁰³ – and slavishly admire Greece and its philosophers.³⁰⁴ The aim of these continuous attacks on unsanctioned prophecy, therefore, is to portray astrology and all its practitioners as demonic instruments of tumult and confusion. Building on the traditional association between Holy War and spiritual growth – a theme first outlined in Bernard of Clairvaux’s famous letter *In praise of a new Knighthood* – and skillfully alluding to the Emperor’s coat of arms in a way that reminds of the flight of the Eagle in Dante’s *Paradiso*, Pico urges the Emperor to get ready for battle and to embrace his divine destiny, expanding Christianity and reforming the life of people all over the world:

Now the Eagle is demanded, which would bring the red emblem of triumph / along the Tanais, the Nile, on the fields of warm Aswan / and the lands of the Arabs, and regions burnt by sun / to the people of East, to the kingdoms of wealth. / But I fear, o Ceasar, that startled by the ancient fear / this people, enemy of true faith, might trouble the West / with sudden incursions; just like when, woken up / by a loud voice, a pack of dogs prepare to fight with bared teeth / if perchance they cannot drive the enemy off / with deaf growls, and it does not continue to make useless / howls, they get ready to attack, by which the frightened enemy / may dread, and may be pushed back by fear. / Break any delay: may the beautiful Ganges see the Persians / destroyed by the arms of Cesar, do not despise the Hydaspes / or the bridges of Hypanis, and do not look back at the fatherland / until you will bravely reach the fragrant lands of India.³⁰⁵

³⁰² Garin, *Lo Zodiaco Della Vita: La Polemica Sull'astrologia Dal Trecento Al Cinquecento*. VIII. See also Garfagnini, “La Polemica Antiastrologica Del Savonarola Ed I Suoi Precedenti Tomistici.” 150.

³⁰³ Pico della Mirandola, *Opera Omnia*, I., p. 556, f. L 6 (I. V, ch. 7): “Idem [Thomas] in libro *De sortibus* et in secundo volume *Theologicae summae* partis secundae, introducit Augustinum secundo *Super Genesum ad litteram* contra mathematicos decernentem: si quando ab eis verum praenunciatur fieri idipsum occultissimo immundorum spirituum instinctu quem necientes humane mentes pariuntur. Eundemque secundo *De christiana doctrina* libro citat asserentem ad pacta quaedam cum daemonibus inita idipsum pertinere. Idem quoque in libro *De iudiciis astrorum* fretus Augustini autoritate, pronunciat diabolium immiscere se operationibus eorum, qui iudiciis astrorum intendunt.”

³⁰⁴ See Rowan and Williams, “Jacob Spiegel on Gianfrancesco Pico and Reuchlin: Poetry, Scholarship and Politics in Germany in 1512.” 298.

³⁰⁵ *Staurostichon*, vv. 405-415.

Pico's message, therefore, is clear: nothing good will come unless the Emperor moves to purge vice, reinstitute virtue and take over the leadership of his court and the Christian world. His advent is declared in apocalyptic terms. The blood will continue to stream from heaven until Caesar takes up the cross against both sinners and infidels. After he has punished Italy for her rebellious and chaotic behavior, he will turn on the enemies of Christendom and establish his rule over a domain greater even than Alexander's empire. The imperial eagle will then spread its wings over the greatest domain the world has ever seen, over Memphis, Byzantium, Persia, the Moorish lands, and the lands around the Bosphorus. In order to fulfill his destiny, therefore, the Emperor must immediately put aside any other political agenda and lead a crusade to fight Satan's wicked customs and spread the domain of the Cross far and wide. It is only under the symbol the cross, in fact, that Pico sees the survival and rebirth of the empire.

7. *The Sign of the Cross: Soteriology of the Arma Christi in the Staurostichon*

As we have seen, Gianfrancesco Pico's *Staurostichon* is a complex literary work, deeply ingrained in the author's needs and beliefs. Solely defining the *Staurostichon* as a poem against astrology would be reductive, as the hymn develops in surprisingly multifaceted ways. Together with its harsh critique against any kind of unholy divination, Pico's *Staurostichon* was designed by its author to provide Maximilian I with an example of "true" prophecy and to prod the Emperor toward ideas and forms of beliefs that were proper to Savonarola's preaching. The devices that Pico uses to further his Savonarolan intent are the instruments of Christ's Passion. The alleged appearances of the *Arma Christi* throughout history allow Pico to build a narrative of misunderstood prophecies, of missed opportunities for the pagan world to acknowledge Christian truth; a narration that – as it often happens in Gianfrancesco Pico's works – mirrors the

contemporary world of European courts, where the author perceives scripture-driven religion as threatened by non-Christian forms of beliefs like astrology. In such a narrative, only a true form of devotion for the crucified Christ, the cross that fulfilled his destiny, and the blood that washed away the Original Sin could lead to what Pico perceived as true and sacred prophecy. As his mentor Savonarola before him, Pico feels entitled to this form of precognition, as he turns the poem into a long, encomiastic (and yet unrealized) prophecy of the Emperor's great crusade against the Turks. Drenched in the blood of Christ, Pico depicts the coming together of all German peoples in an act of collective piety and humble devotion, cleansing themselves from sin and preparing them to the necessary sacrifices of holy warfare.

In Gianfrancesco Pico's vision, therefore, the *Kreuzwunder* becomes a massive act of blood piety, echoing, as we will see, Savonarola's 1496 prophecy of the red river. The bloody signs of the cross of Savonarola's vision are here marking the subjects of the holy roman Emperor in a period of instability for the empire, thus enforcing the Savonarolan idea that any government should be submitted to, and justified by, divine will. Playing with astrological propaganda and Savonarola's popular prophecies, Pico's *Staurostichon* provides the Emperor with an alternative reading of the *Kreuzwunder*, and an alternative, sanctioned form of justification for his rule. In a way that implicitly subordinates the astrological determination of the year 1503 to the Providential design manifesting itself in the miraculous appearance of the Cross in the sky, Gianfrancesco Pico's *Staurostichon* exhorts Emperor Maximilian to align his political decision to what is perceived as the "real" course of history:

Listen, instead, what signs, detested by sinners, he has recently sent forth. / As soon as the Sun through the oblique band with twelve signs / had counted fifteen times on hundred

from the birth / of the Virgin's son, revolving the last / of the first three years, mysterious signs started falling down from heaven.³⁰⁶

Aside from its vital importance in Gianfrancesco Pico's historiography and in the history of astrology in general, the *Staurostichon* is also a fundamental testimony to the evolution and vitality of important forms of Christian devotion such as the cult of the holy blood, and the effigies of Jesus Christ, better known as *Arma Christi*.³⁰⁷ With deep roots in the late medieval ideas of Passion piety, relic veneration, and the papal economy of salvation, the worship of Christ's symbols of the Passion endured for several centuries under many forms, even after the scythe of the Reformation movements of the 16th century.³⁰⁸ On this subject, Shannon Gayk suggests that, while late medieval usages of the *Arma Christi* emphasized their ability to incarnate and reenact Christ's sacrifice, early modern representations usually stressed the metaphorical and emblematic significances of the instruments.³⁰⁹ Arthur Marotti, moreover, stressed how, after Catholic relics came under attack during the 1530's, the reference for relics began to be transferred into print culture.³¹⁰ In the early 16th century, however, the devotion for such symbols was still both physical and metaphorical, and heavily enforced by Savonarolans

³⁰⁶ *Staurostichon*, 179-183.

³⁰⁷ Quoting Lynn Ransom: "The Latin term meaning 'weapons of Christ' and referring to the symbolic representations of the instruments of Christ's Passion (for example, nails, crown of thorns). The Arma Christi were the weapons with which Christ gained victory over death. They functioned as mnemonic signs for meditation and devotional images on the whole Passion narrative." Ransom, Lynn. "Arma Christi" in Robert E. Bjork, "The Oxford Dictionary of the Middle Ages," (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). For further info, see Lisa H. Cooper, Andrea Denny-Brown, and Mary Agnes Edsall, *The Arma Christi in Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture: With a Critical Edition of 'O Vernicle'* (2014). On the survival of forms of piety for the Arma Christi, see: Flora Lewis, "Rewarding Devotion: Indulgences and the Promotion of Images," in *The Church and the Arts: Papers Read at the 1990 Summer Meeting and the 1991 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. Diana Wood (Oxford, UK; Cambridge Mass., USA: Ecclesiastical History Society by Blackwell Publishers, 1992). 183.

³⁰⁸ In the case of the English Reformation, see R. N. Swanson, *Indulgences in Late Medieval England: Passports to Paradise?* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). 108-109.

³⁰⁹ Shannon Gayk, "Early Modern Afterlives of the Arma Christi," in *The Arma Christi in Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture: With a Critical Edition of 'O Vernicle'*, ed. Lisa H. Cooper, Andrea Denny-Brown, and Mary Agnes Edsall (2014). 274

³¹⁰ Arthur F. Marotti, *Religious Ideology and Cultural Fantasy: Catholic and Anti-Catholic Discourses in Early Modern England* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005). 27.

like Gianfrancesco Pico.³¹¹ Poised between the role of icon and relic, thanks to their ability to easily adapt to different media (painting, manuscript, print), Christ's banners maintained a special place among both the lower classes and the nobility, functioning as "holy defenses" against earthly and otherworldly suffering.³¹² Pico's *Staurostichon* is a clear proof of this, as the entire poem consists in a celebration of the *Arma Christi* falling from the sky as a divine message of unity and conversion.

As a matter of fact, Pico's *Staurostichon* reveals elements of self-denial and appropriation of signs of the cross and the Passion that are reminiscent of both Savonarola's and Giovanni Pico's teachings.³¹³ Savonarola considered the crucifixion of Christ as the core of his religious belief.³¹⁴ Basing his writings on the Sacred Scriptures and the Fathers and Doctors of the Church – sources Gianfrancesco Pico would later draw upon — Savonarola often deliberated

³¹¹ On this subject, it is sufficient to consider Gianfrancesco Pico's use of what he considered a piece of Savonarola's heart to exorcise a possessed woman. See Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola and Elisabetta Schisto, *Vita Hieronymi Savonarolae* (Firenze: Olschki, 1999). Chapter 30. 187 – 195. See also Armando Maggi, *In the Company of Demons: Unnatural Beings, Love, and Identity in the Italian Renaissance* (U of Chicago P, 2006). 32 – 33.

³¹² John C. Hirsh, "Two English Devotional Poems of the Fifteenth Century," in *Notes and Quaeries* (1968). 7.

³¹³ See Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *In Oratorem Dominicam Expositio*, (Rome: Biblioteca Italiana - Università La Sapienza, 2004), <http://ww2.bibliotecaitaliana.it/xtf/view?docId=bibit001416/bibit001416.xml&chunk.id=d6529e121&toc.id=&bran d=bibit>. In Viladesau, *The Triumph of the Cross: The Passion of Christ in Theology and the Arts, from the Renaissance to the Counter-Reformation*. 300-301: "If the soul wishes to live by this bread, which is nothing other than Christ crucified, it must totally transform itself into the crucified Christ. This transformation takes place in three ways: by meditation, compassion, and imitation. We chew this bread by meditation, that is, contemplating Christ's entire life, from beginning to end, because his entire life was a cross, as is clear to anyone who reads the gospel, which must be the constant reading of any Christian. Then we digest this chewed bread, by means of compassion: just as digestion creates natural heat, so the digestion of this bread creates the heat of love, which makes us share in the sorrows and sufferings of our beloved and dear Jesus Christ. After digestion, it remains that the digested food become part of our body, so that it may restore and nourish us. Thus it also remains for us after the chewing of meditation and the digestion of compassion, to join ourselves to him by imitation. And just as that bodily food, once chewed and digested, does not nourish us unless it is used by the bodily members that it becomes part of, just so, if we chew over the entire life and cross of Christ by diligent meditation, and even digest [the message] through compassion with him, with much heartfelt affect and even many tears—yet, unless we make ourselves similar to him through imitation, the soul receives no nourishment from this bread, and Christ does us no good." See also the emphasis on the cross, on voluntary suffering, and on weeping with Christ in Pico's "Twelve Rules" in Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Duodecim Regulae, Duodecim Arma, Duodecim Conditiones Amantis*, (Rome: Biblioteca Italiana - Università La Sapienza, 2004), http://www.bibliotecaitaliana.it/indice/visualizza_testo_html/bibit001051.

³¹⁴ See for example his prison meditation on Ps. 50, in which he appropriates to his preaching St. Paul's words in 1 Cor. 2:2.

on his theology and spirituality of the cross. In his numerous orations and meditations, Savonarola employs his “venerable and most beloved master”³¹⁵ Thomas Aquinas to stress the need for Christianity to seek moral reformation and religious piety. As Richard Viladesau writes: “Above all, Savonarola the apocalyptic preacher and moral reformer stresses the need for Christians to act in such a way as to appropriate for themselves the salvation won for them by Christ. Hence, he concentrates on the need to respond to Christ’s love by taking up the cross in one’s life.”³¹⁶ Like his mentor, Gianfrancesco Pico considers the holy cross in the Augustinian sense of reparation from the Original Sin. The crucifixion of Christ, for Savonarola as well as for Gianfrancesco Pico, was the means through which God could redeem humanity while preserving the same divine justice that leaves no sin unpunished. Often in a dialogue with Medieval hagiographies with their emphasis on stigmata and other miraculous manifestations of the Divine on the very body of saints, *Staurostichon* constructs the Cross not only as a symbol, but as an “actual” supernatural cause of visible phenomena manifesting themselves upon the body of saints like Ignatius of Antiochia and triggering Satan’s wrath in the form of earthquakes and sulphurous exhalations:

“[...] What sort of mercy, Christ, |compelled you to suffer death in order to snatch away from death itself / the most ungrateful mortals their hardened hearts? / So that never again, after the burning of the most precious wealth, / The ravings of infernal dreams may creep back. [...] Lions are too afraid to touch the sacred body of the man, / holding back their maw from the innocent blood, / which merciless Trajan’s cruel sword had drained.³¹⁷ / Once extracted (for a cruel attendant had taken it out / from the chest), carved on the heart one sees the honored / name of Jesus, which is the terror of gloomy Tartarus, / the visible

³¹⁵ Girolamo Savonarola, Prohemium in festo Sancti Thome de Aquino, quoted in Cattin, *Il primo Savonarola: poesie e prediche autografe dal Codice Borromeo*. 300.

³¹⁶ Viladesau, *The Triumph of the Cross: The Passion of Christ in Theology and the Arts, from the Renaissance to the Counter-Reformation*. 31.

³¹⁷ This reference to the Trajan’s sword is also found in the final lines of the *Votum* for Giovanna Carafa’s health. As in the *Votum*, Gianfrancesco Pico is following Jacobus of Varagine in recounting the martyrdom of Ignatius and the prodigy of his heart bearing the name of Jesus.

banner of the right hand of the Father.³¹⁸[...] Frightened Orcus roared for ascending into heaven / under the various cloaks of both those countless families: / and the Sicilian sent out flames, and that eminent with signs, / glory of the people of Piceno and once of the female / sex;³¹⁹ and the Tuscan and the Umbrian also showed / faith, and the banners on display, and even the river Nar³²⁰ / white with sulphur water, the Reate of the ancients.³²¹

Exactly as in Savonarola's writings, in the *Staurostichon* we find the idea of the cross as a symbol of salvation for those who accept it, and damnation for those who don't.³²² As we have already seen, in his poem Pico underlines the fact that Christ's salvific signs had already appeared to the pagans, who refused to bow before them, thus succumbing to the Devil's lures. The Holy Spirit, the miracles of the first martyrs, the name of Jesus carved on Saint Ignatius of Antiochia's heart: none of these signs managed to convince the pagans to convert. Even when Christendom triumphed, the Devil kept spreading lies and deceit to lure humanity into abandoning Christian truth. For this reason, God kept sending signs of his will during difficult times: the stigmata of Saint Francis of Assisi, volcanic eruptions, celestial wonders, and many other miracles. The rain of the crosses, therefore, becomes for Pico an important call for Maximilian's Holy Roman Empire to submit to Christ through Savonarolan piety. Combining

³¹⁸ There is a reference to Saint Ignatius of Antiochia also in Gianfrancesco's "votum" written on behalf of his wife. There might have been a chapel consecrated to the saint in Pico's castle as well. The miracle of the heart – discussed, for example, in Jacobus of Varagine – is also found in Savonarola, *Esposizione sopra l'Ave Maria*, 98-99.

³¹⁹ This might refer to the *lacum Sybillae*, also known as Lago di Pilato, on the Monti Sibillini in the Marche region. A number of caves in this region were traditionally considered gateways to the Underworld. The lake, moreover, which periodically turns red, was a gathering place for necromancers and magicians.

³²⁰ Reference to the hagiography of Saint Mauro and Saint Felice, founders of the Abbey in Val di Narco. Armed with the cross, these saints had allegedly stained a Dragon, whose poisonous breath contaminated the River Nar (also known as Nera) and its vicinities.

³²¹ *Staurostichon*, vv. 102 – 106; 134-142;169-175: "[...] Quae te clementia Christe / Ingratos nimium mortales, ferrea corda, / Ut morte eriperes, mortem perferre coegit? / Ne rogo, ne summi collati muneris unquam / Inferni obrepant uaesana obliuia somni".

³²² See Girolamo Savonarola, *Il breviario di Frate Girolamo Savonarola: riproduzione fototipica dell'incunabolo Banco Rari 310 della Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze* (Firenze: SISMELE edizioni del Galluzzo, 1998). book 3, ch. 10: God entered entirely into human nature "to embrace it and totally draw it to [God's] love. And God's mercy appeared even more clearly to the world, when [God] willed to be crucified for love of us. And no less appeared God's justice, in desiring to be satisfied completely for original sin. And from this, sinners, if they wish to repent, can have sure hope in God's mercy. But if they do not repent, they must tremble before such justice."

the medieval model of Christendom – centered on the Pope and the Emperor as the two pillars of devotion and obedience – with the idea of the crucified Lord as an example of virtue and a demand to conversion, Pico calls for a new period of unity through the dissemination of Christendom throughout Muslim lands. As we have seen, political and religious turmoil were a constant concern for the Emperor Maximilian I. Gianfrancesco Pico, therefore, advises the sovereign to read the descent of the *Arma Christi* as a sign of divine authority in order to impose peaceful unity between the Emperor and his subjects, between the Church and its worshipers. As the red rain is able to bring people together under the common fear and love of God, the Emperor should use religion as a key for ending the strife in the Holy Roman Empire.

8. Pico's Blood Piety: Blood and Prophecy in Pico's Staurostichon

Together with the holy symbols of the *Arma Christi*, Pico's poem is capable of uniting the celebration of the emblems of the Passion³²³ with the cult of Christ's blood and wounds. In her insightful treatise *Wonderful blood: theology and practice in late medieval northern Germany and beyond*, Caroline Walker Bynum argued that blood piety in poetry, visual media, and public forms of devotion was mainly a northern European phenomenon in contrast with "less bloody" southern European narratives.³²⁴ Although her point on the German imaginary regarding blood devotion is well documented, her treatise does not take into account the numerous cases of blood piety present in early modern Italian lands. Evident traces of this form of devotion –

³²³ Here I refer to Peter M. Daly definition of emblem: "[...] emblems are composed of symbolic pictures and words; a meaningful relationship between the two is intended; the matter of communication is connotative rather than denotative." See Peter M. Daly, "Literature in the Light of the Emblem Structural Parallels between the Emblem and Literature in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," (1998). 8.

³²⁴ Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond*. 5-7.

drawing back from the Middle Ages and still living in the cult of St. Catherine of Siena (1347 – 1380) and St. Catherine of Genoa (1447 – 1510) – are found in the ritual miracle of the liquefaction of San Gennaro’ blood in Naples,³²⁵ the enduring tradition of the *flagellanti* (instituted in Perugia by Raniero Fasani at the end of the 13th century),³²⁶ and in Savonarola’s blood devotion.

Such elements can also be found in Gianfrancesco Pico’s works. It would be difficult, in fact, not to recognize in the Christ of the *Staurostichon* the same Man of Sorrows that, as Hans Belting has emphasized, found in northern Europe his more lively and bloody representation.³²⁷ Pico’s visionary interpretation of the *Kreuzwunder*, as we will now see, was perfectly attuned with the blood that had been copiously shed in the apocalyptic and visionary imaginary of 14th – and 15th – century Europe.³²⁸ Although one could certainly assert that, from an iconographical point of view, the images of Christ’s passion and crucifixion in the Italian Renaissance are somehow less gory than their German counterparts – concentrating mostly on the image of a dry, dead-like Christ³²⁹ – this cannot be said about Gianfrancesco Pico’s poetry.

As a matter of fact, Pico’s *Staurostichon* achieves some of its highest peaks of lyricism through a succession of violent and gory images. The presence of the holy blood in the *Arma Christi* descending from the sky is, for Pico, almost as important as the symbols themselves. As

³²⁵ For further research, see F. P. de Ceglia, “Thinking with the Saint: The Miracle of Saint Januarius of Naples and Science in Early Modern Europe,” *Early science and medicine* 19, no. 2 (2014). See Giovanni Battista Alfano and Antonio Amitrano, *Il Miracolo Di S. Gennaro: Documentazione Storica E Scientifica* (Napoli: Arti Grafiche Vincenzo Scarpati, 1950).

³²⁶ On this subject, see Norman Cohn and Collection Paul Avrich, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970). Chapter 7, and Marvin Harris, *Cows, Pigs, Wars, & Witches: The Riddles of Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975). Chapter 10. See also Giuseppe Rubini, Claudio Ghisusi, and Gianluigi Arcari, *I disciplini: ricerche sulle confraternite del mantovano* (Mantova: Arcari, 1989). and Franco Ferlano, *Vattienti: osservazione e riplasmazione di una ritualità tradizionale* (Vibo Valentia: Qualecultura, 1990).

³²⁷ Hans Belting, *The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages: Form and Function of Early Paintings of the Passion* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: A.D. Caratzas, 1990). 32-33.

³²⁸ Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond*. 6.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*

the *Staurostichon* well illustrates, in the author’s perspective blood, both as a symbol as an actual bodily fluid, is the overarching theme in the life of Christ, which first materialized itself in the circumcision imposed upon him – as the Gospel of Luke teaches – on the eighth day according to Judaic Law and that continued through the Massacre of the Innocents until his passion: “The infant had barely seen the light of His eighth day / barely had he touched the mold of his given flesh / when his wounded skin experienced bloodstained knives| and escaped the hostile wrath of king Herod.”³³⁰

The life of the savior, therefore, is drawn in blood, and his suffering begins with his circumcision. Such omen, like every other sacred presage, finds its natural realization in the Passion described a few verses later - a prophecy fulfilled with another ritual shed of divine blood:

A punishment in just blood is required, tortures / Are demanded, as a spectacle for the savage crowd / They nailed the limbs of the salvific king on the Cross. / Innocent blood is poured from the whole body, / Copiously the notorious stream of water flowed mixed with blood, / By which the ancient crime from the first origin of the world / Is washed away; the youthful, expiatory offer for the original sin. / Certainly stricken down for love of the human race, / Cruel nails, laughter, and harsh whiplashes, / Spits, slaps, tearing of the beard, and a dire, rough crown / Blistering with thorns he suffered, and He wanted to chase away death / by a death on the Cross. [...]³³¹

In view of the possible “dryness” of other Italian early modern representations, Pico’s version of the Passion of Christ seems especially expressive, with vivid details, and indulging in a description of ruthless and continuous bloodshed with a taste that recalls many northern

³³⁰ *Staurostichon*, vv. 27 – 30.

³³¹ *Staurostichon*, vv. 91 – 102: “Supplicium petitur iusto de sanguine, poenae / Poscuntur, saevae condunt spectacula plebi / Membra salutiferi transfixo stipite regis. / Funditur innocuus toto de corpore sanguis, / Ubertim celebris mixto fluit unda cruore: / Qua scelus antiquum primaque ab origine mundi / Eluitur, patriae primaeua piacula noxae. / Scilicet humani generis percussus amore / Crudeles clauos, risus, atque aspera flagra, / Sputa, alapas, barbae uulsus, diramque coronam / Sentibus horrentem subiit, mortemque fugare / Morte Crucis uoluit.”

European cases of blood piety.³³² The *Staurostichon* itself resonates with the uproar of the infernal powers trying to gain control over the world. In the battle between the darkness of superstition and the light of true faith, waves of blood wash away men's sins as they gush from the wounds of Jesus Christ, described as "the crimson wave of Holy Blood" that carried the once exiled mortals to the formerly inaccessible, and now open heavens.³³³ In Pico's vision, therefore, the copious pouring of Christ's blood is deeply linked to humanity's salvation, just as the Holy Cross is.

The idea of Jesus' blood as a massive tidal wave engulfing humankind is not a standalone narration in Italian Renaissance devotion, as it echoes almost perfectly one of Savonarola's prophecies given in the comment to Amos and Zacharias, Sermon XLIV. During the Good Friday mass of April 1, 1496, Savonarola told his believers about a vision he had:

Out of reverence for so great a solemnity, I shall tell you what I have seen on this feast. The unfaithfulness of many causes the deprivation and withdrawal of many consolations. And yet, on this very account, I am glad to tell it. *Levavi oculos meos et vidi* [Dan. 8:3; 10:5]. I saw the whole world before my eyes, bit by bit, on a very great plain all full of many men and women of every condition in the world (I do not want to tell you particulars about such and such because it is not permitted). In the middle of the plain, there was a little mount all full of roses and lilies, and on top of the mount a Crucifix was pouring forth red blood which radiated all the way round the world, around and around, and it splashed into the air here and there with the most splendid rays. It also poured onto the ground most abundantly, and it seemed to me that it formed a river which divided the world into two parts. And the Crucified One was crying out: "*Venite ad me omnes qui laboratis et onerati estis et ego reficiam vos.*" I stood and watched: on the left side of the river there was Rome with all the Christians; on the right side, there was Jerusalem and all the pagans. The blood

³³² I am considering especially the case of the Middle English treatise *A Talking of the Loue of God*, and that of 15th century devotion prayer already considered by Bynum. See Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond*. 2-3.

³³³ *Staurostichon*, vv. 14 – 20: "Postquam flammifero praepes descendit ab axe / Summa Dei soboles, summi sapientia patris, / Ut male contractas a primo semine labes / Purpurea elueret sacrati sanguinis unda, / Mortales clauso profugos ut ferret Olympo, / Sacra prophanato diffudit lumine mundo, / Tartareas pellens hominum de corde tenebras." [After he descended swiftly from the fiery heavens above / the mighty offspring of God, the wisdom of the supreme father, / So that he would wash away the deeds wickedly committed by the first seed / With the crimson wave of Holy Blood, / So that he would carry the mortals exiled to the inaccessible Olympus, / With his light he poured out holy things onto the unholy world, / casting the darkness of Tartarus away from the hearts of men.]

was spreading out on the right side and appearing on the foreheads of each of those Moors and pagans, and it seemed to me that it made on the foreheads of all of them a red cross more splendid than a ruby.³³⁴ And as they felt themselves marked with the sign, they would run to that river and throw away their clothes and enter into it and drink of that blood and become inebriated, and then they would come forth gentle and sweet, beautiful as angels. Likewise, on the left side, the blood was spreading out, and I saw that it made a mark on the forehead of every Christian of whatever condition – I saw Rome, in particular – and a red cross would appear on their foreheads because of the rays of that blood coming from the Crucified. And I saw that some would put on a cap to cover the cross; others would put up a hand; others a mask (there were different masks: some were lions, others wolves, others foxes, some others different animals). The preachers were standing there, and it seemed to me that they cried out and said, “Do you not hear what He says? ‘*Venite ad me omnes qui laboratis et onerati estis et ego reficiam vos.*’” But they did not want to hear or remove the masks or uncover the crosses. The angels came from heaven and wanted to take off their masks, and they did not allow it, but they ran toward the clothes which the infidels had left and were grabbing them and putting them on.³³⁵

In 1496 Gianfrancesco Pico, who spent most of his youth in Florence, was probably present when Savonarola told this prophecy to his faithful followers. Considering the passion and devotion that Gianfrancesco Pico had for Savonarola (a devotion he will keep all his life), one cannot avoid seeing the similitudes between the Dominican priest’s prophecy and Pico’s narration of the *Kreuzwunder*. For Pico, the rain of crosses is the foretold river of Christ’s blood sent to sanctify the good and punish the wicked. The marks splattered on people’s bodies and garments, throbbing as if alive, are the marks Savonarola had witnessed in his dream five years earlier. Even if subtle and politically cautious, Pico’s interpretation of the *Kreuzwunder*, therefore, is Savonarolan at its very core and requires the acceptance of Savonarola as the rightful prophet of such portent.

9. Conclusion: Drawn in blood.

³³⁴ Ezech. 9: 4 – 6.

³³⁵ Savonarola et al., *Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola Religion and Politics, 1490-1498*. 9 – 10.

Pico's *Staurostichon*, just like most of his other texts, shines of a dark and multifaceted beauty. In its 421 verses, the poem builds a visionary universe capable of depicting the red rain of 1501 as a miraculous flood of religious symbols, capable of uniting people under a deep desire for Christianity and blood devotion. At the same time, it draws from a mythical past of misjudged divine signs, and it fosters the idea of a secret, insidious threat of ancient and diabolic origin: astrology. Its visionary intensity, apt to debunk astrological practices and celebrate divine prophecy, enticed the German speaking world that would have soon embraced the Reformation and, in certain cases, the Calvinist idea of predestination.³³⁶ This present chapter dealt with the numerous contemporary narratives of the *Kreuzwunder* as well as the success of the poem in the lands affected by such accounts. It was also shown how Gianfrancesco Pico elaborated his own take on astrology and prophecy from two major intellectuals of 15th-century humanism, that is his uncle Giovanni Pico and Savonarola and his mentor Girolamo Savonarola, and how the poem *Staurostichon* largely depended on Pico's treatise *De rerum praenotione*, published at the same time. We have seen how Pico's poetic work was meant to be both an encomiastic and polemic text created to stir Emperor Maximilian I away from the snares of astrology and convert him toward a renewed Christian faith well represented by a call for the Crusades. In order to do so, we have seen how Pico constructs a case against astrology by linking it with an ancient, eathen world, source of faulty and sinful doctrines. We have also seen how Pico provides a 'valid' alternative to the tools of astrology by providing a 'Christian' reading of the *Kreuzwunder*. The instruments that he uses, namely the set of symbols called *Arma Christi* and the blood devotion

³³⁶On this subject, see Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1936). See also Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Durham, N.C.: Labyrinth Press, 1986).

typical of medieval culture, provide us with a unique, ‘systematic’ attempt to Savonarolan prophecy.

The world we see depicted in the *Staurostichon* is most certainly the end of a transition that characterized Pico’s first philosophical production and his maturity.³³⁷ Meant as a poetic transfiguration of his *De rerum praenotione*, the *Staurostichon* puts the foundations of the rich universe that will be portrayed in his *Hymni heroici tres*, published less than one year after. In its staunch condemnation of astrology, one is capable to see Pico’s mature rendition of antiquity and the ancient ghosts that haunt his age. What the *Staurostichon* hints as an unorganized set of symbols will find its proper realization in Pico’s poetic masterpiece known as *Hymni heroici tres*. In the hymns such monsters of the past gain a systematic quality that will influence not only the 1513 poem *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis*, but also his later works like the *Examen vanitatis doctrine gentium* and the well-known *Strix sive de ludificatione daemonum*.

³³⁷ This topic is yet to be properly developed, but Schmitt’s introduction to his seminal work on Pico can certainly be of help for understanding Pico’s first production and the difference with his mature works. See Charles B. Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola (1469-1533) and His Critique of Aristotle*, International Archives of the History of Ideas, 23 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967). Introduction and Chapter one. See also Paola Zambelli, *L’ambigua natura della magia: filosofi, streghe, riti nel Rinascimento* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1991). 177-210.

Chapter 3

“Hortor igitur vos, o poetae, ad superiora consendere et ne velitis semper inter pueros commorari. Vanissimam idolorum superstitionem fugite, et ad Christi crucem ac simplicitatem humilitatemque convolate...”

Girolamo Savonarola, *Apologeticus*³³⁸

The Demon’s Empire: Pico’s Metanarrative of Antiquity in the *Hymni Heroici Tres*

1. Introduction

In the last chapter we saw how Gianfrancesco Pico tackled the issue of ancient paganism in contemporary astrology, a cult that could overshadow the Christian tradition of prophecy and blood devotion, in his *Staurostichon*. In the present chapter, we will deal with similar issues in a more systematic perspective, provided by the triptych of sacred hymns known as *Hymni heroici tres*. These poems are fundamental in understanding how Pico constructs his vision of antiquity, and how such vision affects his own understanding of what he perceived as ‘paganizing’ deviations from proper Christian devotion that surrounded him. First, I will provide a concise but thorough account of the historical and cultural context in which Pico’s poetic production was written, that is the newborn Savonarolan poetry and the growing Renaissance tradition of theurgic hymns. After a detailed account of the work’s publication and fortune over the 16th century, a brief synopsis of the hymns will be provided, together with an account of the poems

³³⁸ Savonarola, “*Apologeticus De Ratione Poeticae Artis*.” 272: “I encourage you, o poets, to devote yourselves to higher matters. You should not prefer to always remain among the children. Avoid the foolish superstition of the idols, and fly toward simplicity, humility, and the cross of Christ.”

and the paratext accompanying the *Hymni*. In the second part of this chapter, I will proceed with an analysis of the sources with which Pico constructs his narrative of Europe's pagan past, his vision of the gods as demons, and the function that Pico's narrative of antiquity as an age of demonic influence has in attacking his contemporaries' experimental forms of pietas. Lastly, I will deal with the celebration of the end of paganism as an attempted silencing of the new 'paganizing' trends in Pico's age.

2. *Girolamo Savonarola and the Paradox of Savonarolan Poetry*

In 1491 the poet Ugolino de' Vieri (1438 – 1516), otherwise known as Ugolino Verino,³³⁹ sent Girolamo Savonarola a poem in praise of Christianity and monastic life. During the last years of Lorenzo de' Medici's dominion of Florence, Verino has been one of the most influential representatives of the 'puritanical' turn of the Medicean court, coinciding with a rebirth of religious poetry involving the same Lorenzo – author of several *laude* and a *Sacra rappresentazione di San Giovanni e Paolo* – and the eminent *vates* Politian.³⁴⁰ Verino, in

³³⁹ For a short biography of Verino, see Stefano Ugo Baldassarri and Arielle Saiber, *Images of Quattrocento Florence: Selected Writings in Literature, History, and Art* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2000). 92-93: "born in Florence in 1438, Ugolino de'Vieri [...] was a notary by profession, yet he showed an inclination for writing Latin verse. In 1464, he completed the *Flametta*, a collection of poems patterned after Landino's *Xandra*. On Cosimo de' Medici's death, he composed the *Paradisus*, a Neoplatonic poem in honor of the Florentine *Pater Patriae*, thereby declaring both his devotion to the Medici family – whose patronage he would constantly seek – and his indebtedness to the poetic and philosophical theories promoted by his master Landino and Ficino's Platonic Academy. In the 1470's and the decade that followed, Verino's literary output remained steady, although it did not receive the hoped-for support from Lorenzo de' Medici. In 1480, he finished *Carlias*, a chivalric poem about the Carolingian court, which he later dedicated to Charles VIII of France. In 1485 he unsuccessfully sought the patronage of King Mathias Corvinus of Hungary by sending him the seven books of his Epigrams. Two years later, Verino lost his son Michele, who had already attained considerable fame as a poet himself. This loss was one of the main factors in Verino's decision to devote the rest of his life to writing religious poems. He was close to Savonarola and his *Piagnoni*, as we can see in his dedication of *Carmen de Christianae religionis ac vitae monastichae felicitate* to Savonarola in 1491."

³⁴⁰ Politian, once an exemplar of Latin antiquarian and paganizing poetry, in the last years of Lorenzo's life wrote two hymns to the Holy Virgin. See Francesco Bausi, "Ugolino Verino, Savonarola E La Poesia Religiosa Tra Quattro E Cinquecento," in *Studi savonaroliani: verso il 5. centenario*, ed. Gian Carlo Garfagnini (Florence: SISMEL Edizioni del Galluzzo, 1996). 127. For a broader description of the relationship between the late Laurentian court and Savonarola, see Garfagnini, *Questa è la terra tua: Savonarola a Firenze*. 95-114. On the latest poetic

particular, saw a renewed fame and fortune in the late 1490s, after the fasts of the 1460s – with the well-known elegies of his *Flametta* and the epic poem *Carlias* – and the decline of the 70s and 80s, decades dominated by Ficino’s philosophy and Politian’s antiquarian and philological poetry.³⁴¹ Verino’s sincere and heartfelt religious devotion – already shown in his 1468 poem *Paradisus*, and in books VI-VIII of his *Carlias*, dedicated to a long description of heaven, purgatory, and hell inspired by Dante’s *Commedia* – made him the ideal candidate for representing a new wave of Renaissance Christian poetry that included - among others - humanists like Battista Spagnoli Mantuanus and Jacopo Sannazzaro.³⁴² Verino’s most fertile religious and poetical period coincided with Florence’s Savonarolan period, between 1490 and

production of the Magnifico, see Mario Martelli, *La politica culturale dell'ultimo Lorenzo* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1980). 923-41.

³⁴¹ Bausi, “Ugolino Verino, Savonarola e la poesia religiosa tra Quattro e Cinquecento.” 127-28. For the modern editions of some of Verino’s works, see Ugolino Verino, *Fiammetta; Paradise*, trans. Allan M. Wilson, vol. 69, I Tatti Renaissance Library (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016). See also *Flametta*, trans. Luciano Mencaraglia (Florence: L.S. Olschki, 1940). Ugolino Verino et al., *Vita di Santa Chiara Vergine* (Chelsea [London, England]: Ashendene Press, 1921). Ugolino Verino and Nikolaus Thurn, *Carlias: Ein Epos Des 15. Jahrhunderts* (München: Fink, 1995).

³⁴² Bausi, “Ugolino Verino, Savonarola e la poesia religiosa tra Quattro e Cinquecento.” 128. Jacopo Sannazzaro, like Politian, soon shifted his poetic focus from mythological to sacred themes. Jacopo Sannazzaro, pseudonym Actius Sincerus Sannazarius (1456 - 1530), wrote the famous *Arcadia*, the first pastoral romance and, until the rise of the Romantic movement, one of the most influential and popular works of Italian literature. Sannazzaro became court poet of the house of Aragon at the age of 20. In 1501, when Frederic, last king of the dynasty, lost his throne, Sannazzaro accompanied him into exile in France. During this time, he brought to light several lost Latin works, including Ovid’s *Halieutica* and Nemesianus’s *Cynegetica*. After Frederic’s death in 1504, Sannazzaro returned to Naples, where he spent the rest of his life. Here, he devoted himself entirely to Latin poetry modeled on the Latin poet Virgil, often with Christian themes. In addition to his epic *The Virgin Birth* (1526), which earned him the title of “the Christian Virgil,” he also composed *Piscatory Eclogues*, an innovative adaption of the eclogue form, as well as elegies, epigrams, and a number of shorter works. See Iacopo Sannazzaro and Michael C. J. Putnam, *Latin Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2009). Introduction. For Mantuanus, see Craig Kallendorf, “Battista Mantovano (Battista Spagnoli),” in *Oxford Bibliographies* (Oxford University Press, 2017): “Battista Mantovano (b. 1477–d. 1516, Battista Spagnoli, also spelled Spagnuoli and often referred to in English as Mantuan) is not considered today to be a humanist of the first rank, but he was a friend of such greater figures as Pico della Mirandola, Angelo Poliziano, Andrea Mantegna, Isabella d’Este, and Pope Leo X; indeed, his popularity is attested by the fact that by 1600, more than 600 editions of his works had been published, and he was well enough known in his own day to have been referenced in Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (“Old Mantuan! Old Mantuan! Who understandeth thee not, loves thee not...” 4.2.95). Then, as now, his fame rested primarily in his collection of pastoral poetry, the *Adulescentia*, which was required reading in the Renaissance grammar school, but his total poetic output comes to around 55,000 verses containing some half million words. To this, prose writings such as the *Parthenice*, on the virgin saints of the church, and the *Opus aureum in Thomistas*, written to condemn the excessive devotion to St. Thomas, must also be added. Praised by Desiderius Erasmus as the Christian Virgil, he also had a noteworthy career as a cleric, functioning as a reformer and serving as prior general of the Carmelite order at his death.”

1498. In these eight years, Verino started to compose several works, like the *Fasti*, the *Sylvae*, the *Poema sacrum Veteris ac Novi Testamenti*, the vernacular *Odi morali*, the *Inni* and the long poem *De vitiis et virtutibus et de la religione Christiana et de vera beatitudine*.³⁴³

Verino's dedication of *Carmen de christianae religionis ac vitae monasticae felicitate* to Savonarola, together with the long letter that accompanied the poem, was supposed to express the poet's deep admiration for the friar of San Marco and his cause. They also possibly served to show Savonarola – a stern enemy of any form of poetizing – that poetry could exist without the influence of ancient mythology and Neoplatonic ideals, and that it could foster the values and morals of Christianity. In his letter, in fact, Verino – while condemning lascivious poems – defended the *ars poetica* for its enjoyability and didactic potential. The poet even dared to suggest a link between poetry and Christianity, stating that the Sacred Scriptures, too, are full of beautiful verses.³⁴⁴ Savonarola's answer to Verino's work was published a few months later, under the form of a treatise on the nature and function of poetry, otherwise known as *Apologeticus de ratione poeticae artis* (1492). The treatise opens with a reply to Verino's letter, where Savonarola thanks the poet for his *opuscola*, and ensures him that he never meant to condemn poetry in its totality, but the abuse of some individuals who indulge and deceive themselves in their passion for empty words.³⁴⁵ His promise to Verino, however, was not kept in

³⁴³ Almost all these works, which composition continued until Verino's death in 1516, are lost. Their existence, however, is testified by Verino's biographer, Lorenzo Bertozzi da Figline. Only five books of the *Inni* survive, together with fragments of the *Sylvae* and the *Vetus et Novum Testamentum*. See Bausi, "Ugolino Verino, Savonarola E La Poesia Religiosa Tra Quattro E Cinquecento." 129-30.

³⁴⁴ "Ugolino Verino, Savonarola E La Poesia Religiosa Tra Quattro E Cinquecento," *Studi savonaroliani: verso il 5. centenario / a cura di Gian Carlo Garfagnini* (1996).

³⁴⁵ Savonarola, "Apologeticus De Ratione Poeticae Artis." 211-212: "Opuscola tua animo laetante suscepi et legi lectaque commendavi. Non enim a sententia eruditissimorum hominum ac religiosorum discrepant, nec ego aliquando artem poeticam damnandam putavi, sed quorundam abusum [...]. Mea igitur intentio est quid de arte poetica sentiam in hoc libello describere, et adversus quosdam sciolos stilum dirigere qui in modico atque vano ne dicam iuvenili verborum amore falluntur."

full. Savonarola's *Apologeticus*, in fact, is not only a treatise against the abuse of ancient poetry, but also, and more importantly, it is a harsh negation of poetry's utility.

To Savonarola, poetry is not a science attributable to rational philosophy, and even if it is, it is the lowest of all.³⁴⁶ People should not devote their life to it, and those who do are not to be praised, as they dedicate themselves to the worst of all arts.³⁴⁷ The utility of poetry is extremely limited, as the aesthetic beauty of its verses cannot penetrate a human soul.³⁴⁸ On March 23, 1495, three years after the publication of the *Apologeticus*, Savonarola returned to this concept, and expanded the attack to the world of religious music as well:

Christian worship is interior and exterior, but the exterior is ordered interior, just as the body is ordered by the soul and matter is ordered by and thus exterior worship is made to serve the interior, and to help make more perfect. But in prayers, which are exterior worship, one ought to ploy them only insofar as they assist interior worship, and no further than according to what Saint Thomas says. And if you should sense that these exterior prayers might take away from or impede interior worship, they to be removed and abandoned, and you should stand firm in the elevation the mind and in interior worship. And thus one says that polyphonic is sooner injurious in church than useful, because there one must contemplate and pray to God with the mind and with the intellect, and figural music do nothing but charm the ear and the senses.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁶ Eugenio Marino, *Sul trattato "Apologeticus de ratione poeticae artis" [Discorso Apologetico Sulla Natura Dell'arte Poetica] Di Fra Girolamo Savonarola* (Pistoia: Centro riviste Padri domenicani, 1998). Chapter 1.5

³⁴⁷ Savonarola, "Apologeticus De Ratione Poeticae Artis." 271: "Quamquam ergo talis scribendi modus secundum se damnari non possit eo quod in se non est malus, quia tamen valde modicam religioni nostrae utilitatem confert, non est magnificandus. Et si quis totam vitam suam huic studio mancipaverit, profecto non erit laude dignus, tum propter eius artis inopiam, tum propter eius infimum gradum. Cum enim ars poetica sit infima scientiarum, quam laudem meretur inter sapientes et doctos qui semper in infimis iacet?"

³⁴⁸ Ibid. 271: "Pruritus enim et modulatio versuum non sinit legentem ad interiora redire."

³⁴⁹ Girolamo Savonarola and Roberto Ridolfi, *Prediche Sopra Giobbe* (Roma: A. Belardetti, 1957). I: 393: "Il culto del cristiano e interiore e esteriore, ma lo esteriore è ordinato all'interiore, sì come il corpo è ordinato all'anima e la materia forma; e così il culto esteriore è fatto per servizio dell'interiore, e per aiutarlo e farlo più perfetto. E però nelle orazioni, che sono culto esteriore, tanto debba l'uomo procedere, quanto le sono autilorio al culto interiore, e non più in là, secondo che dice san Tommaso. E quando tu sentissi che queste orazioni esteriori ti togliessino o impedissino lo interiore, si debbano resecare e lasciarle, e stare saldo nella elevazione della mente e nel culto interiore. E però si dice che li canti figurati sono più presto che utili, perché quivi si debbe orare e contemplare Dio colla mente e coll'intelletto e e' canti figurati non fanno altro che dilettere il senso e l'orecchio." Translated by Patrick Macey. See Patrick Macey, "The Lauda and the Cult of Savonarola," *Renaissance Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (1992). 442.

To Savonarola's eye, therefore, even religious poetry, just like religious music, must be restrained, as it can barely serve the purpose of turning sinners toward redemption. Even in this case, however, Savonarola is very dubious of its effectiveness.³⁵⁰ This is because he believed the Sacred Scriptures to be untranslatable in verse, and thought that any previous attempt to versify the Bible had been punished by God himself.³⁵¹ "God, who created eloquent languages, did not want His scriptures to be decorated with the eloquence of the pagans," he stated.³⁵² Not even the prophets, who spoke in verse, dared to imitate the lyrics of the gentiles. According to Savonarola, therefore, pagan poetry is not only demonic for the stories and the ideas it conveys, but also for its decadent rhythm and versification.³⁵³ Any form of poetry derived from the pagan tradition, moreover, drives people to vanity and vainglory. Similarly, the vast majority of the poets of his time are seen by the priests as needy, vain individuals always looking for praises.³⁵⁴ Even allegedly Christian poets, when imitating the ancients – he continues – often fall into blasphemy, calling upon God with the profane names of antiquity. Even when their poems are written with no mention of pagan mythology, they still fail at conveying concepts that only

³⁵⁰ Savonarola, "Apologeticus De Ratione Poeticae Artis." 271: "Arbitramur ergo horum libros hanc minimam afferre utilitatem: quod adolescentes lubrici carnisque illecebris involuti, dum talium carmina poetarum legunt, occupantur interim et turpia ac amatoria deserere suadentur, non tamen usque adeo prosunt ut ad eam cordis compunctionem puritatemque ac christianam sanctimoniam eos revocare valeant. [...] Concedamus nonnumquam eorum carmina ad compunctionem animos reducere et a mortuis peccatores revocare, tamen hoc adeo perrarum est ut nullus forte aetatis nostrae miraculum tale viderit."

³⁵¹ Ibid. 269: "unde etiam etiam Eusebius Pamphilus [...] narrat quosdam a Deo fuisse percussos quia sacras Scripturas oratorio ac poetico fucō ornare voluerunt."

³⁵² Ibid. 269: "Deus, qui linguas fecit disertas, noluit Scripturas suas ornari facundia paganorum."

³⁵³ Ibid. 252: "Nec tamen prophetae usi sunt versibus virgilianis aut ovidianis, sed his quos non vana hominum superstitio et diabolica instigatio ad colenda idola invenit, sed Spiritus sanctus qui vult hominem de seipso humilia, non alta sentire. Inter versus enim poetarum gentilium et prophetarum nostrorum infinita distat est: in illis enim magnus diaboli laqueus absconditus est." See also Bausi, "Ugolino Verino, Savonarola e la poesia religiosa Tra Quattro e Cinquecento." 133.

³⁵⁴ Savonarola, "Apologeticus De Ratione Poeticae Artis." 253-254: "Sicut enim diabolus ad sui cultum et superstitionem hominum nutriendam ea carmina docuit, ita et in eis superbissimam vanitatem inanisque gloriae intolerabilem foetorem relinquit; unde Dominus non est passus laudes suas his versibus ab aliquo prophetarum suorum decantari." See also ibid. 268: "Videbis enim eos, cum eorum carmina vel leguntur vel laudantur applaudere, nec posse se continere quin et ipsi os proprium ad suas laudes extendant, et scribentes nonnumquam contra inanem gloriae cupidinem, ita de genere dicendi et ornatu proprio inflantur, ut sui penitus immemores et quasi phrenetici videantur dum seipsos pariter et laudant et vituperant."

theology and the Sacred Scriptures can convey. The aim of Savonarola's criticism, in this case, was not only Verino, whose poetic style was extremely sober, devoid of any mythological reference and of any indulgent tribute to the classical lyric tradition: a style that was *de facto* extremely close Savonarola's teachings.³⁵⁵ What the friar of San Marco had in mind when criticizing Christian poetry was probably poets like Maffeo Vegio (1407–1458) and his *Antoniad*, a Virgilian epic of the life of Saint Anthony of Padua (1195 – 1231),³⁵⁶ Antonio Geraldini (1448 – 1489),³⁵⁷ Battista Spagnoli, Feo Belcari (1410 – 1484),³⁵⁸ or Lucrezia Tornabuoni (22 June 1427 – 25 March 1482).³⁵⁹ The problem for Savonarola, in these cases, was not the topic exposed in these works, but the way in which they were modeled from classical poems, and the way they employed the same lexicon, the same situations, the same structure. Despite their purpose of celebrating Christianity, to Savonarola these poems were actually a tribute to the pagan art of poetizing. Even Verino, in his chastised style, was still trying to operate a compromise between Christianity and ancient poetry. A compromise that, according to the friar of San Marco, was heretical at its core. Following this line of thought, Savonarola's ultimate solution against ancient poetry proposed in his *Apologeticus* is that of burning them to

³⁵⁵ See the letter to Savonarola accompanying *De Christianae religionis ac vitae monasticae felicitate* in Bausi, "Ugolino Verino, Savonarola e la poesia religiosa tra Quattro e Cinquecento." 132: "Si enim ab his [poetis] Dei laudes et heroum canerentur, non esset acerimus stimulus aemulatio virtutis, ut in conviviiis apud Laecedemonas et apud veteres Romanos decantari facta praeclara maiorum legimus esse consuetum, ut similis aut superior audentium animus evader niteretur?" See also Francesco Arnaldi, *Poeti Latini Del Quattrocento* (Milano: R. Ricciardi, 1964). 886.

³⁵⁶ See Maffeo Vegio, *Short Epics*, trans. Michael C. J. Putnam (Cambridge, Mass.: I Tatti Renaissance Library, Harvard University Press, 2004).

³⁵⁷ For a brief synopsis of Geraldini's life and works, see Francesco Bausi, "Geraldini, Antonio," in *Dizionario Biografico Degli Italiani*, ed. Alberto Maria Ghisalberti and Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 2007). See also J. F. C. Richards, "Some Early Poems of Antonio Geraldini," *Studies in the Renaissance* 13 (1966).

³⁵⁸ For further information on Belcari's religious poetry in vernacular, see Mario Marti, "Belcari, Feo," in *Dizionario Biografico Degli Italiani*, ed. Alberto Maria Ghisalberti and Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1970).

³⁵⁹ Natalie Tomas, *The Medici Women: Gender and Power in Renaissance Florence* (Aldershot, Hampshire, England; Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2003). 28.

the last copy.³⁶⁰ In the meantime, young Christians must not come in contact with such writings and should devote themselves exclusively to the study of the Sacred Scriptures.³⁶¹ Only after this process, should they be allowed to read a selection of sanctioned ancient philosophical works. In his project to safeguard young believers, Savonarola thought Christian poetry should be tolerated, as long as it was devoid of any *clignement d'œil* towards antiquity. Tolerated, Savonarola reiterates, but not celebrated, since its usefulness is questionable.³⁶² The concept of Christian poetry, to Savonarola, therefore, always remained a major and inextricable oxymoron.³⁶³

Savonarola's *Apologeticus* shows us a very unapologetic approach towards any kind of poetry, whether or not inspired by classical antiquity. Yet, despite the friar's fierce opposition against any form of *ars poetica*, many of his most notable disciples, as we will see, were poets, who deeply believed in the utility of poetry as a vessel of Christian values. This is mainly because the friar of San Marco had a much more complex relationship with verses and hymn singing than what his *Apologeticus* suggests. Much of Savonarola's success regarding his program of political and social reform in Florence, in fact, had to do with his charismatic preaching and *laude*³⁶⁴ singing. "Eloquence [...] was created by the pagans and, consequently, it

³⁶⁰ Savonarola, "Apologeticus De Ratione Poeticae Artis." 265: "Quid igitur faciunt principes nostri? Cur haec mala dissimulant? Cur legem non ferunt ut non solum tales poetae vicitatibus expellantur, sed etiam libri eorum aliorumque veterum qui de arte amandi, de meretriculis, de idolis ac de daemonum spurcissima nequissimaque superstitione editi fuerunt, igne usque ad pulverem consumantur?"

³⁶¹ Ibid. 266: "Modus itaque artis poeticae, qui nun fere ab omnibus servatur, christiano est fugendus et maxime ab adolescentulorum animis tenellis est removendus." See also ibid. 265: "Multum enim prodesset civitatibus si libris paganorum, qui deorum falsorum laudes, improbos mores ac ignominiosa flagitia continent, igni traditis, ceteris vero, qui veritates speculativae practicaeque philosophiae docent, ab adolescentulorum oculis subtractis, catholicorum virorum puer lac primum sugerent et doctrina Christi eorum ingenia tenella ante omnia imprimerentur."

³⁶² For a deeper analysis of Savonarola's work, see Marino, *Sul Trattato "Apologeticus De Ratione Poeticae Artis" [Discorso Apologetico Sulla Natura Dell'arte Poetica] Di Fra Girolamo Savonarola*.

³⁶³ Bausi, "Ugolino Verino, Savonarola e la poesia religiosa tra Quattro e Cinquecento." 133.

³⁶⁴ Poems in praise of God and the saints, set to music and sung in chorus. See John Milsom, "Lauda Spirituale," in *The Oxford Companion to Music*, ed. Alison Latham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011): "A type of sacred song, usually with Italian words though sometimes partly or wholly in Latin, cultivated in Italy from the 13th

is full of their foolishness” states the friar in his *Apologeticus*,³⁶⁵ not considering the fiery sermons that he delivered every week to the city of Florence. His predications, although never in verse, certainly shine for their sober elegance and rhetoric.³⁶⁶ How can we otherwise explain the outstanding success that Savonarola’s preaching had in the early 1490’s? A success that brought him to gather almost 20,000 people at one of his sermons, delivered in the immense cathedral church of Santa Maria del Fiore in 1495.³⁶⁷ This is something that the friar himself justifies through the gift of prophecy and divine inspiration. To Savonarola, prophets are justified in their use of verses and rhetoric, because their knowledge comes directly from God: “The verses of the prophets emanate a scent of knowledge, divine love and saintly humility as if they had been inspired by the Holy Spirit.”³⁶⁸ Savonarola’s self-imposed status of prophet, therefore, granted

century to the 16th. Like the Spanish *cantiga* and the English carol, *laude* belong to the category of popular religious music sung by the laity, and never formed part of the formal worship of the church. Their performance was fostered by guild-like fraternities of singers (called *laudesi*), which existed throughout Italy; laude were also popular within monastic communities, and were sometimes included in religious plays. The earliest laude were penitential in tone; they were sung at times of warfare, plague, or other affliction, and were usually addressed to the Virgin or one of the saints, especially St Francis of Assisi. Later, verses of a more generally devotional or seasonal nature (concerning the Christmas story, the Passion, etc.) were also set. The poetry is homely and stereotyped in nature, and is rarely of any great literary distinction. For its musical substance, the early *lauda* drew on a wide variety of sources, its basic idiom owing much to folk and popular elements, but with the influence of plainchant and the songs of the troubadours also apparent. These *laude* were monophonic at first, with syllabic melodies moving largely by step, unsophisticated rhythms, and often also short refrains. During the 15th century, accompanying lines came to be improvised or composed around the original melody, most often in a note-against-note fashion, giving rise by the early 16th century to simple chordal works for four voices with an emphasis on the melody and bass, in a style not unlike that of the contemporary *frottola*. The market for laude was apparently large at this time, for the Venetian printer Petrucci published two collections. Although the *lauda* itself declined in importance later in the 16th century, some of its characteristic features were taken over in the music of the *rappresentazione sacra* and the early *oratorio*.³⁶⁵ Savonarola, “Apologeticus De Ratione Poeticae Artis.” 254: “*Eloquentia [...] a paganis ortum habuit, ita est plena paganorum vanitate*”

³⁶⁶ See Girolamo Savonarola and Adriana Valerio, *Fede E Speranza Di Un Profeta: Pagine Scelte* (Milano: Paoline, 1998). 6. What I contend to Valerio is that what one may consider as “lack of rhetorical elegance” could actually be seen as a pondered choice of expressing oneself in a not-costumary kind of rhetoric. The rather extraordinary effectiveness of Savonarola’s sermons, moreover, demonstrate his rather skillful use of rhetoric, although devoted to a *simplicitas* that is proper of the friar of San Marco.

³⁶⁷ See Natalie Tomas, *A Positive Novelty: Women and Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (Clayton, Vic.: Monash Publications in History, Dept. of History, Monash University, 1992). 52, n. 71. See also Girolamo Savonarola and Konrad Eisenbichler, *A Guide to Righteous Living and Other Works* (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2003). 7.

³⁶⁸ Savonarola, “Apologeticus De Ratione Poeticae Artis.” 254: “[...] prophetarum carmina sicut a Spiritu sancto inventa sunt, ita et sapientiam et amorem divinum sanctamque redolent humilitatem.”

him some special conditions regarding eloquence and *laude* singing. The art of rhetoric, in fact, was not Savonarola's only penchant. Music too played an integral role in his project of reform. During the short-lived Savonarolan Republic of Florence, where polyphonic music was officially banned,³⁶⁹ it is said that the city streets echoed with the singing of religious *laude* as thousands of children – Savonarola's *fanciulli* – friars, and citizens processed through the city towards the Duomo.³⁷⁰ A contemporary witness, Simone Filipepi (c. 1443 – 1512) – brother of the painter Sandro Botticelli – tells how, after Savonarola's fall, such *laude* resounded from the windows of the reopened brothels to celebrate the end of the friar's prohibitions.³⁷¹ The performance of *laude*, therefore, was seen as a distinguishable element of Savonarola's spiritual dominion over the Florentine Republic. *Laude* singing, moreover, helped to sustain the spirit of Savonarolan reformers until the end of the 16th century. For more than a century, in fact, the Savonarolan *lauda* acted as a powerful symbol of both political and religious reform and as a force to subvert the established order.³⁷² Although the *laude* that Savonarola employed during his spiritual rule in Florence placed special emphasis on the text, it does not change the fact that such *laude* were sacred poems enriched with monodic tunes; poems that Savonarola often wrote himself. According to Giulio Cattin and other experts, Savonarola left a small body of fourteen sacred poems, with musical settings for four of them.³⁷³ Serafino Razzi, a *Piagnone* friar active in the

³⁶⁹ Macey, "The Lauda and the Cult of Savonarola." 443.

³⁷⁰ Ibid. 439-40. See also Paolo de Somenzi's letter to Lodovico Sforza in Savonarola et al., "Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola Religion and Politics, 1490-1498." 343: "Last came the friars of San Marco, disciples of this Fra Girolamo. They conducted the procession through the middle of the city, passing the Piazza della Signoria, and then returned to San Marco, on the piazza before the door of the church; there they halted and all began to sing with one voice, *Ecce quam bonum et quam bonum habitare fratres in unum*, all making a circle round this same piazza.

³⁷¹ See Filipepi in Villari, 1898: "Cantavasi ancora in Fiorenza, in dispregio di f. Girolamo: *Ecce quam bonum ecc.*, perche egli usava molto spesso insieme a' suoi frati; et cantavansi insino al postribolo delle meretrici: né mai ci si fece provisione per chi reggeva."

³⁷² Macey, "The Lauda and the Cult of Savonarola." 440.

³⁷³ Giulio Cattin, "Le Poesie Del Savonarola Nelle Fonti Musicali," *Quadrivium*, no. 12. The poems have been edited in Girolamo Savonarola and Mario Martelli, *Poesie* (Rome: A. Belardetti, 1968). See also Macey, "The Lauda and the Cult of Savonarola." 450.

monastery of San Marco at the end of the 16th century, reported that Savonarola composed *laude* and delighted in hearing them and singing them, and even noted that some of Savonarola's own *laude* were still being sung at his time.³⁷⁴ The pseudo-Burlamacchi, an early biographer of Savonarola, moreover, notes that behind the convent walls the friars of San Marco sang *laude* informally after more formal processions around the cloister.³⁷⁵ In addition, it is important to note that Savonarola's allegedly composed *lauda*, *Ecce quam bonum*, was often mentioned in his predications, and his followers were often invited to sing it together as a sign of joy and salvation.³⁷⁶

It is also important to acknowledge that the young Savonarola did not just compose *laude*, but delighted in the same *ars poetica* that he will later condemn. "Happy are they" he writes in his 1475 sonnet 'On the assumption of the Virgin Mary to Fra Giovanni da Asula O.P.,' "[...] who can sing out / to you a hymn so sweet, which I cannot."³⁷⁷ In his early years, moreover, it is also plausible to say that he believed in poetry as an instrument of change in a

³⁷⁴ Serafino Razzi, *Santuario De Laudi, O Vero Rime Spirituali Per Le Feste Di Ciaschedun Santo, Solennemente Celebrato Per Tutto L'anno Da S. Chiesa, Con Eziandio Quelle Delle Feste Mobili E Di Alcune Da Cantarsi Nel Vestire Di Monache, Con Brevi Annotazioni in Prosa, Composte Dal Padre F. Serafino Razzi* (Florence: Bartolommeo Sermatelli e fratelli, 1609). 103.

³⁷⁵ Pacifico Burlamacchi, Piero Ginori Conti, and Roberto Ridolfi, *La Vita Del Beato Ieronimo Savonarola* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1937). 45-46.

³⁷⁶ See Aggeus, Sermon XIII in Savonarola et al., "Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola Religion and Politics, 1490-1498." 154: "O Florence, this is the third Sunday of Advent, on which the Church in the Introit of the Mass today begins by saying as follows: *Gaudete in Domino, iterum dico gaudete* [Philip. 4:4], that is, "Rejoice, let all rejoice in the Lord"; therefore, chant these words and beseech the Lord that this may be the beginning of your renewal, so that you may be able to sing once more: *Ecce, quam bonum et quam iocundum habitare, fratres in unum.*" 158: "Let everyone live for God and not for the world, all in simplicity and charity, so that we may all sing: *Ecce quam bonum et quam iocundum habitare fratres in unum.* See also Bonfire of Vanities II: 27 February 1498 in *ibid.* 323: "*Montes exultastis ut arietes et colles sicut agni ovium*; 'the mountains have exulted like rams and the hills like the lambs of the sheep.' This means that the high mountains illuminated by God, as well as the humble hills and all the good, have made a great feast and have had and now have great joy, and they rejoice always and everywhere and sing, *ecce quam bonum et quam iocundum habitare fratres in unum.*" Eisenbichler has also shed light on two *laude* contained in the Miscomini edition of Savonarola's *Operetta dell'amor di Gesù* published in 1492. These two *laude*, namely 'Omnipotent God' and 'Song of Praise to the Crucifix', are further proof that Savonarola was composing *laude* during the same period of his *Apologeticus*. See Savonarola and Eisenbichler, *A Guide to Righteous Living and Other Works*. 22-23, 75-77.

³⁷⁷ See Savonarola, On the assumption of the Virgin Mary to Fra Giovanni da Asula O.P., trans. Konrad Eisenbichler, in *A Guide to Righteous Living and Other Works*. 73.

society he saw as corrupt and decadent. In a letter to his father dater 25 April 1475 – the year in which he entered the Dominican convent of San Domenico in Bologna, and the same period in which he was working on his poem, ‘On the ruin of the Church’³⁷⁸ – Savonarola writes:

The reason why I entered into a religious order is this: first, the great misery of the world, the wickedness of men, the rapes, the adulteries, the thefts, the pride, the idolatry, the vile curses, for the world has come to such a state that one can no longer find anyone who does good; so much so that many times every day I would sing this verse with tears in my eyes: *Alas, flee from cruel lands, flee from the shores of the greedy*. I did this because I could not stand the great wickedness of the blind people of Italy, especially when I saw that virtue had been completely cast down and vice raised up.³⁷⁹

Although his poetic activity seems to have ended around 1484,³⁸⁰ years before his fiery invective against poetry found in the *Apologeticus*, Savonarola left a small corpus of poems that might have served as a model for his disciples in their creation of a poetic genre in line with Savonarolan ideals.³⁸¹ This corpus, formed exclusively of poems in vernacular, are a treasure of Savonarolan themes put into verses. The *canzoni* ‘On the ruin of the world’ and ‘On the ruin of the Church’ are exquisite examples of millenarian poetry that, as we will see, may have inspired Gianfrancesco Pico’s poems *Staurostichon* and *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis*, while his ‘Song to Saint Catherine of Bologna’ may have moved Pico’s hymnic production collected in his 1531 *Hymni heroici decem*, mainly dedicated to the poetic celebration of the saints.³⁸²

³⁷⁸ This is the dating proposed by Mario Martelli and accepted by Konrad Eisenbichler. See *ibid.* 17-18. Some critics have suggested that the poem has been written towards the mid 1490’s against Pope Alexander VI Borgia (r. 1492 – 1503). Valentino Piccoli and Domenico Coppola date it to 1495 or shortly after, during Savonarola’s moral battle against the Borgia pontiff. Martelli, however, argues convincingly against this critical tradition of later date. See Gerolamo Savonarola and Valentino Piccoli, *Poesie: con due tavole* (Torino: Unione tipografico-editrice torinese, 1941). 8-9. See also Domenico Coppola, *La poesia religiosa del secolo XV* (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1963). 154-55.

³⁷⁹ Savonarola and Eisenbichler, *A Guide to Righteous Living and Other Works*. 35-36.

³⁸⁰ See Cattin, *Il primo Savonarola: poesie e prediche autografe dal Codice Borromeo*. 191.

³⁸¹ Cattin recognizes seventeen poems, and rectifies Mario Martelli’s theories on some apocryphal lyrics present in the same manuscript. See *ibid.* Chapter VII.

³⁸² See Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulae Inni, Et Cont. Com. & C. Hymni Heroici Decem Post Tres Priores Ad Diversos Coelites. Item Eiusdem Principis Poema Eodem Metro Quo Excitatur a Somno Miseræ Vitæ Ad Tranquillam, & Perpetuam Vigiliam*. (Bologna: Ioannes Baptista Phaellus,

3. Savonarolan Poets

As we have mentioned before, Savonarola's attack against the utility of Christian poetry did not affect the birth of a short, but significant tradition of Savonarolan poems. Many of the artists and intellectuals that followed the friar of San Marco, in fact, might have seen his lack of direct prohibition as a permission to write verses celebrating Christian values. Therefore, they often continued to write poetry, hoping that the sanctity and necessity of their mission – that is the spreading of Savonarolan values – might justify their imitation of classical poets. Others, like Verino and, as we will see, Gianfrancesco Pico, actually tried to link their poetry to the biblical tradition. No matter the justification that these authors found in continuing their poetic compositions, Savonarolan poetry did not cease to exist after the friar's admonitions. Verino, for example, dedicated almost twenty years of his life to the creation of the entire Bible in hexameters, despite Savonarola's warnings that such an operation would have unleashed the wrath of God. His project, moreover, received great consensus, to the point that Gianfrancesco Pico decided to mention Verino's *Poema sacrum* in his *De studio divinae et humanae philosophiae*, and praise him as one of the greatest religious poets of humanism, alongside the aforementioned Battista Spagnoli, as well as friend and fellow Savonarolan, Ludovico Pittorio (1452 – 1525).³⁸³ Pittorio's presence in this tryptic of authors should be seen, most probably, as an act of kindness and tribute to a friend, rather than an objective celebration of his poetry. Yet,

1531). For a thorough definition of Millenarianism, see Robin B. Barnes, "Millenarianism," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, ed. Hans J. Hillebrand (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). See also Francesco Santi and Lennart Rydén, "Apocalyptic Literature," in *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages*, ed. André Vauchez (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). For a deeper analysis of the influence of millenarianism on medieval European culture, see Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

³⁸³ See *Ioannis Francisci Pici De studio divinae et humanae philosophiae*, in *Opera Omnia*, II. I, 7, 22: "Ugolini opus sacrum merito celebrandum est, quo eleganter Christianae veritatis mysteria recensuit." See also Bausi, "Ugolino Verino, Savonarola e la poesia religiosa tra Quattro e Cinquecento."

Pico's honorable mention of him allows us to mark another – although minor – representative of this poetic trend. Author of the *Candida*, a collection of elegiac songs dedicated to Gianfrancesco Pico himself, and the *Carmina tumultuaria*, Pittorio soon converted to the Savonarolan cause and committed his mature poetic writings to it, enriching the tradition of Savonarolan poetry and earning Pico's praise through an unlikely comparison to the Mantuanus himself.³⁸⁴

Far from being a proper school of aesthetics or a compact group of *litterati* and humanists, Savonarolan poets were often more united under a set of themes and spiritual suggestions, rather than a precise agenda for the circulation of Savonarolan ideas.³⁸⁵ Although the influence of the friar of San Marco varies from author to author, his teachings made a mark on a wide circle of active literates in Florence during the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th century. Among these we also find the figure of Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475 – 1564).³⁸⁶ During the last decade of the 15th century, Michelangelo and Savonarola had many friendships in common, and it is plausible to say that they had several occasions to meet in person.³⁸⁷ Michelangelo's older brother, Leonardo, entered the Dominican order in 1491, through Tommaso Busini, faithful disciple of Savonarola. Many of the poets of the late Laurentian court that Michelangelo frequented in his youth, moreover, were often heavily influenced by the teachings of the friar of San Marco.³⁸⁸ Ascanio Condivi, biographer of the artist, tells us about Michelangelo's constant

³⁸⁴ His *Christianorum opusculorum libri tres*, printed in Modena in 1498 and in Strasbourg in 1509, for example, marks a conversion to religious life that brought about a series of religious poems highly inspired to a Savonarolan type of pietas. Giancarlo Andenna, "Pittorio, Ludovico," *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* 68 (2015), [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/ludovico-pittorio_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/ludovico-pittorio_(Dizionario-Biografico)/).

³⁸⁵ Giulia Ponsiglione, "La poesia ai tempi della "tribulazione": Giovanni Nesi e i savonaroliani" (Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2012). 93.

³⁸⁶ For further information on Michelangelo's Savonarolan spirituality, see Pancani U., "Lo Spirito Savonaroliano in Michelangelo," *Memorie domenicane*, no. 81 (1964). See also Sarah Rolfe Prodan, "Michelangelo's Christian Mysticism: Spirituality, Poetry, and Art in Sixteenth-Century Italy," (2014).

³⁸⁷ Giulia Ponsiglione, one of the leading experts on Michelangelo's poetry, is certain about their personal acquaintance. See Ponsiglione, "La poesia ai tempi della "tribulazione": Giovanni Nesi e i Savonaroliani." 94.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 94.

reading of Savonarola's predications and about his great affection toward the friar from Ferrara. The same can be found in Giorgio Vasari's writings.³⁸⁹ Although Michelangelo never openly joined the cause of the Piagnoni,³⁹⁰ his poetry still reflects the idea of religious *simplicitas* typical of other Savonarolan poets.³⁹¹ Another important, although minor, Savonarolan poet of the time is Castellano Castellani (1461 – 1520). Castellani is a figure that deserves a certain attention, as he was at the margins of the late Laurentian court, a cultural environment that constituted the core of Savonarolan poetry. Part of the clergy since 1488, he worked together with Savonarola in Prato during the years of the Florentine Republic. This collaboration influenced him greatly and inspired the composition of a series of *laude* that were very well received among the Piagnoni.³⁹² His simple and popular poetry, devoid of the Neoplatonic and classical refinements of the Laurentian Piagnoni, is most probably the closest to Savonarola's original mission of a moral and spiritual edification of the masses.³⁹³

Special mention goes to Giovanni Nesi (1456 – 1509), who is probably the most original of all Savonarolan poets active between the 15th and 16th century.³⁹⁴ Well acquainted with the late Laurentian court and the Florentine world of the *confraternite*,³⁹⁵ Nesi progressively

³⁸⁹ Ascanio Condivi et al., *Vita di Michelagnolo Buonarroti* (Firenze: Studio per edizioni scelte, 1998). 62. See also Giorgio Vasari and Paola Barocchi, *La vita di Michelangelo nelle redazioni del 1550 e del 1568* (Milano: R. Ricciardi, 1962). I, 121.

³⁹⁰ Although Michelangelo's private devotion toward the friar is quite evident. In his testament, for example, the artist destined all his goods, in absence of *direct heirs*, to the *Pia Istituzione dei Buonomini di S. Martino per i poveri vergognosi*, once supported and led by Savonarola. See Condivi et al., *Vita di Michelagnolo Buonarroti*. 63. See also Vasari and Barocchi, *La Vita di Michelangelo nelle redazioni del 1550 e del 1568*. 123.

³⁹¹ Ponsiglione, "La poesia ai tempi della "tribulazione": Giovanni Nesi e i Savonaroliani." 95-96.

³⁹² Castellani's poetic production can be found mostly in a fragmented state. His *Laudi*, however, were published in Venice in 1521, and found great and wide success among the remaining communities of Piagnoni. *Ibid.* 98.

³⁹³ *Ibid.* 98.

³⁹⁴ For further details on the author and his unique perspective on philosophy and Savonarolan devotion, see Christopher S. Celenza and Giovanni Nesi, *Piety and Pythagoras in Renaissance Florence: The Symbolum Nesianum* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2001).

³⁹⁵ For a broad perspective on the importance of Italian confraternities in the Renaissance, see Konrad Eisenbichler, *Crossing the Boundaries: Christian Piety and the Arts in Italian Medieval and Renaissance Confraternities* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1991).

developed his own form of poetry in reflection with Savonarola's teachings, after being exposed to Ficino and Giovanni Pico's Neoplatonic philosophy in his young adulthood. Nesi's first work receiving proper recognition, the 1486 *Oratio de charitate*, clearly defines his adhesion to the Renaissance Neoplatonic ideal. The intricate game of anaphors, metaphors and climaxes, in fact, is built around the Neoplatonic ideal of beauty and love, with a strong attention to the symbol of the sun.³⁹⁶ Nesi's oration was received with considerable success, which lasted for the entire 16th century.³⁹⁷ It is, however, with the Florentine Republic, and the author's progressive adhesion to Savonarola's spiritual reform, that Nesi managed to write what remains his major work: the 1497 *Oraculum de novo saeculo*. The treatise is immediately recognized as one of the most interesting experiments in Savonarolan circles. Nesi's hermetic interpretation of the figure of Savonarola is nothing short of outstanding, especially considering the audience to which it was appealing. It is not surprising that neither Savonarola nor the Piagnoni managed to appreciate Nesi's 'neoplatonization' of the friar's vatic figure.³⁹⁸ During the same period, Nesi writes a collection of 28 *canti*, gathered in a manuscript simply called *Poema*. In this collection, inspired by Dante's *Commedia*, Nesi pictures himself in an otherworldly journey soaked with Pythagorean, cabbalistic, and hermetic notions.³⁹⁹ Part of this literary work, which remained unedited and unfinished, pour into Nesi's most important poetic work, the *Canzoniere in volgare*, which survives only in manuscript form.⁴⁰⁰ The compelling mixture between Hermetic and Savonarolan

³⁹⁶ Giovanni Nesi and Cesare Vasoli, "Giovanni Nesi tra Donato Acciaiuoli e Girolamo Savonarola: testi editi e inediti," in *I Miti E Gli Astri*, ed. Cesare Vasoli (Naples: Guida, 1977). 153.

³⁹⁷ On the fortune of Nesi's *Oratio de charitate*, see Giorgio Masi, "Interpolazioni editoriali e refusi d' autore: il Doni e l' Oratio De charitate di Giovanni Nesi," *Studi italiani* (1989). 43-90.

³⁹⁸ Lorenzo Polizzotto, *The Elect Nation: The Savonarolan Movement in Florence, 1494-1545* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1994). 105-06. On the diffusion of the *Oraculum*, see Stéphane Toussaint, "La voix des prophètes. Un 'inédit' pour Giovanni Nesi et Paolo Orlandini," *Bruniana & Campanelliana* 10, no. 1 (2004). 105-116.

³⁹⁹ Ponsiglione, "La poesia ai tempi della "tribolazione": Giovanni Nesi e i Savonaroliani." 19-20.

⁴⁰⁰ Codice Riccardiano 2962. See *ibid.* 20. For a deep analysis of Nesi's 'Canzoniere' – name attributed by Giulia Ponsiglione – see *ibid.* 21-90.

themes, and between mysteric and millenarian tones, makes Nesi's work a unique masterpiece of Savonarolan hybridism.

Up to this moment we have dealt especially with authors that – Ugolino Verino and Michelangelo aside – had only marginal influence on the culture of their time as writers. Savonarolan spirituality, however, inspired several fundamental literates of the 15th-16th century. Two of them deserve special mention as poets: Girolamo Benivieni (1453 – 1542), and Gianfrancesco Pico.⁴⁰¹ Considered almost unanimously as the most important poet among the Piagnoni, Benivieni was introduced to the Savonarolan fold by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. The death of his friend in 1494 – buried in Dominican clothes donated by Savonarola himself – strengthened this bond to the point of surviving the friar's death in 1498 and continuing throughout the poet's entire life. During the Florentine Republic, Benivieni openly sided with the Piagnoni, and sang several laude for the Savonarolan *fanciulli* and the celebration of the bonfires of the vanities.⁴⁰² Even after the end of the Republic and the repression of the Piagnoni, Benivieni, like Gianfrancesco Pico, never stopped writing in favor of a Savonarolan form of spiritual reformation. Benivieni's 1500 *Commento sopra a più sue canzone et sonetti dello Amore e della Bellezza divina*, dedicated to Gianfrancesco Pico and its 1519 re-edition are often considered one of the major works of Savonarolan poetry. His later *Laude e canzoni morali*, moreover, enjoyed a certain fame, and were published several times throughout the 16th century.⁴⁰³

⁴⁰¹ Although Giovanni Pico della Mirandola left a collection of poems in vernacular, their composition is prior to 1486. Therefore, the poems pre-date the author's conversion to Savonarolan values and spirituality. For more information on Pico's sonnets, see Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Giorgio Dilemmi, *Sonetti* (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1994). See also Mario Martelli, "La Poesia Giovanile E Le Opere in Volgare Di Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola.," in *Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola: convegno internazionale di studi nel cinquecentesimo anniversario della morte (1494-1994), Mirandola, 4-8 Ottobre 1994*. (Florence: Leo Olschki, 1997).

⁴⁰² Cesare Vasoli, "Benivieni, Girolamo," *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* (1966), http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/girolamo-benivieni_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

4. Gianfrancesco Pico and Savonarolan Poetry

Together with Ugolino Verino and Girolamo Benivieni, Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola represents what can be easily considered the peak of 16th century Savonarolan poetry. Although his literary production is mainly dedicated to lengthy philosophical works, the count of Mirandola never stopped writing poetry. During his life, Pico published a total of seventeen poems: fifteen poems divided into two collections (the 1507 *Hymni heroici tres* and the 1530 *Hymni heroici decem*) and two poems, *Staurostichon* (1505 – 1507) and *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis* (1513), linked respectively to the treatises *De rerum praenotione* and *De amore divino*, and published independently.⁴⁰⁴

The two contemporary authors that have most deeply influenced Pico's poetry are the aforementioned Verino and Spagnoli, otherwise known as Mantuanus. We have already seen how Pico elected these two authors as the apex of the religious poetry of his time in his *De studio divinae et humanae philosophiae*. We know, moreover, that Verino and Pico were in contact, and that Pico was acquainted with Verino's works. The relationship between Pico and Mantuanus, however, was extremely important for the development of Pico's poetry. The two, in fact, appeared to be bound by a sincere friendship built on a common respect for Gianfrancesco's uncle Giovanni Pico and the mission of reformation of the Church as well as of the Christian poetry of the time.⁴⁰⁵ Mantuanus, like the young Pico, was very conscious of the necessity of

⁴⁰⁴ If one accepts its authorship, Gianfrancesco Pico's late work *De Auro* also includes quotations from two alchemical *aenigmata* in Latin hexameters. This is mentioned in Francois Secret, "Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola, Lilio Gregorio Giraldi Et L'alchimie," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 38, no. 1 (1976).

⁴⁰⁵ See the epistolary exchange between Pico and Spagnoli in Pico della Mirandola, *Opera Omnia*, II. 1340-43; 1352-53. See also Claudio Moreschini, *Rinascimento Cristiano: Innovazioni E Riforma Religiosa Nell'italia Del Quindicesimo E Sedicesimo Secolo* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2017). 217. For Mantuanus' personal agenda in relation to the so-called "Osservanza" movement within the Carmelite order, see Matteo Soranzo, "Words of Conversion: Poetry and Religious Identity in Early Modern Italy," *Journal of Religion in Europe* 6, no. 2 (2013). 237-44.

building a Christian poetic genre that could go beyond the mere imitation of classical sources. A purpose that he made clear in his *Divi Dionysii Areopagitae vita*, where he stated that the Muses, once having abandoned the lascivious topics of antiquity, migrated to the altars of Christian religion, under the orders of the Virgin Mary.⁴⁰⁶ Mantuanus was also instrumental in the editing of Pico's first published poem, the *Staurostichon*. Once finished, in fact, Pico sent a stub of the poem to Spagnoli, asking for his opinion.⁴⁰⁷ The Carmelite friar answered with great enthusiasm, subscribing to all the principles that guided Pico to the writing of his poem. Mantuanus, citing Horace, recommended the young Pico combine the useful with the delightful, and to merge learned doctrine with the pleasantness of ancient poetry.⁴⁰⁸ In his answer to Mantuanus' letter, Pico praises his poetic style, hoping to follow his example and convince other authors to abandon the obscenities of ancient poetry and devote themselves to religion.⁴⁰⁹

Although heavily influenced by Mantuanus' poetry, the diversity between the two poets' use of ancient sources and themes is still deep. Mantuanus, for example, while rejecting the cult of antiquity found in many other poems of his times, accepted the influence of pagan deities as useful metaphors and symbols. This approach is clear in his letter to Pico, where he compares recreational and learned poetry to the Olympian goddesses Flora, Diana, Venus, and Minerva.⁴¹⁰ The themes and the purpose of Pico's verses, on the contrary, can be easily assimilated to those and of many of the Savonarolan authors we have seen so far, and especially to Ugolino Verino's declarations on the function of poetry.⁴¹¹ Pico's poetry, just like Verino's, has no intention to

⁴⁰⁶ *Rinascimento Cristiano: Innovazioni E Riforma Religiosa Nell'italia Del Quindicesimo E Sedicesimo Secolo*. 184.

⁴⁰⁷ Pico della Mirandola, *Opera Omnia*, II. 1358-59.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 1360.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 1360-62.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.* 1360.

⁴¹¹ Moreschini, *Rinascimento Cristiano: Innovazioni E Riforma Religiosa Nell'italia Del Quindicesimo E Sedicesimo Secolo*. 166-67.

compromise itself with ancient pagan poetry, but strives to create a new and original kind of Christian poetry using rhythms and topics in line with ancient Jewish and Christian devotion. This is clearly stated in the proem to the first of the *Hymni heroici tres*, dedicated to the Holy Trinity:

[...] I beg to compose high volumes of praises, / equal to the ancient melody of Jesse / or the righteous ruler, or in the ways of the exiled prophet; / that is, the song that the legislator sculpted in stone on the shores of Eritrea, / and that her sister tuned with a group of dancing women / when the young Egyptians were already submerged; / or the verses that in Latium, or on the shores of Hellas learned, holy poets intoned with various intonations.⁴¹²

Despite the similarities to Verino's intentions, declared in his introductory letter to the *Carmen de christiana religionis ac vitae monasticae felicitate*, Pico's poetry demarks itself with a series of important differences, clearly expounded in the *exordium* of Pico's *Hymni heroici tres*. This preface, dedicated to the son Giantommaso, had the clear intent of educating the child to the interpretation of his father's verses and of sacred poetry in general. The theme of classical knowledge and versification is a core topic in Pico's argument, as it touches on the delicate subject of the influence of paganism in poetry. Pico, in this case, does not seem to reject the lesson of pre-Christian antiquity in its entirety, especially if it serves to show the error of paganism and the greatness of Christian doctrine:

[...] in the interpretation of the second hymn, if it seems to you that I have devoted too much attention to refute the fables and divinities of the gentiles, I wanted to revive them

⁴¹² Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani Principis: Concordiaequae Comitiss Hymni Heroici Tres Ad Sanctissimam Trinitatem: Ad Christum: Et Ad Virginem Mariam* (Milan: Alessandro Minuziano, 1507). 4v. Vv. 19-26: "Sed petimus superae praecelsa volumina laudis / pangere Iessei quondam modulaminis instar / aut iusti regis dissecti aut more prophetae / seu quod erythraeo procudit littore carmen / legifer, atque soror recinit permixta choreae / foemineae, postquam demersa Aegyptia pubes / seu quae per Latium doctaeque per Helladis oras / fuderunt vario sacri spiramine vates."

in front of you, having reasoned that you cannot exactly refute something that was not previously exposed. In addition to all this, may you learn what was done by those ancient and trusted theologians of our Church, and especially by Augustine, who with the utmost diligence explained, refuting them, all the gentle deities of the gentiles and mythological narratives. Add to this that the works of Christ will shine brighter than all the follies he banished, and if by chance there was still someone captive of the error of those - in fact a few years ago during the pontificate of Pius II it was found someone who worshiped the material sun – [he] will be silenced.⁴¹³

In this section of the preface, Pico therefore justifies the use of ancient pagan imagery in his poetry. Contrarily to the warnings of Savonarola's *Apologeticus*, Pico did not believe in the necessity of a poetry devoid of images that were not directly linked to Christianity.⁴¹⁴ Instead, he thought that pagan symbols should be used and exposed for what they were – the product of madness and error – so that the Christian message could shine brighter. “For this reason,” Pico states, “the knowledge of the gentiles must be delved in order to be eradicated.”⁴¹⁵ The same can be said about the teachings of antiquity that can be assimilated to the truth of Christianity. Using the metaphor of the pagan temples converted to Churches, Pico brings forth the idea that ancient philosophy, literature, and law could be used as long as they celebrate Christian religion. The same – he continues – can be said about metric verses and poetic rhythms. Unlike Savonarola, in fact, and in agreement with – in some ways – Plethon, Ficino, Lazzarelli, Giovanni Pico and Marullo, Gianfrancesco Pico attributed to the form of the ancient antique spiritual property

⁴¹³ *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani... Hymni Heroici Tres Ad Sa[N]ctissimam Trinitatem, Ad Christum & Ad Virginem Mariam: Una Cu[M] Commentariis Luculentiss. Ad Io. Thomam Filiu[M]* (Milan: Apud Alexandrum Minutianum, 1507). “In hac ipsa vero secundi hymni interpretatione, si tibi videbimur in fabulis et diis gentium confutandis immorari, a quibus te revocatum voluimus, id cogitato, non posse id exacte confutari quod prius quoquomodo non prodatur. Tum illud discas factum hoc ab antiquis illis et probatissimis ecclesiae nostrae theologis, et Augustino praecipue, qui omnes etiam minutos gentium deos et fabulosa commenta inter confutandum, evoluit diligentissime. Huc accedit quod Christi opera clarius elucebunt insaniis illis quas expulit collata<s>, et siquis fortasse adhuc illorum errore detentus fuerit (nam et aulo ante nostram aetatem Pii Secundi pontificis tempestate, inventus est qui solem hunc corporeum adoraret)” coarguetur.”

⁴¹⁴ Moreschini, *Rinascimento Cristiano: Innovazioni E Riforma Religiosa Nell'italia Del Quindicesimo E Sedicesimo Secolo*. 177.

⁴¹⁵ Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani... Hymni Heroici Tres Ad Sa[N]ctissimam Trinitatem, Ad Christum & Ad Virginem Mariam: Una Cu[M] Commentariis Luculentiss. Ad Io. Thomam Filiu[M]*.

which, once purified, could be adapted to its severe religious perspective. Precisely because, unlike many authors close to Ficino's ideas, he implicitly refutes allegory as a way to bridge the hermeneutic gap that separates pagan writers from Christian ones, Pico's poetry moves innovatively for the rehabilitation of ancient poems on formal terms.⁴¹⁶ On this subject, Pico underlines the superiority of the hexameter, and especially of that which composes the heroic hymns: poems destined to celebrate the divine.⁴¹⁷ According to Pico – and this is an important fact for understanding his take on sacred poetry – Moses was the first man to use hexameters in praise of God.⁴¹⁸ Moses is a key element in Pico's belief, as it gives precedence to Christian doctrine against classical antiquity. Pico strongly believed that Greek culture stole most of its knowledge, art, and law-making from the teachings of Moses. This fact is reiterated in several of Pico's works, especially in the *Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium*. The Mosaic and Jewish influence over ancient Greece is what brings Pico to condone certain aspects of pagan antiquity. To the philosopher, therefore, all the good that can be found in pagan knowledge is mostly due to the enlightenment of Moses.⁴¹⁹ The same, therefore, can be said about Greek, and Roman, poetry. That said, however, according to Pico very few Christian authors, except for Ausonius (c. 310 – c. 395) and Claudianus (c. 370 – c. 404 AD), had written heroic hymns: thus, his perceived need to bridge this important gap and show everyone how to write Christian hymns.⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁶ Soranzo, "Un'identità Religiosa Nel Primo Cinquecento." 63.

⁴¹⁷ Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani... Hymni Heroici Tres Ad Sa[N]ctissimam Trinitatem, Ad Christum & Ad Virginem Mariam: Una Cu[M] Commentariis Luculentiss. Ad Io. Thomam Filiu[M]*: "Excellit autem inter omnia genera carmen hexametrum ob perfectionem numerari senarii, qui ex partibus (ut arithmeticiis dicitur) aliquotis constat idque inveni explicatum a Victruvio his verbis "Ea re mathematici perfectum esse dixerunt numerum qui sex dicitur, quod is numerus habet partitiones eorum rationibus sex numero convenientes". Erui tamen alia ratio ab Aristotele, qui in *Arte Poetica* scribit difficilium idipsum carmen in sermone codepromi, sicuti Iambum facilius, et ob id fuisse primum carmen censuit. Inter hexametri vero species carmen heroicum perstat, quo grandia facta et ingentes ausus decantabantur. Inter heroica vero poemata hymni heroici praecllunt, quibus graeci res divinas celebrabant et hymnographi eorum auctores a Zeze in commentario in Lycophonem vocati sunt."

⁴¹⁸ Ibid. See also Soranzo, "Un'identità Religiosa Nel Primo Cinquecento." 65.

⁴¹⁹ Moreschini, *Rinascimento Cristiano: Innovazioni E Riforma Religiosa Nell'italia Del Quindicesimo E Sedicesimo Secolo*. 32; 37.

⁴²⁰ Ibid. 179.

Pico's relative openness towards the incorporation of pagan rhythms and poetic genres proper of pagan antiquity does not coincide with the embracing of a poetry devoted to the imitation of the ancients. On the contrary, the purpose of Gianfrancesco Pico's poems, just like in Verino, is that of countering that growing tradition of paganizing poetry which, with the excuse of drawing inspiration from the ancient hymns, had been orbiting dangerously toward syncretic and filo-pagan ideas. On this subject, it is sufficient to read a short section of the introduction to his *Hymni heroici tres* (1507) to understanding how significant this idea was for the writing and circulation of his poems:

And after I saw many people of our own days corrupting everything and addressing prayers to Pan, Earth, Venus under the veil of nature, invoking every god and goddess, and drawing souls from the stars, conjuring ghosts, and evoking shades, and holding ceremonies for gentile gods nowadays more eagerly than the gentiles themselves, I decided that I could no longer accept that learned pupils under the pretext of a refined and erudite language would swallow the poison of a false religion as if it were covered in honey.⁴²¹

Pico's position toward the paganizing poetry of his time, therefore, is as harsh as that of Savonarola. Pico cannot condone the fact that pre-Christian poetry and religion have been given a place of preeminence with respect to their Christian counterparts, which, according to the author, already absorbed everything that was good about antiquity and expunged all the error and superstition that surrounded it. The final aim of Pico's poetry, therefore, is that of acting as an example of high poetry achieved without any dangerous compromise with pagan poetry.

5. Forms of Religious Hybridism in the Italian Hymnic Tradition of the 15th-16th Century:

Ficino's Hymns

⁴²¹ Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani... Hymni Heroici Tres Ad Sa[N]ctissimam Trinitatem, Ad Christum & Ad Virginem Mariam: Una Cu[M] Commentariis Luculentiss. Ad Io. Thomam Filiu[M]*. 1v.

As we have seen, one of the main staples of the Savonarolan poetic tradition was to contrast the servile imitation of ancient poetry that the Piagnoni saw as dangerous and heretical, as it could invite the return of the same ancient superstitions contained in such texts.⁴²² This point of view – although difficult to understand nowadays – was founded on a sincere, although partial, fear. It would be unfair, in fact, to comment on Savonarola’s sermons against poetry without addressing the reasons why these sermons were made in the first place. As I have noted, the end of the 15th century brought about a new wave of religious poetry. Not all of this religious poetry, however, could be easily categorized as Christian if not in a broad sense. The humanistic rediscovery of classical culture, in conjunction with the failed attempt to reunite the Eastern and Western Churches in 1439, the fall of Constantinople in 1453, and the subsequent migration of Byzantine scholars and books to the Italian peninsula, paved the way for a new kind of poetizing, which brought with it important intellectual ramifications. These poems, born from an elaboration of hermetic and Neoplatonic sources, were often an attempt to an irenic interpretation of ancient mythology that presupposed the validity of the images of the gods and their symbolic value as carriers of ancient – albeit inscrutable – truths. One of the main protagonists of this revolution is most certainly the Florentine humanist Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499).⁴²³

During his studies on ancient Greek sources, Ficino became acquainted with the Hellenistic idea that philosophy could be seen more as a way of life rather than a purely theoretical quest; an idea that Ficino and other Renaissance scholars embraced in contrast with,

⁴²² Francesco Tateo, “L’idea Dello Scrittore Cristiano Moderno in Gianfrancesco Pico,” in *Ut Granum Sinapsis: Essays on Neo-Latin Literature in Honour of Jozef Ijsewijn*, ed. Gilbert Turnoy and Dirk Sacré (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997). 139.

⁴²³ James Hankins, “Plato in the Italian Renaissance,” (1990). 300-01. See also Raphael Falco, “Marsilio Ficino and Vatic Myth,” *MLN* 122, no. 1 (2007). 106: “Ficino’s work offers a crucial starting place for recognizing how myth—in particular, vatic myth—contributes to the accomplishment of logos in fifteenth-century thinking about poetry, theology, and progress.”

and often in response to, the traditional institutions of learning of their time.⁴²⁴ In trying to decode and translate Plato's dialogues, moreover, Ficino became immersed in the work of late ancient philosophers such as Plotinus, Proclus, Iamblichus and – much like these authors before him – pre-Christian texts such as the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the *Orphica*, and the *Oracula Chaldaica*.⁴²⁵ In line with this late ancient tradition, Ficino and his followers drew from Plato's dialogues the coordinates of a spiritual path headed a mystical *askesis*⁴²⁶ with the metaphysical One – a path that diverged from the still dominant view of natural philosophy as an '*ancilla theologiae*' useful for, but subordinated to, the pursuit of Christian faith.⁴²⁷ On this subject, an

⁴²⁴ Pierre Hadot and Arnold Ira Davidson, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Oxford; New York: Blackwell, 1995). 33, 271-72. See also C. S. Celenza, "What Counted as Philosophy in the Italian Renaissance? The History of Philosophy, the History of Science, and Styles of Life," *Critical Inquiry* 39, no. 2 (2013). 367-401.

⁴²⁵ Celenza, "The Revival of Platonic Philosophy." 84-86.

⁴²⁶ See John Roberts, "Asceticism," in *Oxford Dictionary of the Classical World*, ed. John Roberts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): "The Greek word askēsis implies disciplined and productive effort. At first mainly physical in sense—alluding to the skill of the craftsman and the vigour of the athlete—it quickly acquired a moral sense also, clear in Xenophon. He contrasted the ascetic with the self-willed amateur, stressing submission to a tradition of instruction, and he made a connection with self-mastery, overlaying with that positive moral note the more general notion of labour. The ascetic improved upon nature, remaining in that sense a craftsman. Asceticism was associated thereafter with philosophical rather than religious practice. Philosophers rejected ritual as a guarantee of liberation or virtue. Their moderation was distinct from the self-denial of priests, initiates, and devotees, even when that involved fasting or sexual restraint. Linked thus with philosophy, asceticism adopted forms dictated by different schools. With Platonism ascendant, its general aim veered naturally towards truth and knowledge understood in increasingly exalted and visionary senses. Followers of Pythagoras, believing a divine element was imprisoned in the body, recommended release through silence as an aid to contemplation, with fasting an added option (perhaps more symbolic than effective). Some Cynics may have furthered the ascetic cause, esp. when, like Crates, they advocated simplicity and detachment. The Stoics armed themselves against what they called 'passion' and relinquished some goods to safeguard others: sound judgement mattered more than will-power. No less, in their way, the disciples of Epicurus chose some goods over others in pursuit of true happiness and should be allowed the title of 'ascetic' in a strict sense. Finally, Neopythagoreanism from the 1st cent. bc on prompted more severe criticism of cult as a moral tool and emphasized the inner quality of true piety—an emphasis that would mirror if not reinforce the suspicion of some Christian ascetics about the usefulness of sacramental religion. By the time of Philostratus and Iamblichus, those different elements had begun to conflate—a process confirmed within Neoplatonism. Not surprisingly, therefore, asceticism made its appearance in a Christian context precisely when Christians opened themselves fully, during the 2nd cent., to the classical philosophical tradition. The chief exemplars are Clement and Origen of Alexandria."

⁴²⁷ Hadot and Davidson, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*. 107-8. See also Pierre Hadot, *The Veil of Isis: An Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006). 110-12.

important aspect of Ficino's legacy is his impact on religious practices and, more specifically, on hymn singing.⁴²⁸

Even in just browsing through Ficino's letters, the crucial role that hymnal performance played in his philosophical project becomes evident. In a letter addressed to Cosimo de' Medici on September 8, 1462, the Florentine philosopher describes in detail the performance of a hymn taken from the *Orphic Hymns* - a collection of prayers traditionally attributed to the mythical poet Orpheus, which 15th century humanists had recently brought to light.⁴²⁹ Composed mainly of music and words, Ficino's performance of Orpheus' *Hymn to the Cosmos* is presented not only as an encomiastic poem, but also as a ritual with concrete effects on both the philosopher's mind and destiny, thus determining Cosimo's generosity toward the Florentine philosopher.⁴³⁰ In a letter to his friend and follower Giovanni Cavalcanti, moreover, Ficino explains the positive effects of hymn-singing as a remedy against melancholy. By addressing hymns of recantation to Saturn, the planet deemed responsible for triggering black bile and depression, Ficino and his interlocutor believe that the soul can be turned toward God and away from the lesser elements afflicting the body.⁴³¹ Even in his later years, when Ficino became more aware that his claim on

⁴²⁸ The matter is clearly expressed in Giovanni Corsi's 1506 *Marsilio Ficini Vita*, where we find: "[Ficino] expounded the hymns of Orpheus and it is said that he sang them to the lyre in the ancient style with remarkable sweetness." See 'The Life of Marsilio Ficino,' in Marsilio Ficino, *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, trans. London The members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science, vol. 3 (London: Shephard-Walwyn, 1996). 138. See also Celenza, "What Counted as Philosophy in the Italian Renaissance? The History of Philosophy, the History of Science, and Styles of Life."

⁴²⁹ The *Orphic Hymns*, considered as an ancient philosophical theology dating from before Pythagoras and Plato, circulated in manuscript among Greek scholars in Italy from 1423, and they were published in a Greek printed edition in Florence in 1500. Ficino devoted himself to a Latin translation of the Hymns, though he was reluctant to publish them as they are ritual hymns to the Olympian gods. Two Latin translations were written, one being published in 1540, but now generally attributed to the humanist Janus Lascaris (1445-1535). See *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, trans. London The members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science, vol. 10 (London: Shephard-Walwyn, 2015). 75. Despite his public detachment to Orpheus' dangerous material, Ficino never stopped sharing his hymns with a very small selection of friends. See, for example, the letter "*Opiniones non temere divulgandae Itam Orphei carmina*" sent to Martin 'Uranus' Prenninger. Ibid. 27-30. On the rediscovery and editorial history of the Orphic hymns, see Walker, "Orpheus the Theologian and Renaissance Platonists." 103-04.

⁴³⁰ Marsilio Ficino and Angela Voss, *Marsilio Ficino* (Berkeley, Calif: North Atlantic Books, 2009). 59-60.

⁴³¹ Ibid. 65.

Neoplatonic theology and Orphic religious poetry could have been considered at odds with Christian teachings on prayers and invocations, he never truly ceased to admire Orphic hymn singing. In a letter to Paul of Middelburg, written when he was nearly sixty, Ficino looks back over a lifetime of cultural achievements in his native city and exclaims: “This age, like a golden age, has brought back to light those liberal disciplines that were practically extinguished: grammar, poetry, oratory, painting, sculpture, architecture, music and the ancient singing of songs to the Orphic lyre.”⁴³² The same can be said about a letter to Martin ‘Uranius’ Prenninger dated June 9, 1492, and entitled ‘Beliefs should not be rashly promulgated, nor should the ‘Hymns of Orpheus.’” In this letter, Ficino seems to share the same preoccupations on ancient poetry that characterized Savonarola’s *Apologeticus*:

It never seemed a good idea to publish the *Argonautica*, the hymns of Orpheus, of Homer or Proclus, or the *Theology* of Hesiod, which [...] I had translated, word for word, just for myself in my youth (I know not how). I was afraid I might seem to be calling readers back to an ancient worship of gods and daemons that was justly condemned years ago.⁴³³

Yet, despite these concerns, Ficino cannot help but share two Orphic hymns deemed ‘safe’ for their presence in the *Preparatio Evangelica* of the 4th-century Church Father Eusebius.⁴³⁴ In fact, although Ficino had always been afraid to publish his translation of the Orphic hymns, for fear that his readers would suspect him of reinstating the cults of ancient gods and daemons, there is abundant evidence that their use, primarily as part of a ritual activity in the practice of natural

⁴³² Marsilio Ficino and Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Opera Omnia* (Torino: d’Erasmio, 1962). “Hoc enim seculum tanquam aureum, liberales disciplinas ferme iam extinctas reduxit in lucem, grammaticam, poesim, oratoriam, picturam, sculpturam, architecturam, musicam, antiquum ad Orphicam lyram carminum cantum.” Translated by Angela Voss in Angela Voss, “Orpheus Redivivus: The Musical Magic of Marsilio Ficino,” in *Marsilio Ficino His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, ed. Michael J. B. Allen, Valery Rees, and Martin Davies (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2002). 227.

⁴³³ Ficino, *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, 10; 27.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.* 75.

magic, lay at the very heart of his philosophical work.⁴³⁵ Many of Ficino's friends and acquaintances recognized these elements in his theurgy, which often incorporated music-making and hymn singing. The celebrated poet Politian, who was accustomed to hearing Ficino philosophizing on the secrets of the heavens, on healing, on metaphysics, recounts of how he gained inspiration from his performative prayers:

Often, his wise lyre chases out these grave thoughts and his voice follows the song springing up from under his expressive fingers, like Orpheus, interpreter of Apollo's songs [...] Then when he has finished, inflamed by the Muses' *furor* I return home, to my *Lari*, return to the composition of verses, and inspired, I invoke Phoebus, touching the divine lyre with my plectrum.⁴³⁶

Similarly, the poet Naldo Naldi (born in 1439) even suggested that Ficino could be the true incarnation of Orpheus: "Hence he soothes the unyielding oaks with his lyre and his song and softens once more the hearts of wild beasts."⁴³⁷ Even Ficino himself cannot avoid describing himself as a new, Neoplatonic Orpheus. "I have not, in company with Claudian, impiously sung of [...] Proserpine, snatched, as the story goes, into the underworld," exclaims Ficino, re-evoking the story of Orpheus and Eurydice "but, as is the way of the Platonists, I have depicted the sublime upward soaring of the heavenly mind."⁴³⁸

⁴³⁵ Voss, "Orpheus Redivivus: The Musical Magic of Marsilio Ficino." 227. For a broader discussion on this subject, see Daniel P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella* (University Park (PA): Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000).

⁴³⁶ See Angelo Poliziano, Poem to Bartolomeo Fonzio in Angelo Poliziano and Ida Maïer, *Opera Omnia. A Cura Di Ida MaïEr* (Torino: Bottega d'Erasmus, 1971). 172: "saepe graves pellit docta testudine curas, / Et vocem argutis suggerit articulis, / Qualis Apollinei modulator carminis Orpheus / [...] Hinc, ubi conticuit, Musarum concitus oestro / Deferor ad solitos protinus ipse Lares / Atque iterum meditor numeros Phoebumque laccessio / Attonitusque sacram pectine plango chelym." My translation is based on that of Angela Voss in Voss, "Orpheus Redivivus: The Musical Magic of Marsilio Ficino." 228.

⁴³⁷ Naldo Naldi, 'Carmen ad Ficinum', in Marsilio Ficino and Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum: Opuscula Inedita Et Dispersa* (Florentiae: In aedibus Leonis S. Olschki, 1937). II, 262. Translation by John Warden in John Warden, "Orpheus and Ficino," in *Orpheus, the Metamorphoses of a Myth*, ed. John Warden (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1982). 86.

⁴³⁸ Ficino, *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, 3. 15. In a similar context, that of Pythagora's influence on Ficino's charismatic persona, Christopher Celenza has noted that "the notion of Ficino as a self-styled prophetic, hierophantic

Strange as this practice may seem to a modern reader, Ficino's use of hymns as meditative prayers is rather predictable once one considers his exegetical context. Along with the collection of hymns attributed to the mythical poet Orpheus, which had been widely circulating in manuscript form since 1424 until their first printed edition in 1501, Ficino's views on the nature of prayer were shaped by Proclus (412-485 AD) – a late ancient composer of treatises, commentaries and, most importantly, hymns.⁴³⁹ According to Proclus and his followers, in his dialogues, *Phaedrus* and *Parmenides*, Plato himself envisioned philosophy as a form of hymn-singing, by which he would have meant a form of poetic prayer, capable of turning the human soul toward the cosmic intelligences.⁴⁴⁰ Proclus' views on the performance of hymns were closely related with his general conceptions regarding the position of human beings in the cosmos. Previous interpreters of Plato such as Plotinus, more precisely, had claimed that human beings could aspire to lift their minds to the sphere of Intellect (*νοῦς*) without the intervention of intermediaries.⁴⁴¹ Proclus, on the contrary, argued that a wide gap existed between the human soul and the sphere of the Intellect, so that humans could aspire to reunite themselves with the One (*ἕνωσις*) only by means of apposite ceremonies and invocations addressed to higher gods (*θεουργία*).⁴⁴² And since the will of the gods, according to Neoplatonic ethics, cannot be moved by human prayers, Proclus' hymns were not petitions but meditations, by which the soul can

figure fits not only within the world of active intellectuals in early modern Europe... but more specifically in the context of millenarian Florence at the end of the Quattrocento." See Christopher S. Celenza, "Pythagoras in the Renaissance: The Case of Marsilio Ficino," *Renaissance Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (1999). 670.

⁴³⁹ Walker, "Orpheus the Theologian and Renaissance Platonists." 104-08.

⁴⁴⁰ Berg, *Proclus' Hymns: Essays, Translations, Commentary*. 24-6.

⁴⁴¹ See O. R. Jones, "Nous," in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford Oxford University Press, 2005): "In Greek philosophy, the highest form of rationality which is capable of grasping the fundamental principles of reality. In contrast to perception, which delivers awareness of the changing, accidental properties of things, *nous* consists in understanding their essential, immutable nature. Moreover, it supersedes belief, which may attain truth but falls short of explaining the why and wherefore of things. For Aristotle, the unmoved mover of the universe was a cosmic *Nous*."

⁴⁴² Berg, *Proclus' Hymns: Essays, Translations, Commentary*. 70-6. See also Proclus, *On the Theology of Plato* 1.26.63 in E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966). 291.

convert away from the material world toward her heavenly cause.⁴⁴³ For Proclus, and consequently for Ficino, praying was thus a central exercise in an authentic philosophical life. Of this spiritual practice, the hymn was its archetypal form.⁴⁴⁴

6. Renaissance Hymns and Platonic Theurgy

The problem of these practices in the context of early modern Italy, however, came from the recipient of such prayers. As Ficino's renitence in publishing his translation of the Orphic hymns clearly show, it was clear in the eyes of many that publicly declaring their practice of evocation of celestial intelligences under the guise of pagan gods could be seen as dangerous, and most certainly heretical. As a matter of fact, on 19 December 1513, during the Fifth Later Council, Pope Leo X issued his *Apostolici Regiminis*. This pontifical bull was meant to forbid every philosophical proposition contrary to Catholic theology, and to condemn the, so called, theory of the 'double truth': a philosophical device often used by medieval and Renaissance natural philosophers to justify propositions that contradicted those of the theological orthodoxy of the time.⁴⁴⁵ Because of its reaffirmation on the dogma of the immortality of the individual soul, Leo X's *Apostolici Regiminis* was often interpreted as the official approval of the apologetic mission pursued by 15th-century interpreters of Plato and, most importantly, by Marsilio Ficino.⁴⁴⁶ That said, however, the bull's pronouncement on the pursuit of poetry and

⁴⁴³ Berg, *Proclus' Hymns: Essays, Translations, Commentary*. 33-4, 87-8.

⁴⁴⁴ Matteo Soranzo and Marco Piana, "Les Hymnes Platoniciens Et Leur Rôle Dans La Spiritualité Prémoderne," in *L'époque De La Renaissance (1400–1600). Tome II. La Nouvelle Culture (1480–1520)*. ed. Eva Kushner (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: Benjamin, 2017). 29-37.

⁴⁴⁵ For this very reason, the bull was traditionally interpreted as an attack against Pietro Pomponazzi (1462–1525) and other secular interpreters of Aristotle. See M. Soranzo, "Words of Conversion: Poetry and Religious Identity in Early Modern Italy," *Journal of Religion in Europe* 6, no. 2 (2013). 229-30. See also Minnich, "Councils of the Catholic Reformation." 50; Eric A. Constant, "A Reinterpretation of the Fifth Lateran Council Decree *Apostolici Regiminis* (1513)," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 33, no. 2 (2002). 356-57.

⁴⁴⁶ Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Theory of Immortality in Marsilio Ficino," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 1, no. 3 (1940). 317; John Monfasani, "Aristotelians, Platonists, and the Missing Ockhamists: Philosophical Liberty in Pre-

natural philosophy as a life choice denotes a more conservative tone. By means of a medical metaphor that echoes Savonarola's sermons on the ruin of the Church,⁴⁴⁷ *Apostolici Regiminis* depicts poetry and natural philosophy as an infection or disease, which needs to be healed and cleansed by the knowledge of theology:

That is why, since the prolonged study of human philosophy – which God has made empty and foolish, as the Apostle says, when that study lacks the flavoring of divine wisdom and the light of revealed truth – sometimes leads to error rather than to the discovery of the truth, we ordain and rule by this salutary constitution, in order to suppress all occasions of falling into error with respect to the matters referred to above, that from this time onwards none of those in sacred orders, whether religious or seculars or others so committed, when they follow courses in universities or other public institutions, may devote themselves to the study of philosophy or poetry for longer than five years after the study of grammar and dialectic, without their giving some time to the study of theology or pontifical law. Once these five years are past, if someone wishes to sweat over such studies, he may do so only if at the same time, or in some other way, he actively devotes himself to theology or the sacred canons; so that the Lord's priests may find the means, in these holy and useful occupations, for cleansing and healing the infected sources of philosophy and poetry.⁴⁴⁸

Although Pope Leo X, a descendant of Cosimo and Lorenzo de Medici, remained relatively tolerant toward poetic experimentations, he too was aware of the facts that many poets and philosophers had gone too far in their cult of pre-Christian antiquity. For this reason – a reason that does not differ that much from that of the Savonarola poets – the pontiff commissioned

Reformation Italy," *Renaissance Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (1993). 267; Soranzo, "Words of Conversion: Poetry and Religious Identity in Early Modern Italy." 230. See also Giovanni Di Napoli, *L'immortalità Dell'anima Nel Rinascimento* (Torino: Società editrice internazionale, 1963). 222-23.

⁴⁴⁷ Matteo Soranzo has also noted the coincidence between the medical metaphor used in the bull and Leo X's title of "*papa medicus*" in charge of healing the world. See Soranzo, "Words of Conversion: Poetry and Religious Identity in Early Modern Italy." 230. On the iconography of Leo X as a "*papa medicus*," see Firpo, *Gli Affreschi Di Pontormo a San Lorenzo: Eresia, Politica E Cultura Nella Firenze Di Cosimo I.* 10-14; Ilaria Ciseri, *L'ingresso Trionfale Di Leone X in Firenze Nel 1515* (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1990). 104-05; Janet Cox-Rearick, *Dynasty and Destiny in Medici Art: Pontormo, Leo X, and the Two Cosimos* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984). 38-40.

⁴⁴⁸ Norman P. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London; Washington, DC: Sheed & Ward; Georgetown University Press, 1990). 606.

Zaccaria Ferreri (1479-1523) for the composition of a new Hymnal, which was only printed posthumously in 1525, during the papacy of Clement VII.⁴⁴⁹ In the world of Italian courts, which seemed to progressively diverge from traditional forms of religious devotion towards new, fascinating philosophies and spiritual practices, the papacy began to understand the importance of controlling and supervising religious poetry and philosophy such writings were fostering.

Ficino's radical innovation in the use of prayers, while contrary to the teachings of influential medieval theologians such as Thomas Aquinas and controversial in the eyes of 16th-century popes like Leo X,⁴⁵⁰ was made possible thanks to a period of relative openness to liturgical innovations linked to the humanists' rediscovery of ancient Latin and Greek literature. Based on a better knowledge of classical Latin, and in response to the ongoing reform of the liturgical calendar, 15th and 16th century poets often denounced the linguistic awkwardness and metrical inelegance of traditional Christian hymns.⁴⁵¹ The need for new collections of rhetorically elaborate prayers, which explored Christian spirituality through classical imagery and meters, resulted in the composition of numerous collections of prayers such as Giovanni Pontano's *De Laudibus Divinis* and, even more systematically, Ludovico Lazzarelli's *Fasti Christianae Religionis* or Baptista Mantuanus' *De Sacris Diebus*.⁴⁵² During this short, yet

⁴⁴⁹ Ann Moss, "Latin Liturgical Hymns of the Reformation Crisis (1520-1568)," *Humanistica Lovaniensia* 40 (1991). 82-83.

⁴⁵⁰ According to Thomas Aquinas, invocations addressed to deities that are different from God, besides being in contradiction with the first commandment, were incompatible with Christian prayer. By praying, Thomas contended, humans should strive to actively cooperate with the unfolding of an otherwise immutable divine plan; in doing so, therefore, only God should be the petitioner's addressee. Secondly, similarly to Augustine of Hippo, Thomas claimed that there was only limited space for innovation in the formulation of prayers, which should always be modeled on Scriptures, and more precisely on the petitions found in the Lord's Prayer and Christ's Prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. The adoption of pre-Christian hymns, which distinctively open with invocations addressed to a god, the personification of a natural phenomenon or abstract philosophical concepts, was thus in contradiction with dominant views on prayer. See Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*. 137. See also Corey Barnes, "Thomas Aquinas on Christ's Prayer," in *A History of Prayer: The First to the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Roy Hammerling (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008). 325-26, 329-334.

⁴⁵¹ Moss, "Latin Liturgical Hymns of the Reformation Crisis (1520-1568)." 75-79.

⁴⁵² Isabelle Pantin, *La Poésie Du Ciel En France Dans La Seconde Moitié Du Seizième Siècle* (Genève: Libr. Droz, 1995). 245-49. Moss, "Latin Liturgical Hymns of the Reformation Crisis (1520-1568)." 79-87.

incredibly prolific, period brusquely interrupted by the rise of the Lutheran schism and the subsequent Catholic response, therefore, Christian liturgy witnessed a series of attempted innovations and reforms, which the Council of Trent irremediably rejected.⁴⁵³

Although short-lived and in many respects unique, the 15th and 16th centuries witnessed a spectacular revival of theurgical hymns. Independently from Ficino, but in response to very similar late ancient sources, the Greek controversial philosopher Georgius Gemisthus Plethon (1355-1454) had already advocated for a similar adoption of hymn-singing as a meditative practice intended to mold the imagination of the subject to reach the ancient divinities.⁴⁵⁴ In 1486, at the time of his failed attempt to bring forth a project of theological reform in front of a commission of doctors gathered in Rome during the papacy of Innocent VIII, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola planned to dedicate part of his nine hundred conclusions to the Orphic Hymns with the declared intention of stimulating the minds of contemplative souls.⁴⁵⁵ The subjective and transformative virtues of hymn singing, moreover, played a central role in Ludovico Lazzarelli's *Crater Hermetis*: a dialogue set at the court of the King of Naples in which the listeners' minds are progressively transformed and made suitable to receive the author's secret knowledge.⁴⁵⁶ The author that best exemplifies the literary offspring of this influential moment in

⁴⁵³ Giorgio Caravale, *Forbidden Prayer: Church Censorship and Devotional Literature in Renaissance Italy* (Farnham, Surrey, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011). 255-244.

⁴⁵⁴ Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*. 61. For a detail biography of the philosopher, see Brigitte Tambrun, "Plethon, Georgios Gemistos," in *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, et al. (Leiden; Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2005).

⁴⁵⁵ Frances A. Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (2001). 20-22; Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*. 54-9.

⁴⁵⁶ Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Lazzarelli, Lodovico," in *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, et al. (Leiden; Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2005). 679-682; Antoine Faivre, "Hermes Trismegistus Iii: Modernity," *ibid.*; "Hermetic Literature Iv: Renaissance – Present." A fundamental analysis of Lazzarelli's works can be found in Ludovico Lazzarelli, Wouter J. Hanegraaff, and Ruud M. Bouthoorn, *Lodovico Lazzarelli (1447-1500): The Hermetic Writings and Related Documents* (Tempe, Ariz.: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005). For a thorough examination of the scholarly trend surrounding Lodovico Lazzarelli and his spiritual master, Giovanni Mercurio da Correggio (1451-?), see P. Copenhaver Brian, "A Grand End for a Grand Narrative: Lodovico Lazzarelli, Giovanni Mercurio Da Correggio and Renaissance Hermetica," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 4, no. 2 (2009). 207–233. For an excellent analysis of Lazzarelli's *Crater Hermetis* as

early modern spirituality, however, is Michael Marullus Tarcaniota (1458 – 1500), a Greek *émigré* and the author of a collection of twenty hymns entitled *Hymni Naturales* (1497) finalized in Ficino's Florence, most probably under the guidance of Giovanni Pico.⁴⁵⁷

Divided into four books, Marullus' hymns constitute a long path of spiritual ascension based on Ficino's particular form of Neoplatonism and, one may argue, Plethon's call for the return of the ancient gods. Consistent with Ficino's system, each book of Marullus' collection includes hymns addressed to the mythical inhabitants of each *hypostasis*.⁴⁵⁸ Starting from a first book devoted to God's intellectual manifestations at the level of Intellect (Jupiter, Pallas, Love; the Angels, Eternity, and Bacchus), the collection continues to the reason-principles residing in the World Soul (Pan, Heaven, Stars, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Mercury, Venus), moves onto the rational seeds inhabiting Nature (Sun, Moon), and it closes precisely on the body of the world, which holds the elemental forms (Aether, Jupiter, Juno, Ocean, and Earth). Although apparently borrowed from Lucretius, the presence of *semina rerum* throughout Marullus' hymns further

a form of hermetic religious prayer, see M. Soranzo, "A New Look at Spirituality: Knowledge and Transformation in Early Modern Italy," *Journal of Religion in Europe* 8, no. 2 (2015). 189-95.

⁴⁵⁷ Michele Marullo Tarcaniota and Donatella Coppini, *Inni Naturali* (Firenze: Le Lettere, 1995). "Introduzione," 13-14.

⁴⁵⁸ See Karl-Heinz Uthemann, "Hypostasis," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Karl-Heinz Uthemann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005): "(ὑπόστασις, lit. 'substance'), an ancient term used by philosophers and scientists primarily to designate individual or real existence; Plotinos applied it to his supreme principles—the One, Intellect, and Soul. The word appears in the New Testament five times without having any technical meaning, and in its use by 3rd-C. theologians it was not clearly distinguished from *ousia* (substance); at the First Council of Nicaea it was used as a synonym for *ousia*. As late as the Council of Serdica hypostasis was conceived of as real existence, and the acceptance of individual divine hypostases proclaimed heretical. Only at the Council of Alexandria in 362 did Athanasios of Alexandria approve the difference between the terms *hypostasis* and *ousia*, and in the wake of the creed of the First Council of Constantinople in 381 the Cappadocian interpretation of the Trinity as three hypostases and one *ousia* became canonical. Hypostasis was contrasted to the substance or nature of the divinity, and defined as the individual property (*idios*) of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, whereas *ousia*—as an individual reality—was the element they shared (*koinon*) that presupposed a Stoic ontology. In Christology hypostasis was equated with the concept of person at the Council of Chalcedon (451). This teaching was further developed by John of Caesarea and Leontios of Byzantium who defined the hypostasis as "being-for-itself" (*kath' heauten einai*), discerning two degrees of individuation, the nature and the person; this formula was analyzed by Maximos the Confessor and Anastasios of Sinai. The distinction between *ousia* and *hypostasis* was not fully understood in the Latin West, which tended to translate both terms as *substantia*; this accounted for the Eastern opinion that the West was Nestorian, that is, that the concept of two natures was in fact the concept of two hypostases in Christ. This linguistic misunderstanding appears in John of Caesarea and Anastasios of Sinai."

demonstrates how the author's noble and metaphysical melancholy of pagan Greek antiquity fuses with a central, albeit often neglected, aspect of Ficino's cosmology.⁴⁵⁹

Despite Marullus' acquaintance with the subtle hybridism of Ficino's Orphic hymns, his direct call for the ancient divinities of the Greco-Roman pantheon has left many scholars baffled and divided.⁴⁶⁰ Announced in the first hymn and distributed throughout the entire collection, this complicated religious link between the author and the Greek pantheon is best exemplified – I argue – by Marullus' 'Hymn to Bacchus' found at the end of the first book. Scholars have often been puzzled by the presence of a prayer addressed to this pagan deity in Marullus' collection, and have tried to resolve it by proposing numerous, and often contrasting, allegorical interpretations. According to Benedetto Soldati, for example, Marullus' Bacchus would be an allegory of divine justice, while for Francesco Tateo the god of wine would refer to eternal youth as a terrestrial counterpart for Eternity.⁴⁶¹ For Cesare Goffis, who first emphasized Marullus' knowledge of Lucretius, Bacchus would be a personification of nature and its irresistible forces, while for Jacques Chomarat and Walter Ludwig – who are both inclined toward a Christian interpretation of the collection – the ancient god would stand for the manifestation of God in history or, more interestingly, the Holy Spirit's transformative impact upon the soul of humans.⁴⁶² These interpretations, which recent commentators such as Coppini and Fantazzi have

⁴⁵⁹ Hiro Hirai, *Le concept de semence dans les théories de la matière à la Renaissance: de Marsile Ficin à Pierre Gassendi* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2005). 52-3. For the concept of the *Hymni naturales* as a nostalgic recall to Greek antiquity, see Francesco Tateo, "La poesia religiosa di Michele Marullo," in *Tradizione e realtà nell'umanesimo italiano*, ed. Francesco Tateo (Bari: Dedalo libri, 1967). 219.

⁴⁶⁰ It is sufficient to consider the radically different interpretations that the latest translations of the hymn gave regarding Marullus poetic prayers to the ancient gods. See Michele Marullo Tarcaniota and Jacques Chomarat, *Hymnes Naturels* (Genève: Libr. Droz, 1995). Marullo Tarcaniota and Coppini, *Inni Naturali*; Michele Marullo Tarcaniota and Charles Fantazzi, *Poems*, trans. Charles Fantazzi (2012).

⁴⁶¹ Benedetto Soldati and Cesare Vasoli, *La poesia astrologica nel 400* (Firenze: Le Lettere, 1986); Tateo, "La Poesia Religiosa Di Michele Marullo." 129-219.

⁴⁶² Cesare Federico Goffis, "Il sincretismo lucreziano-platonico negli "Hymni naturales" del Marullo," *Belfagor* 24, no. 4 (1969). 386-417; Walther Ludwig, *Antike Götter Und Christlicher Glaube: Die Hymni Naturales Von Marullo* (Hamburg: Joachim Jungius-Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften, 1992). 68.

generally confirmed and challenged, are all useful for understanding the meaning of Marullus' collection as a work of literature charged with classical allusions and hidden allegorical meanings

For late ancient Platonists and Ficino, Dionysus had already been transformed into a cosmological or spiritual allegory linked to a process of self-transformation. In his hymns to Helios and Athena, for example, Proclus had recounted the myth of Dionysus' dismemberment and eventual rebirth as an allegory of the division of the cosmos and the distribution of its elements – a process which he had also interpreted as the cosmic counterpart of the philosopher's conversion.⁴⁶³ Plotinus, moreover, had read this myth as a parable of the soul's fall from the unity of the intellect into the multiplicity of material reality, and influentially interpreted Dionysian frenzy as the soul's desire to escape the bodily prison and return to its metaphysical abode.⁴⁶⁴ Ficino systematized these Neoplatonic motifs in his famous commentaries to Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Ion*, where he described the soul's conversion away from the multiplicity of bodily senses toward the reunion with the One as a four-tiered hierarchy consisting of Poetic (Muses), Mystic (Bacchus), Prophetic (Apollo) and Erotic (Venus) frenzies.⁴⁶⁵ Building creatively on these precedents, Marullus' hymn to Bacchus is fittingly situated at the end of the first book, which symbolically marks the boundary between the spheres of Intellect and World Soul, and thus constitutes the first step in the poet's intellectual ascent.

The modality in which this ascent happens, however, is certainly worthy of note. While most of the authors tried to intellectualize the figure of Bacchus, Marullus imagines himself

⁴⁶³ Berg, *Proclus' Hymns: Essays, Translations, Commentary*. 170-74; 280-81.

⁴⁶⁴ Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen McKenna, vol. 3 (Boston: The Medici Society Ltd., 1924). I, 6, 5.

⁴⁶⁵ Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "The Platonic Frenzies in Marsilio Ficino," in *Myths, Martyrs, and Modernity: Studies in the History of Religion in Honour of Jan N. Bremmer*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer, et al. (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010). 553-567.

participating to an orgiastic rite in company of the Bacchantes. The description of the event, although guided by ancient sources, could easily remind the narrative of the witches' sabbath and demonic possession, which was quickly developing in that period. As persuasively argued by Daniel P. Walker, in fact, a rich apologetic tradition systematized by Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae* and renewed by the publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum* in the late 15th century, led to identifying the hymns attributed to the mythical singer Orpheus with demonic invocations of demonic nature – a kind of forbidden prayer, therefore, to be banned immediately.⁴⁶⁶ Hymns directed to ancient gods, such as those collected by Michael Marullus in his *Hymni Naturales*, therefore, could have been easily condemned as examples of 'addressative magic,' a category which continued to be used during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, generally in a derogatory and polemical way.⁴⁶⁷ Carried away by the frantic rhythm and lists of appellations of his own prayer, the protagonist abandons himself to his inner frenzy. The poet's persona, whose condition of political exile is often used as a cipher of human existence as exiled from the eternal One, manifests his desire to run into pathless woods and join the Bacchantes in their never-ending dances, even howling "Euoe!" - the cry of Bacchus' disciples to greet their deity.

Come now, Muses, sing to me of father Bromius, fiery offspring of Jupiter, whom the good Semele brought forth, the boy distinguished by his locks and his radiant eyes. Euoe! My breast sends forth a sound emanating from a frenzied rage and my soul, overflowing with the god, is shaken. Euoe! Give me the cymbals, give me the plaintive horns, and may a headband of vipers gird my youthful locks, my locks adorned with ivy, fluttering in the breeze, and in my train may a thousand Edonian women follow after, their sacred feet trembling, with shrill ululations and dancing the wild tripudium, violently shaking

⁴⁶⁶ Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*. 137.

⁴⁶⁷ Nicolas Weill-Parot, "Astral Magic and Intellectual Changes (Twelfth- Fifteenth Centuries). Astrological Images and the Concept of Addressative Magic," in *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer and Jan R. Veenstra (Leuven; Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2002). 167.88. See also Soranzo, "Un'identità Religiosa Nel Primo Cinquecento." 62.

their ferine heads under the powerful thyrsus, while the rider on his stooped mount repeats the cry “euoe”!⁴⁶⁸

Possessed by the god, dragged into restless dances and orgiastic ceremonies, forced into a hallucinatory prayer of thanksgiving voiced under Bacchus’ influence, the poet presents himself as a symbol of humankind’s earthly permanence and desire to return to the heavenly residence through him, the keeper of the threshold.⁴⁶⁹ Rather than part of a declaration of poetics confined to the domain of literature, however, the poet’s description of himself as wandering through the forest guided by Bacchus’ frenzy and reviving ancient rituals with the help of poetry may be best understood as a dramatic representation of human existence and its authentic spiritual vocation, which the recitation of hymns contributes to awaken.⁴⁷⁰ Besides being a tribute to Orphic hymns, and their characteristic lists of appellations and epithets such as “two horned king”, “satyr”, “nocturnal”, and “multiform,”⁴⁷¹ Marullus’ hymn indexes a gradual movement away from the

⁴⁶⁸ Marullus, *Hymni* I, 6, 1-13 in Marullo Tarcaniota and Fantazzi, *Poems*. 213-215: “Agedum, canite patrem, Thespiades, mihi Bromium,/ sobolem igneam Iovis, quem peperit bona Semele/ puerum coma praesignem et radiantibus oculis./ Euoe! sonant furenti mihi pectora rabie/ nimioque deo plenus concutitur gravis animus. Euoe! date cymbalum huc, huc date cornua querula,/ cingat virentem mihi taenia viperea comam,/ comam diffusam animis Aeoliis hederigeram/ quam hinc mille secutae atque illinc trepidante pede sacro,/ ululent citatis Edonides usque tripudiis/ valido sub thyrsu iacentes vi capita fera./ Euoe! sessore pandi geminante quadrupedis.”

⁴⁶⁹ Marullus, *Hymni* I, 6, 55-57 in *ibid.* 217: “Per te remota coeli procul ardua colimus, / Nimio diffusi praecordia nectare gravia, / Tu das deorum sanctis accumbere dapibus. / Salve, begigne lychnita, deum et pater hominum,” [Through you we inhabit the remote heights of the heavens, our heavy hearts cheered with too much nectar, you allow us to take our places at the tables of the gods]

⁴⁷⁰ Marullus, *Hymni* I, 6, 13-18 in *ibid.* 215: “At ipse vagus, anhelans, animo duce nimio, / Totus noua plenus mente, per auia nemora / Orgia praecedam acutis celebrans ululatibus, / Orgia verendis arcana recondita calathis, / Penitus quae sanctis frustra captes sine initiis, / Nouies perpessus sacra Castalidos vada vitreae” [But I myself, wandering aimlessly, gasping for breath, led on by overpowering feeling, totally filled with a new spirit, press forward into the pathless woodlands, celebrating the orgies of Bacchus with piercing shrieks, the secret *orgia* hidden away in a venerated basket, which you would try to touch in vain without a sacred initiation, or without having received nine time the sacred waters of transparent Castalia.]

⁴⁷¹ Marullus, *Hymni* I, 6, 13-18 in *ibid.* 215: “Euoe! Impotenti thyrsu grauis, Alme Dionyse, / Martie, bicornis, rex, omnipotens, femorigena, / Mystice, Thioneu, ultor, soliuage, Euie, satyre, / Genitor deorum idem atque idem germen amabile, / Nyctelie, multiformis, hymeneie, nomie, / Gemine, hospitalis, Liber, pater optime maxime” [Euoe! Weighed down by the wild thyrsus, O life-giving Dionysus, martial, two-horned king, almighty one, born from the thigh, initiate in the sacred mysteries, son of Thyone, avenger, wandering alone, Euisius, Satyr, at once father of the gods and loveable infant, nocturnal, multiform, god of marriage, shepherd, twofold, hospitable, Liber, greatest and best father.]

countless features attributed to Bacchus, toward the discovery of this god's authentic meaning as the organizing principle of the universe. A discovery that, as an illumination, readers can find in the petition on which the poem ends:

You add force to judgment; you are the first to discover the gods on high Olympus, for you the sacred band of the Bacchantes traverses the frozen Rhodope on sleepless foot, dragging of young calves and tearing them apart in their mad fury; for you the oracular hearts of a thousand prophets rumble, for you the fruitful fields are verdant, you color the flowering meadows with your warm zephyrs, you join diverse seeds together, you recover for the world the ever fleeing generations through long-lasting youth, you balance the weight of the world machine and suspend the earth in the middle of the air in a firm position. Through you we inhabit the remote heights of the heavens, our heavy hearts cheered with too much nectar, you allow us to take our places at the tables of the gods. Hail, benign source of light, father of gods and men, in your benevolence give aid to those who piously celebrate your mysteries, together with our loved one, good Themis, Themis surrounded by the dancing choruses of the Corycian nymphs.⁴⁷²

Although Marullus' hymns were certainly an intriguing cradle of metaphors destined to the spiritual elevation of their readers towards the One, the same symbols that would have been clear to the initiate could have been dramatically misunderstood by the vast majority of their readers, who as is bound to happen, tend to bring their own cultural heritage into the act of reading. It is not a surprise, therefore, if – as Matteo Soranzo has recently argued – Marullus' *Hymni naturales* could be considered as the primary target of Gianfrancesco Pico's invective against the poets of his time, collected in the introduction of his *Hymni heroici tres*.⁴⁷³ For a follower of Savonarola, inspired by the condemnation of the ancient anthem formulated in the *Apologeticus*, in fact, the use of those which were, in the end, prayers to pagan gods, was unacceptable. The same can be

⁴⁷²Marullus, *Hymni* I, 6, in *ibid.* 53-61: “[...]tu libras pondera machinae/ medioque terram suspendis in aere stabilem,/ per te remota coeli procul ardua colimus,/ nimio diffusi praecordia nectare gravia,/ tu das deorum sanctis accumbere dapibus./ Salve, benigne lychnita, deum et pater hominum,/ animoque dexter tua mystica rite colentibus/ adsis, tuis non sine amoribus et Themide bona./ Themide nympharum stipata Coricidum choris.”

⁴⁷³ Soranzo, “Un'identità Religiosa Nel Primo Cinquecento.” 61-62.

said about many other examples of paganizing literature of the time. What was, in the hands of the initiate, a guide to spiritual enlightenment, in the eyes of the profane, became idolatry and demon worship. In this sense, it is difficult to not understand what brought the Savonarolan movement and the Church before it to control, and possibly suppress, any paganizing form of religious poetry.

7. *The Hymni Heroici Tres (1507): Dissemination and Legacy of the Text*

Gianfrancesco Pico's first edition of the *Hymni Heroici Tres* was published in 1507 by the Milanese publisher Alessandro Minuziano.⁴⁷⁴ Although they were first printed in 1507, the hymns were already partially finished in the latter part of 1505, as we learn from the letter dedicated to Thomas Wolf, Pico's friend and publisher in German lands.⁴⁷⁵ The publication of the collection, as Charles B. Schmitt has carefully retraced, happened a few months after the German edition of the *Staurostichon sive de Mysteriis Crucis* was published, together with Pico's most important early treatises, such as the *De rerum praenotione*, the *Theoremata de fide* and the *De imaginatione*.⁴⁷⁶ As it often happens with Gianfrancesco Pico's literary works, his *Hymni* received much more attention in German lands than in Italian territories. The first German edition of Pico's poetic collection dates to 1511. Printed in Strasbourg by Matthias Schürer, the same publisher of the 1507 *Opera omnia*, this new edition of the *Hymni* was merged with Pico's

⁴⁷⁴ Leonardo Quaquarelli and Zita Zanardi, *Pichiana: Bibliografia Delle Edizioni E Degli Studi* ([Firenze]: L.S. Olschki, 2005). 274-75.

⁴⁷⁵ According to the letter, the first hymn was already done, while the other two were at an early stage. See Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola, [*Opera Omnia*] *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulae... De Rerum Praenotione Libri Novem... De Fide Theoremata. De Morte Christi & Propria Cogitanda: Libri Tres. De Studio Diuinae & Humanae Philosophiae: Duo. De Diuini Amoris Imaginatione: Unus. Vita Patris & Defensio De Uno & Ente & Alia Quæpiã. Expositio Tex. Decreti De Con. Dis II. Hilarii. Epistolarum Libri Quattuor. Iustini Tralatio. Staurostichon De Mysteriis Germanicae Heroico Carmine*. (Argentorati (Strasbourg): Joannes Knoblochus, 1506). 865. See also Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola (1469-1533) and His Critique of Aristotle*. 23, 197; Moerschini, *Rinascimento Cristiano: Innovazioni E Riforma Religiosa Nell'Italia Del Quindicesimo E Sedicesimo Secolo*. 4-6.

⁴⁷⁶ Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola (1469-1533) and His Critique of Aristotle*. 23-24, 199.

Staurostichon, the poem dedicated to Emperor Maximilian I. The success of Schürer's edition is testified by the 1514 Leipzig edition of the *Hymni* by Melchior Lotter the Elder (1470 – 1549), a printer that would soon become fundamental in the spread of Lutheran ideals.⁴⁷⁷ In 1517, the year of Martin Luther's publication of the *Ninety-Five Theses*, Pico's *Hymni heroici* saw two different editions: one in Leipzig by Valentin Schumann, and one in Vienna, by the presses of Hieronymus Vietor (1480 – 1547).⁴⁷⁸ In Italy, a second edition of the Hymns would only see the light of day in 1531 in Bologna, two years before the death of the author, by Giovanni Battista Faelli.⁴⁷⁹ Despite this relative lack of interest in Italian lands, the fame of the hymns lived on, especially in Reformation areas/territories. The last known 16th-century edition of the *Hymni*, in fact, is Dutch, and was produced by the presses of Jan van Turnhout.⁴⁸⁰

8. Structure of the Collection

⁴⁷⁷ Quaquarelli and Zanardi, *Pichiana: Bibliografia Delle Edizioni E Degli Studi*. 277-78. On Melchior Lotter, see Vassar College Digital Library, "Melchior Lotter," <https://digitallibrary.vassar.edu/node/37>: "Melchior Lotter was born in Aue, in the Ore Mountains, around 1470. He began to work with Leipzig printer Konrad Kachelofen, and in 1495, he printed his first book, *Orationes legatorum Francorum ad Venetos*. He married into Kachelofen's family and continued to print with him occasionally. Between 1515 and 1517, Lotter started to produce smaller prints, including a set of *Indulgences* commissioned to finance the rebuilding of St. Peter's Basilica. In 1517, Lotter printed the first edition of Luther's *Ninety-five Theses* and later issued publications of Luther's involvement in the Leipzig Debates of 1519. In 1520, Luther encouraged Lotter to transfer to Wittenberg, where Lotter entrusted a branch of his practice to his son, Melchior Lotter the Younger. This son also pursued a career in printing and worked closely with Luther, for whom he published *Das Neue Testament Deutzsch* and another edition of his *Ninety-five Theses* in 1522. For the remainder of his career, Lotter the Elder focused on the publication of grammar textbooks, classical texts, liturgical commissions, and until 1526, the official documents of Saxony. Notably, Lotter cast and printed with typesets in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew throughout his career."

⁴⁷⁸ Quaquarelli and Zanardi, *Pichiana: Bibliografia Delle Edizioni E Degli Studi*. 279.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid. 281.

⁴⁸⁰ Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandvlani Principis ConcordiëQue Comitum Hymni Heroici Tres, Ad Sanctissimam Trinitatem, Ad Christum, & Ad Virginem Mariam* (Syluæducis: Ioannis Turnhout, 1544). The WorldCat library catalog shows the presence of another edition, published by the printer Johannes Thomas in the first half of the 16th century: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani Principis Concordiaeq[ue] Comitum Hymni Heroici Tres Ad Sa[N]ctissima Trinitatem, Ad Christum Et Ad Virginem Mariam* (S.L.: s.n., 16th Century). Since I did not have the opportunity to inspect it personally, I decided to avoid quoting it in the text.

As previously noted by Matteo Soranzo, Pico's tryptic of hymns – addressed to the Trinity, to Christ and to the Virgin – focuses on a reading of the Holy Scriptures in a spiritual key based on the analogy between the effect of Revelation on humanity and that of divine action on the soul and body of the poet.⁴⁸¹ Similarly to Marullus' *Hymni naturales*, therefore, Pico's hymns are conceived as a path of spiritual enlightenment. This time, however, the path is traced by clear symbols related to Christian devotion. In this spiritual journey of Christian devotion, moreover, one can also glance into Pico's own Savonarolan reading of human history. This is, I argue, a very important instrument for the understanding of Pico's criticism toward antiquity, as it lays bare the roots of his own metanarrative of history. A narrative that is deeply rooted in the Sacred Scriptures, with a certain attention toward some apocryphal texts and the late ancient apologetic discourse.⁴⁸²

As it is usual for Gianfrancesco Pico's poetry, it is difficult to summarize all of the themes treated in each individual poem. Since the *Hymni heroici tres* are seen by the author as a tryptic, we are going to consider the hymns as linked to one another. The first hymn – dedicated to the Holy Trinity – contains a summary of the book of Genesis centered on the theme of the Fall (I, 213-367). Here, the poet explores the consequences on Nature, which stops obeying mankind (I, 260-88), and on the human body, which begins to disobey the mind, thereby generating tragic events such as Abel's assassination (I, 302-06), the Babelic confusion of tongues (I, 312-22), the Flood (I, 323-29), Sodom and Gomorrah (I, 330-41), and, finally, the spreading of pagan superstition (I, 342-67). The poet then prays for the image of the Trinity to

⁴⁸¹ Soranzo, "Un'identità Religiosa Nel Primo Cinquecento." 58.

⁴⁸² In absence of a modern critical edition, all quotations are drawn from the *edictio princeps*, namely Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani Principis: Concordiaequae Comitit Hymni Heroici Tres Ad Sanctissimam Trinitatem: Ad Christum: Et Ad Virginem Mariam*. Accompanied by the comment, in this edition hymns are read in the following order: I (3v-15r), II (15v-79r) and III (79v-84r). The *votum* for the healing of the author's wife at the foot of the collection can be read in folios 84v-86r. For practical reasons, numbering has been assigned to the verses of their respective hymns.

remind him of true God, as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses had done in the past (I, 369-402), though his mind remained the victim of the deceptive senses. The second hymn – dedicated to Jesus Christ – consists of a revision of the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, centered on the theme of biblical prophecy (II, 583-622; 659-94), which, in adhering to the figure of Christ, silences every other form of divination and idolatry. This, as we will see, is a topic that the *Hymni* share with the previous carmen *Staurostichon*. As the coming of Christ has silenced the oracles (II, 157-96) and any astrological explanation of the Gospel (II, 295-319; 637-58), so the poet attributes to Christ the recognition of his sins (II, 695-711), his conversion from the prison of the senses to God (II, 712-33) and the next resurrection of the body (II, 734-45). The third hymn – dedicated to the Virgin Mary – closes the tryptic by recalling the Annunciation (III, 41-59), the Nativity (III, 73-81), the Resurrection (III, 82-94) and the Assumption (III, 95-114) of Christ alongside the escape (III, 18-40) and the anger (III, 161-80) of the ancient gods. Mary's account is thus linked to the virtuous action of the Virgin over the soul of the poet, finally liberated, through prayer, from the evil influence of mundane passions (III, 185-201).

The 1507 *editio princeps* of the *Hymni heorici tres* printed in Milan includes two extra short poems and a dedication to Pico's son Giantommaso as a corollary to the tryptic of hymns. These works, although not integral to the collection itself, are important instruments for the interpretation and function of such hymns. The first item of the edition, in fact, is the dedication to his son, containing Pico's declaration on the utility and function of sacred poetry. Second in order is a poetic introduction to the hymns, the *Argumentum Hymnorum carmine elegiaco*. Following the introductory poem we find the general remarks on the hymns, providing some preliminary notions before the long self-comment that accompanies the poems themselves. Right at the end of the three hymns, moreover, we find the poem *Votum pro salute coniugis* and a

detailed index by Lilio Gregorio Giraldi. The text ends with a letter of the printer Minuziano to Carlo Iafredo, president of the Senate of Milan, and the answer of Giovanni Maino in the name of Iafredo.

While the *Argomentum Hymnorum* and the rest of the paratext work around the hymns in an organic form, Pico's *Votum pro salute coniugis* appears as an element on its own. This poem in hexameters – renamed *Sylva* in the Strasbourg edition of the hymns due most probably to its difficult collocation in a specific genre, and/or in order to link it to the *Sylvae* of Statius and of Politian⁴⁸³ – probably comes from an early, unedited poetic production of the author ascribable to the period preceding 1505. If we were to believe the words of the poet himself, Pico wrote his *Votum* when his hymns were yet to be put to paper.⁴⁸⁴ The poem was written after Pico's wife – Giovanna Carafa, married in 1491⁴⁸⁵ – fell deeply sick. The structure of the *carmen* is explained by Pico himself in the latter part of the comments to his hymns. The author divides the *Votum* in three parts coinciding with three different spiritual influences. In the first part, the author is devastated by his tumultuous feelings, agitated by the idea of the illness and possible death of his beloved wife. The second section indicates the arrival of reason and peace of mind, denoted by the realization that everything that is material is also temporary, and that only divine love is eternal. The third part, instead, denotes the spiritual realization of prayer, which brings to the *votum* itself, a prayer to the Omnipotent to spare the life of Giovanna.⁴⁸⁶ The *Votum*, just like the

⁴⁸³ The change of title could also be due to the fact that Pico describes the *Votum* as *Sylva* in his own comment to the hymns. Moreschini, *Rinascimento cristiano: innovazioni e riforma religiosa nell'italia del quindicesimo e sedicesimo secolo*. 171.

⁴⁸⁴ Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani Principis: Concordiaequae Comitum Hymni Heroici Tres Ad Sanctissimam Trinitatem: Ad Christum: Et Ad Virginem Mariam*. 85r. Vv. 73-74: "Sive hymnos canerem, quos iam mandare papyro / constitui, gaudens numeros plena aure bibebas;" [If I was singing the hymns that I have already decided to entrust to the paper, / you happily absorbed the verses with ears wide open;]

⁴⁸⁵ Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola (1469-1533) and His Critique of Aristotle*. 170.

⁴⁸⁶ Moreschini, *Rinascimento cristiano: innovazioni e riforma religiosa nell'italia del quindicesimo e sedicesimo secolo*. 172.

hymns that it accompanies, is a form of poetic prayer, and this is why the author probably deemed it to be a good fit for his collection of hymns. However, although the poem echoes elements that would be indissolubly part of Pico's mature poetry, it does not seem to follow all the rules of Pico's declaration of poetic intent. The first part in particular, relies heavily on ancient poetic authorities like Vergil, Homer, Statius, and Orpheus. The very mythological figure of Orpheus, whom Pico condemned repeatedly in his writings, is used as a comparison for the author himself, who would fight the infernal legions to follow his love:

In the midst of the threatening looks and roar of the angry Chimera, / in front of bulls blowing flames out of the wide nostrils / and through the woods (if so can be said) of Hell, / more cautious and much braver than Orpheus the Odrysian / I would follow you, wife, I would follow you, my dear wife.⁴⁸⁷

This element, together with a series of other references to mythical creatures like centaurs and sea monsters,⁴⁸⁸ denotes a still conflicted but somehow less problematic relationship with ancient mythology, something that might put the first writing of the *Votum* in a period preceding the conception of *Staurostichon* in 1503.

Pico's first edition of the *Hymni* is accompanied by an impressive critical apparatus written by the author himself. Alongside the use of glosses of a didactic nature, Gianfrancesco's self-commentary is certainly linked to a tradition begun in the Italian context, with Dante's *Convivium* and repeated on numerous occasions during the 15th century, for example by Lorenzo de Medici in his Neoplatonic re-reading of his early *Canzoniere*.⁴⁸⁹ As in the case of Dante and

⁴⁸⁷ Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani Principis: Concordiaequae Comitum Hymni Heroici Tres Ad Sanctissimam Trinitatem: Ad Christum: Et Ad Virginem Mariam*. 84v-85r. vv. 36-40.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid. 84v-85r.

⁴⁸⁹ Soranzo, "Un'identità Religiosa Nel Primo Cinquecento." 63. For an excellent history of this tradition, see Sherry Roush, "Hermes' Lyre: Italian Poetic Self-Commentary from Dante to Tommaso Campanella," (2002).

Lorenzo, the use of self-exegesis by Gianfrancesco responds to apologetic needs made necessary by the possible misunderstandings that the adoption of a precise literary genre could generate in readers of time. The allegorical interpretation, however, has been used by Dante and Lorenzo in order to clarify the intentions of their own texts from the suspicions they could have aroused, allowing them to read as philosophical allegories those who apparently were verses of love. Gianfrancesco's self-reflection, perhaps answering to this tradition, adopts the allegory only with regard to the Scriptures, formulating a condemnation of ancient culture that starts from a literal interpretation of every element other than Christianity.⁴⁹⁰ According to the auto-exegetic material attached to the edition, the immediate reasons for this change would be attributed, on the one hand, to the choice of a genre - the hymn in hexameters - to which Gianfrancesco attributed specific properties in resonance with Aristotle and John Chrysostom; and on the other, as we have seen, to the education of his readers against the contemporary revival of hymns aimed at philosophical concepts or pagan divinities interpreted in Neoplatonic and spiritual key. Looking more closely at the hymn's text and the numerous auto-exegetic glosses, both these convictions can be traced back to the vast philosophical production published by Gianfrancesco after the *Hymni heroici tres*, and, more specifically, in *De imaginatione* and *De rerum praenotione*. Judging by the continued presence of references to these two works in the self-commentary, it is possible to suggest that the *Hymni heroici* constituted – as per all of Pico's poems – a poetic transposition of the author's simultaneous philosophical formulation.⁴⁹¹ The type of commentary provided by Gianfrancesco Pico is quite new, as it mixes short glosses (*gloxemata*) with annotations (*adnotamenta*), clarifications (*declarations*), comments and large chunks of paraphrases and metaphrases (*interpretamenta*). The length and magnitude of these comments,

⁴⁹⁰ Soranzo, "Un'identità Religiosa Nel Primo Cinquecento." 63.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid. 65-66.

which greatly surpasses the length of the poems themselves, can be almost considered as an independent work in themselves.⁴⁹²

9. *Antiquity and Spirituality*

In his article “Un’identità religiosa nel primo Cinquecento: Gli *Hymni heroici tres* di Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola” Matteo Soranzo defines Picos’ three hymns as it follows:

From a purely thematic point of view [...] the *Hymni Heroici* exhibit a precise theory of the functioning of the soul in the knowledge of God, and present the process of writing the hymn as a kind of synecdoche of the biblical tale. Like mankind had been subjected, after the fall, to passions and devilish temptations that can only be resisted through divine enlightenment, so the authorship of hymns is that of a man obscured by the confusion of the senses and false beliefs that can be overcome only through divine intervention. The defeat of the ancient gods and the silence of pagan oracles staged in the narration, therefore, are interpreted as the transposition of a precise way of understanding how the soul, through a process of purification, can become worthy of receiving the knowledge of God.⁴⁹³

Soranzo’s reading of the *Hymni heroici tres* is compelling, especially because it manages to link Pico’s poetic work with the spiritual exercises typical of Renaissance hymns. This present chapter, however, will not focus on the *Hymni* as prayers, as explained in the introduction, but rather on another very important aspect of this collection. That is, the depiction of antiquity that Pico provides in these religious poems, and the function that such depiction has in attacking his

⁴⁹² Moreschini, *Rinascimento cristiano: innovazioni e riforma religiosa nell’Italia del quindicesimo e sedicesimo secolo*. 182.

⁴⁹³ Soranzo, “Un’identità religiosa nel primo Cinquecento.” 58-59: “Da un punto di vista prettamente tematico, per riassumere, gli *Hymni Heroici* espongono una precisa teoria sul funzionamento dell’anima nella conoscenza di Dio e presentano il processo di scrittura dell’inno come una sorta di sinecdoche del racconto biblico. Come il genere umano, a seguito della Caduta, era rimasto vittima di passioni e tentazioni diaboliche che possono essere resistite solo per illuminazione divina, così la figura autoriale che emerge dagli inni è quella di un uomo offuscato dalla confusione dei sensi e di false credenze che soltanto per intervento divino possono essere superate. La sconfitta degli dèi antichi ed il silenzio degli oracoli pagani inscenato nella narrazione, in questo modo, vengono ad essere interpretati come la trasposizione di un preciso modo di intendere come l’anima, attraverso un processo di purificazione, può rendersi degna di ricevere la conoscenza di Dio.”

contemporaries' experimental forms of pietas. The ending to the introductory *Argumentum hymnorum* is a clear index of how the extinction of what Pico perceived as paganizing poetry was central to the message enclosed in his hymns. In the short poem, in fact, the Virgin Mary kneels in front of her son, Jesus Christ, and asks for help so that “useless vulgar poems, legends of gods and all obscene verses are destroyed, and [so that] Circe stops giving harmful potions to those who are driven by Zephyrus, tricking them with deceiving images.”⁴⁹⁴ The same spirit can be found in the proem of the first hymn of the tryptic, the *Hymnus ad Sanctissimam Trinitatem*. Pico's poem begins with an invocation to God rapidly followed by a counter-invocation, or a program of what Pico intends to avoid in his poetry, which is to imitate pagan poetry and indulge in the revival of Olympic mythology:

Supreme Father of things, who holds the immense reins / of the world and distributes everything with your everlasting nod, / grant me the strength I wish to give birth to these verses. / I do not ask you, however, to carry the Golden Fleece once again / from the coast of the River Phaeacia on the old Ship of the Minotaur, / I do not ask you to raise the son of Laertes to the stars with false verses, / or the deeds of the son of Peleus, / or Thebes, or the exiled leader and the progeny of the Frigians; / I do not ask you for offers to the Thracian poet / or to give praise sang on Cyrene's plectrum, / or the rhythmic prayers of Salamina's vates; / not the verses that rattled the rustic muse of Trinacria, / or those who in the five-year tribute of the Olympic victory / sang the chelid of Dirce's son, protected by fire.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹⁴ Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani Principis: Concordiaequae Comitit Hymni Heroici Tres Ad Sanctissimam Trinitatem: Ad Christum: Et Ad Virginem Mariam*. 2r. Vv. 52-56: “[Maria] orat opem / qua vulgi nugae vana et commenta deorum / atque obscoena simul carmina dispereant / ne zephyro impuls[i]us iam noxia pharmaca Circe / porrigat, et falsis ludat imaginibus.”

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid. 3r-4r. Vv. 1-13: “Summe parens rerum qui vastas flectis habenas / orbis et eterno dispensas omnia nutu, / da, precor, optatas edenda in carmina vires. / Non tamen Auratam Pellem de Phasidis ora / poscimus antiqua Minyarum avertere puppi, / non Laertiaden, Pelideae aut gesta ferocis / non Thebas, profugumque ducem phrygiosque nepotes / tollere mendaci suprema ad sydera cantu; / nec iam Threicio libamina dicta poetae / non Cyreneo laudes effundere plectro, / nec Salaminiaci numerosa precamina vatis; / non quae Trinacriae cantavit rustica musa, / non quae ad Olympiacae quinquennia praemia Palmae / concinuit dircaea chelys defensa per ignes.”

As we have seen in the *Staurostichon*, and as we will later see in *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis*, the antithetical nature of Gianfrancesco Pico's poems is a common feature of his poetry. What changes in this case is the programmatic fashion in which Pico carries out its negation of non-Christian values. This need for 'purification' of philosophy and poetry from the snares of pagan antiquity is a fundamental feature of Gianfrancesco Pico's works. What the *Hymni heroici tres* provide in these terms is quite important, as the triptic designs a poetic history of the human race: from its creation to the death of Christ, to the consequential ascension of the Virgin Mary, and the ultimate victory of Christianity over pagan superstition. This is Pico's history of antiquity in all respects. Similar aspects can be found in other poems and philosophical treatises, but what the *Hymni* have in addition is a true sense of continuity. In these three poems, Pico's account of ancient history is revealed in its uniqueness.

10. A History of Demons

In order to properly understand Pico's history of humanity, it is necessary to also understand the nature of his demons. To Pico, the idea that pagan gods were demons is unequivocal, almost as unequivocal as his judgement to those who used to (and still – according to him – continue to use) worship them. Pico's judgement of pagan religions and their practitioners can certainly be seen as monolithic, especially when compared to many other great humanists of the same period. To the author, in fact, antiquity was a demonic age. Despite all the knowledge and the technical advances acquired, and despite the outstanding cultures that Renaissance intellectuals were finally rediscovering, according to Pico, antiquity was a dark age of lies, where demons were worshiped as gods. A period that, notwithstanding the openly negative opinion that Pico maintained for his entire life, deeply fascinated the author. It would be

sufficient to count the number of treatises that he dedicated to thoroughly analyze and debunk pagan philosophy, religion, and culture to understand Pico's hidden penchant for pagan antiquity. Another clear symptom of his passion for pagan mythology is the care he put in the notes that accompany his hymns. Pico's critical apparatus to the *Hymni heroici tres*, as I have said, is almost a work on its own, due to the encyclopedic prolixity of many of its entries. On this subject, the comments related to pagan gods deserve special attention, as they are among the longest and most articulated of the collection. To us, these notes are treasures for understanding Pico's construction of his own history of ancient history and religion.

There are gods in Pico's universe. The existence of other entities is not denied. Just like in Augustine, it is not monotheism and polytheism that are at issue here. Rather what is debated is whether these beings, gods or angels, are to be worshipped or not.⁴⁹⁶ Augustine asserts that whatever name these beings deserve they should not be venerated. Angels do not wish to be venerated since worship belongs only to the one God: the supreme God, the Creator. Unlike Pico, Augustine is ready to recognize that the God whom Platonists believe in is the one true God. Their problem – in the eyes of the Church Father – is that they worship the lower deities, too. Secondary gods or good demons or angels should not be venerated.⁴⁹⁷ With respect to Augustine's take on ancient mythology, Pico goes even further, stating that all the entities once

⁴⁹⁶ See Augustine et al., *The City of God. Books I-VII* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008). VII, 33, p. 390: "It was by means of the true religion alone that it could be made manifest that the gods of the pagans were nothing but unclean spirits who used the memory of people departed or the images of earthly creatures to get themselves reckoned as gods and who then rejoiced with proud impurity that divine honors should be paid to such disgusting and indecent things, all the while hating to see men's souls turn to the true God. [...] To this category of unclean spirits belong not only the lesser gods of which I have said so much, and many, many other gods of the same sort among the various peoples of the world, but likewise those gods who were selected to form a sort of Senate of the gods." For a thorough reconstruction of Augustine's demonology, see Maijastina Kahlos, *Debate and Dialogue. Christian and Pagan Cultures C. 360–430*, Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology, and Biblical Studies (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). Chapter 6, 138–84. For a detailed account of Augustine demonology in a pichian context, see Pico della Mirandola and Pappalardo, *La Strega (Strix) di Gianfranco Pico*. 23–41.

⁴⁹⁷ Maijastina Kahlos, *Debate and Dialogue. Christian and Pagan Cultures C. 360–430*, Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology, and Biblical Studies (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

known as gods were nothing but demons, and that there are no good demons.⁴⁹⁸ “False divinities are the voices of the demons,” he states, quite poetically.⁴⁹⁹ Thus, understanding what a demon is for Pico becomes a necessity in order to understand what ancient gods were for him.

Gianfrancesco Pico truly believed that pre-Christian antiquity was the realm of demons, and he meant to foster this knowledge in order to avoid that Christianity fall into the same trap as the ancients. However, how does he build this narrative? What are his sources? And how deep is his own agency in this process?

Let us first tackle the issue of the sources for Pico’s demonology. The Old Testament has quite a bit to say about demons, but it does not allude to a conspiracy of intelligent beings under the Devil’s command, like that at work in Pico’s narrative. The Israelite conception of ‘demons,’ as it existed in the popular mind or the literary imagination related to the Babylon Talmud, resembled in some ways, but not entirely, what Pico held as true. The *Se‘irim* (Lv. 17.7, “satyrs”; or goat demons) or *Shedim* (Dt. 32.17, “demons” or “devils”) were very often foreign gods, not recognized by Hebrew religion, and therefore transformed into evil spirits, just like those in Pico’s mythology. In rabbinic times, under Babylonian and Persian influence, Hebrew demonology assumed considerable importance in haggadic thought and general Jewish folklore. Many of the demons were given specific names, often from exotic sources due to the foreign origin of the gods themselves. The chief generic names are *shedim*, *mazziqim* (injurers), *ruhōt* (spirits), and *mal’akhei ḥabbalah* (angels of destruction). These demons are invisible, and they are numerous beyond counting. Like angels, they possess wings, they are capable of flying from one end of the world to the other, and they know the future. Like

⁴⁹⁸ Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani Principis: Concordiaequae Comitum Hymni Heroici Tres Ad Sanctissimam Trinitatem: Ad Christum: Et Ad Virginem Mariam*. “[...] nos autem daemones bonos non esse affirmamus et Davidi succinentes pronunciamus. Omnes deos gentium daemonia.”

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid. 41r: “Daemonum voces falsa numina [sunt]”

human beings, they eat and drink, procreate, and die (*Hag.* 16a). The ancient *Shedim*, however, cannot truly be compared to the grandeur of Pico's demons. These evil spirits often lived in deserts or ruins (*Lev.* 16:10; *Isa.* 13:21; 34:14), isolated from society. They inflicted sickness on men (*Ps.* 91:5–6). They troubled men's minds (*Saul*; *I Sam.* 16:15, 23) and deceived them (*I Kings* 22:22–23) – but nevertheless these evil spirits were sent by the Lord. As such, some can be friendly and useful to humans; they were employed, for example, in the construction of the Tabernacle and the Temple,⁵⁰⁰ something that Pico would have never accepted in its original state. In a tribal world like that of the primal Yahweh, the *Shedim* were the gods of other tribes. For its later Biblical counterpart, whose omnipotence and omnipresence is so absolute, the powers of evil seem irrelevant in comparison, and cannot escape his lordship and judgement. As the God of Deutero-Isaiah (6th century B.C) say: “I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace and create evil: I the Lord do all these things” (*Isa.* 45:7). In the early Jewish religion, therefore, the demons were often a foreign anomaly, or a nuisance sent by God himself. Later biblical – and often apocryphal – recounts began to change this depiction of the Hebrew god, as that God should be directly responsible of evil was later seen as an incongruity.⁵⁰¹ The Book of Enoch (2nd century B.C.), the Book of Jubilees (c 135-105 B.C.) and other later testimonies found in the Dead Sea Scrolls are witnesses to this shift in perception of God and the progressive rise of Satan as his nemesis, and the demons as his servants. Yet, although it is sure that Pico's systematic reduction of all foreign gods to the like of demons echoes the ‘tribal’ aspect of the Old Testament, his narrative is only partially inspired by it.

⁵⁰⁰ Sarah L. Schwarz, “Demons,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, ed. Adele Berlin and Maxine Grossman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁵⁰¹ Great example of this shift in perception can be found in the comparison between the story of David recounted the Second Book of Samuel (10th century B.C.) and the one found in the Book of Chronicles (4th century B.C.). See Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). 17.

The New Testament, another source that Pico knew thoroughly, provides a narrative that comes closer to his own. However, once again, not quite completely. Unlike Yahweh in the Old Testament, God in the New Testament found in Satan and his mob of subordinate demons the most formidable antagonists. To the Christians, Satan's role is to oppose the new religion's existence and dissemination. Just like Pico's narrative, the Devil is the relentless nemesis of Jesus, and he is forever plotting to seduce his followers and keep them away from eternal salvation.⁵⁰² The all-encompassing, fully omnipotent world of Yahweh becomes split in two kingdoms, the kingdom of Christ, and the kingdom of the Devil. It is in Saint Paul that, I argue, we find the first main source for Pico's narrative of antiquity. In Saint Paul, writing between A.D. 50 and 70, the account of a powerful God in control of good and evil is irremediably changed, as the man set to convert the Gentiles depicts a world that is under the rule of Satan. "The God of this world" he states "hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (II Corinthians 4.4). In Saint Paul, as in Pico, the pagan gods that constitute the Roman pantheon become the new *Shedim*, re-baptized with a very familiar name: *daimones*. This name was not chosen randomly. When early Christianity began its struggle to impose itself as a religion, the word demon was rather common in the Empire, especially in the competing world of Neoplatonic theology.

In the Greek world since Homer, the term *daimon* (δαίμων) has often referred to an external force, sometimes ascribable to a god or a messenger of fate. For Hesiod (Works and Days 122 f., 126) demons were the deceased of the Golden Age, functioning as guardians or protectors (φύλακες). This resulted in the meaning 'personal protecting spirits', who accompany

⁵⁰² Ibid. 19.

each human's life and bring either luck or harm. From the 5th century B.C., the Greek world defined lucky, fortunate persons as εὐδαίμων ('with a good *daimon*': already in Hes.), and the unlucky ones as κακοδαίμων ('with a bad *daimon*': from the 5th cent. B.C.). In Plato's *Phaedo* (107 d–e) and the *Republic* (617 d–e, 620 d–e), the *daimones* are described as protective entities who accompany man during his life and after his death function as prosecutors or advocates, not so differently from what Christians will later refer to as guardian angels. In a platonic sense, the *daimon* becomes a transcendental stake in the human being. Humans receive their divine 'Ego,' also identified with his Nous ('Mind'), from the divine: an idea already developed by Empedocles (c. 490 – c. 430 BC). Plato's true revolution to the concept of *daimon* is the notion that *daimones* must be interpreted as intermediary beings between god and men (Symp. 202d–203a). This had a major influence in both pagan and – later – Christian branches of Platonism, and was adopted by all subsequent demonologies. Xenocrates (396/5 – 314/3 BC), a pupil of Plato, introduced another important aspect in the narrative of demons, that is the existence of good and evil *daimones*. This is essentially the picture accepted by the Stoics and in Middle and New Platonism (especially Plutarch, Porphyry, and Iamblichus).⁵⁰³

From the 1st century AD to later antiquity, the platonic concept of *daimon* helped solve problems connected with the emergence of monotheistic ideas, and the problems inherent to theodicy. It also offered a certain solution to the difficult question of the true nature of the old polytheistic gods, which were still worshiped by some and understood by many as existing entities. In more inclusivist Neoplatonic approaches – like in Augustine, Origen, and pseudo-Dionysus – the platonic 'good *daimones*' acquired the status of Biblical angels, while the others

⁵⁰³ S. Versnel, "Daimōn," in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. Simon Hornblower and Esther Eidinow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

– maintaining their original Greek name – were banished to the newly made spires of Hell.⁵⁰⁴ At the time of Paul, however, this nuanced dialogue with Neoplatonic theology had yet to be defined. To Paul, these demons were nothing but the old pagan gods, which operated through all other forms of cult, and above all through the priests of the official Roman religion.⁵⁰⁵ For the gods of any other religion in competition with Christianity, are really demons in Satan’s service. “The things which the Gentiles sacrifice” Saint Paul affirms “they sacrifice to the devils, and not to God.”⁵⁰⁶

Paul’s words resound deeply in Pico’s poetical recount of antiquity, but the same can be said about the entire late ancient diatribe on the nature of demons, which Pico knew very well: “[...] In the age of Homer” he affirms in the exegetical definition of demon “they were called gods and demons without distinction, and Plato defined demons as the lords of the universe [...]. In truth, among the Platonists the question on this subject is manifold: Pindar thought that there were good and bad demons. [...] Yet, Eusebius wanted all demons to be bad, and so those who thought that there were good demons among them.”⁵⁰⁷ In Pico’s narrative of antiquity, in fact, it would be greatly reductive to state that the Scriptures and the works of the Church Fathers were the only sources employed by the theologian. From Pico’s precious notes to the poetic text, we can deduce a great number of sources employed to build his vision of antiquity. Among the

⁵⁰⁴ Similarly to Augustine, Origen had interpreted the Scriptural mentions of Gods as referring to angels. However, there were Gods and so-called Gods. The former were angels and the latter were the pagan Gods that in fact were mere demons. For the discussion, see Michael Frede, “Monotheism and Pagan Philosophy in Later Antiquity,” in *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, ed. Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁵⁰⁵ Cohn, *Europe’s Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom*. 20.

⁵⁰⁶ I Corinthians 10:20: “sed quae immolant gentes daemoneis immolant et non Deo nolo autem vos socios fieri daemoniorum non potestis calicem Domini bibere et calicem daemoniorum”

⁵⁰⁷ Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani Principis: Concordiaequae Comitum Hymni Heroici Tres Ad Sanctissimam Trinitatem: Ad Christum: Et Ad Virginem Mariam*. 43r: “[...] dei autem et daemones indiscriminatim antiquitus apud homerum dicebantur: et plato gubernatorem universi nuncupavit daimona [...]. Apud platonicos vero hac de re varia et multa quaestio pindarus malum et bonum daemonem esse sensit [...]. Voluit tamen Eusebius omnem daemonem malum esse sed et eorum qui daemones putabant bonos.”

major influences we find apologists like Augustine, Lactantius Firmianus (c. 250 – c. 325), Eusebius of Caesarea, Dionysius the Areopagite, but also pagan philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Ptolomeus, the Chaldean oracles, pseudo-Epimenides, historians like Herodotus, Diodorus Siculus, Pliny the Elder, and Diogenes Laertius, and major classical authors like Vergil – most probably in the edition curated by Maurus Servius Honoratus published in Florence by Bernardo Cennini in 1471⁵⁰⁸ – Horace, Homer, Callimachus, Servius, Apuleius, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Pindar.⁵⁰⁹ However, Pico makes good use of minor authors as well, like Aratus (ca. 315 BC/310 BC – 240 BC), and Macrobius, whose texts enjoyed relative success throughout the Middle Ages until the late Renaissance.⁵¹⁰ The poet Tibullus is used as a guide to define Egyptian gods, while Claudius Aelianus, together with Pliny, is used – for example – to describe the fauna that the Egyptians adored.⁵¹¹ It would be almost impossible to quote all the authors that Pico quotes directly or refers to in the exegetical text provided for the *Hymni heroici tres*. Such

⁵⁰⁸ For information on the relevance of Servius' *In Vergilii Aeneidem commentarii*, see Sergio Casali and Fabio Stok, "Servio: Stratificazioni Esetiche E Modelli Culturali = Servius: Exegetical Stratifications and Cultural Models" (Bruxelles, 2008). See also Savage John Joseph Hannan, "The Manuscripts of Servius's Commentary on Virgil," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 45 (1934).

⁵⁰⁹ Pindar was much read, quoted, and copied during the Byzantine Era, and consequently found its fortune in Europe after the rediscovery of Byzantine manuscripts happened during the Renaissance. For a broad and pertinent analysis of Pindar's influence in Renaissance literature, see Stella Purce Revard, *Pindar and the Renaissance Hymn-Ode, 1450-1700* (Tempe, Ariz.: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2001). On Pindar's fortune in the Byzantine world, see Frederick Lauritzen, "Students of Pindar and Readers of Mitylenaios. Allusions in Christopher Mitylenaios 6 Kurtz," *Byzantion; revue internationale des études byzantines*. 80 (2010). On the survival and success of Aeschylus in the Renaissance, see Monique Mund-Dopchie, *La Survie D'eschyle à La Renaissance: ÉDitions, Traductions, Commentaires Et Imitations* (Lovanii: Aedibus Peeters, 1984).

⁵¹⁰ On Aratus, See Jean Sez nec and C. S. Lewis, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and Its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art* (1953). 51, 151, 184. See also Maurice Kelley and Samuel D. Atkins, "Milton's Annotations of Aratus," *pmla PMLA* 70, no. 5 (1955). On Macrobius in the Renaissance and Middle Ages, see Sez nec and Lewis, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and Its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art*. 140, 172, 221, 226, 239, 253. On Macrobius in the Middle Ages, see Charles Dahlberg, "Macrobius and the Unity of the "Roman De La Rose"," *Studies in Philology* 58, no. 4 (1961).

⁵¹¹ See Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani Principis: Concordiaequae Comitit Hymni Heroici Tres Ad Sanctissimam Trinitatem: Ad Christum: Et Ad Virginem Mariam*. Fol. 28v: "[...] Quidem clarius aliquanto explicavit et Tibullus canens Primus aratra manu solerti fecit Osiris: et teneram ferro sollicitavit humum." On Tibullus and Egyptian mythology, see Phebe Lowell Bowditch, "Tibullus and Egypt: A Postcolonial Reading of Elegy 1.7," *Arethusa* 44, no. 1 (2011). See also L. B. T. Houghton, "Tibullus' Elegiac Underworld," *The Classical Quarterly* 57, no. 01 (2007).

an enormous variety of sources clearly denotes Pico's encyclopedic – and almost pedantic – notion of ancient literature. On the other hand, however, it also shows how important it was for him to provide a thorough historical account of ancient mythology.

The enormous number of sources employed by Pico in his metanarrative of antiquity does not diminish the outstanding power of his own agency. If anything, it just increases it. One must not confuse, in fact, Pico's attention for ancient sources and Christian authorities for a lack of imagination and personal opinions on the Sacred Texts, as well as the other works he used for his personal recount of antiquity. Pico's own history does not always follow mainstream sources of Christian history as one may expect. One of the first elements that stand out in Pico's narration is the rather important discrepancy regarding the fall of the rebel angels. The views that the Fathers of the Church adopted on the subject matter were heavily influenced by that of an important authority for Gianfrancesco Pico, that is second-century apologist Justin Martyr, which was greatly influenced by Jewish apocrypha like the *Book of Enoch*, the *Books of Adam and Eve* and the florid genre of first-century apocalypses.⁵¹² Justin's point of view on the relative chronology of the fall of Adam and the riot of the angels follows closely what can be found in the *Books of Adam and Eve*, composed at the end of the first century. These texts elaborate on the part played by Satan in the fall of humankind and his role in the revolt of the rebel angels, and posit the rebellion before the temptation and fall of Adam. The book of Genesis and the influential *Book of Enoch*, however, state that the punishment of the rogue angels happened after

⁵¹² Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom*. 21. For a more detailed discussion on the *Book of Enoch* and other Jewish texts and traditions, see Michael A. Knibb, "Essays on the Book of Enoch and Other Early Jewish Texts and Traditions," (2009). For further inquiry on the *Books of Adam and Eve*, see Gary A. Anderson and Michael E. Stone, *A Synopsis of the Books of Adam and Eve* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1999).; Brian Murdoch and J. A. Tasioulas, *The Apocryphal Lives of Adam and Eve* (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 2002).; Paul W. Kahn, "Out of Eden: Adam and Eve and the Problem of Evil," (2007). See also Michael E. Stone, "The Fall of Satan and Adam's Penance: Three Notes on the Books of Adam and Eve," in *Literature on Adam and Eve: Collected Essays*, ed. Gary A. Anderson, Michael E. Stone, and Johannes Tromp (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2000).

the fall of men. The *Book of Enoch*, moreover, held that these angels had fallen because they copulated with the daughters of man, thus putting the fall of angels well after the fall of men. In the third century this discrepancy was circumvented by the theologian Origen, who proclaimed that the passage in Genesis concerning the sons of God and the daughters of men was to be taken allegorically; the true fall of the angels had taken place before the creation of man, and before the creation of the world itself. The Greek Church followed Origen immediately, while the Latin Church waited until St Jerome (c. 340-420) and St. Augustine agreed with him. By the end of the fourth century it was generally accepted that the fall of man was part of a greater scheme created by the evil angels against God.⁵¹³ Yet, despite this widely accepted reading of the Sacred Scriptures, Pico goes against the Church Fathers and re-establishes the primacy of the Genesis, postponing the falling of the angels to after the fall of men.

After its long invocation to God, the *Hymn to the Holy Trinity* begins with an account of the creation. Pico's narration follows closely that of the book of *Genesis*,⁵¹⁴ underlining once again the communion of intent that Pico had with Verino and his desire of translating the Bible in verse. In this long description, Pico indulges in depicting the lavish world before the coming of the age of man, the creation of Adam, the original sin and the consequent fall. The narration of the origin of the world and the carefree life of animals before the birth of humanity, although inspired by the Scriptures, echoes the beauty of the ancient descriptions of a mythical Golden Age; an element that can be found, for example, in Lucretius' *De rerum natura*.⁵¹⁵ After the human race's disobedience towards God, Pico recounts the rebellion of the angels, their fall, and

⁵¹³ Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom*. 21-22.

⁵¹⁴ On this subject, Moreschini convincingly indicates Augustine's *Genesi ad litteram* as the main source for this part of the poem. See Moreschini, *Rinascimento cristiano: innovazioni e riforma religiosa nell'Italia del quindicesimo e sedicesimo secolo*. 195.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.* 198.

the creation of Hell: “It was a faction of these, rebelling against the eternal defeat,” he writes, “reaching into the dreary Chaos, falling from the sky, who moved to the attack, / and eager for the throne, ready to side with the rebel / ended up placing eternal settlement in the Tartar.”⁵¹⁶ According to Pico, the fall of men and the fall of Lucifer, therefore, are almost consequential, practically linked, and prefigure the beginning of an age of error and superstition. Another passage that shows Pico’s preference for Biblical sources is most certainly that of the tower of Babel. In a passage possibly echoing the *Book of Enoch*, Pico tells about the demonic race of giants, a misgeneration born from the lust of fallen angels for the daughters of men. To Pico, the influence of the fallen angels wishing to assault the heavens inspired the giants the construction of the tower of Babel (I Enoch 10: 1-11),⁵¹⁷ a sin that still haunts the lands that Europe had freshly discovered, and that will soon be known as the Americas.⁵¹⁸ According to the *Book of Enoch*, the giants were also responsible for leading humans astray from true religion into sacrifice for the pagan gods. However, this is a detail that cannot be found in Pico’s narration. This is because Pico, defying the past stories of the Babelic confusion, believed that the Devil himself was behind this hoax.

Another important aspect with which Pico partially disagrees is that of the habitat of the demons. In ancient times, in fact, it was believed that demons did not inhabit the underworld, but

⁵¹⁶ Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani Principis: Concordiaequae Comitum Hymni Heroici Tres Ad Sanctissimam Trinitatem: Ad Christum: Et Ad Virginem Mariam*. 21r. Vv. 173-76: “Quorum perpetuam pars colluctata ruinam / nacta Chaos tetrum coelo delapsa petivit, / et solium cupiens sibimet placitura rebellis, / Tartarae subiit claustrum irremeabile sedis.”

⁵¹⁷ Ibid. vv. 326-30: “Quin et terrigenae caelum sperare gigantes / caepere et summo votis certare tonanti / cum superas vecta est babylonica turris ad auras / et confusa modis restarunt impia miris / labra novosque aditus mens consternata petivit. [And the giants of the earth hoped to reach the sky / and they began to attack the High Thundering One with threats, / when the tower of Babel was stretched to the regions of the sky / and the blasphemous mouths were confused in a surprising way; Mind in delirium began to look for new languages.]

⁵¹⁸ Ibid. vv. 334-36: “occiduo novit quos illuc pertulit orbe / auri sacra fames per mille pericula ponti / perque venenatae ter mille pericula terrae.” [he does not recognize those that the terrible gold fever / led to the far west, through the thousands pitfalls of the sea / and the thousand and a thousand pitfalls of a land soaked in poison.] The term *venenum* (poison), here as in other verses of Gianfrancesco Pico, must be intended as a metaphor for superstition and idolatry.

the dark air immediately above the earth. This is the original meaning of Paul’s famous phrase about ‘spiritual wickedness in high places,’ an idea that the other Fathers of the Church commonly adopted. Augustine, for example, maintained that “the Devil was expelled, along with his comrades, from the lofty abode of the angels, and was cast into darkness, that is to say into our atmosphere, as into a prison.”⁵¹⁹ It was also agreed, seeing that angels possessed ethereal bodies, that demons must be similarly equipped. Pico’s narration of the fall of the rogue angels, however, while confirming their aerial origin, locates their lair directly in the netherworld, echoing the long medieval tradition of the harrowing of hell started with texts like the *Homily* of Melito of Sardis and the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus.⁵²⁰ To Pico, in fact, the demons can be both ‘the aerial armies’ and ‘the Stygian mob’ at once.⁵²¹ The picture of aerial entities given by the Church Fathers still remains, but to their rendition Pico adds a further chapter: the flight of the demons in the netherworld.

But after the conqueror returned to the citadel above triumphing over death [...] immediately the gods roared, and the nefarious chant of the spirits grew quiet and receded from the dark caverns. But one could still hear mournful voices and a secret whispering in the wilderness. Soon, the gods left the temples in a flock, and at once surrendered their backs to the conquered world, scattered in the air and the void, and defeated pointed immediately at the hidden recesses of the underworld.⁵²²

⁵¹⁹ Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalmum* (xlvi, 9) as in Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom*. 22.

⁵²⁰ See Chapter 2.

⁵²¹ In his Hymn to Christ, Pico calls the Devil’s mesnie “aerias acies,” the aerial armies. See Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani Principis: Concordiaequae Comitum Hymni Heroici Tres Ad Sanctissimam Trinitatem: Ad Christum: Et Ad Virginem Mariam*. II, 191.

⁵²² *Ibid.* 175-85: “Sed postquam superas victor remeravit ad arces morte triumphata: [...]. Extemplo fremuere dei: siluitque nefastus spirituum cantus: furisque recessit ab antris. At querulae voces tacitumque per avia murmur hinc exaudiri passim: mox agmine facto templa reliquerunt: et victo protinus orbe terga dedere feri: vacuumque per aera fusi: et victi infernas subito petiere latebras.”

Pico's vision of the demonic throng, therefore, meant to balance the ancient and late ancient tradition of the Church Fathers with the medieval conception of hell initiated by apologists like Minucius Felix (died c. 250 AD in Rome) and Gregory the Great;⁵²³ a vision that – yet – greatly reminds of the intermediary experience found in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*.

The *Evangelium Nicodemi* is a late medieval Latin source containing a recollection of the full version of pseudo-Nicodemus' work (the accounts of the Passion, Joseph of Arimathea, and the Descent of Christ into Hades). The themes that eventually converged in the *apocryphon* began to coalesce as early as the second century, but the original Greek composition may have acquired shape or, perhaps, currency during the early fourth century. By the end of that century, its existence is attested in patristic writings. The *apocryphon* already began to spread from its Greek font to other Eastern languages in late antiquity or the early Middle Ages; that is, before the period of its translations into Western vernaculars. That expansion continued throughout and,

⁵²³ See Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 35.1-4 in Tertullian et al., "Apologetical Works and Minucius Felix Octavius," (2008). 394: "Yet, outstanding men of learning in their writings, and poets [meaning Vergil, Aeneid 6.313-439] in their verses, warn mankind of that river of fire and the circles of glowing flood issuing from the Stygian morass; they recorded those means of eternal torture, as they found them disclosed in the statements of demons and the oracles of prophets. 2 Hence it is that, in their works, even King Jupiter himself swears in awe by the burning shores of Styx and its black abyss, for he knows beforehand and dreads the punishment destined for him and his followers. 3 Nor is there set any limit or end to these torments. The fire there below, endowed with ingenuity, consumes and renews, wears away and sustains the limbs. As the fiery flashes of lightning strike the bodies without consuming them, as the fires of Etna, and Vesuvius, and volcanoes all the world over burn without being exhausted, so that avenging fire is not fed by destroying those who are exposed to the flames, but is sustained by the never ending mangling of their bodies." For a detailed walkthrough of Gregory the Great's *infernus*, see Alan E. Bernstein, "Hell and Its Rivals: Death and Retribution among Christians, Jews, and Muslims in the Early Middle Ages," (2017). 33-66. Notable mention goes also to the Latin vulgate of the Gospel of Mark 9:42-48: "et si scandalizaverit te manus tua abscide illam bonum est tibi debilem introire in vitam quam duas manus habentem ire in gehennam in ignem inextinguibilem ubi vermis eorum non moritur et ignis non extinguitur et si pes tuus te scandalizat amputa illum bonum est tibi claudum introire in vitam aeternam quam duos pedes habentem mitti in gehennam ignis inextinguibilis ubi vermis eorum non moritur et ignis non extinguitur quod si oculus tuus scandalizat te eice eum bonum est tibi luscum introire in regnum Dei quam duos oculos habentem mitti in gehennam ignis ubi vermis eorum non moritur et ignis non extinguitur omnis enim igne sallietur et omnis victima sallietur." [And if your hand scandalizes you, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life, maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into unquenchable fire: Where their worm died not, and the fire is not extinguished. And if your foot scandalizes you, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter lame into life everlasting than having two feet to be cast into the hell of unquenchable fire: Where their worm died not, and the fire is not extinguished. And if your eye scandalizes you, pluck it out: it is better for thee with one eye to enter into the kingdom of God than having two eyes to be cast into the hell of fire: Where their worm died not, and the fire is not extinguished. For everyone shall be salted with fire: and every victim shall be salted with salt.]

in some cases, beyond medieval times.⁵²⁴ Gianfrancesco Pico seems well aware of this tradition, which gives Jesus Christ the main responsibility for relegating Satan to Hell, and he somehow acknowledges it, although already filtered by late medieval demonology. Although he does not condone pseudo-Nicodemus' somehow positive depiction of Hades – whom he sees as the ancient incarnation of the demon Mammon⁵²⁵ – Pico nevertheless incorporates Christ's harrowing of hell in both his *Staurostichon* and his *Hymnus Secundus*. In Pico's hymn, Christ is remembered as the one who “once defeated death, subdued the dark battalions, / and destroyed the foundation of the infernal door” rose victorious and gave his disciples the gift of the holy spirit.⁵²⁶ The same story applies to the earlier *Staurostichon*, where Pico asks his readers: “How often Christ would have renewed the ritual signs / Of his own death, after he visited the blackened, rusty throne / And beaten the darkness with eternal light, / And returned, once freed the forefathers from the chained enemy, / to the highest heavenly citadels.”⁵²⁷ Christ's harrowing of hell, moreover, finds in the second hymn of Pico's collection one of its most beautiful poetic renditions:

You [Christ] passed through the Stygian shadows triumphant, and removed the pious men from the maws of Orcus. Then, the savage mob feared at the sudden light, beating their heads on the gates. And Pluto, descending through the wastes, awakened the pale

⁵²⁴ Izydorczyk, *The Medieval Gospel of Nicodemus: Texts, Intertexts, and Contexts in Western Europe*. 3.

⁵²⁵ Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani Principis: Concordiaequae Comitum Hymni Heroici Tres Ad Sanctissimam Trinitatem: Ad Christum: Et Ad Virginem Mariam*. 74v: “Plutonem graeci inferorum principem dixere et divitiarum regem: quoniam nihil esset corruptibilium rerum quod ad illum omnino non perveniret et eius possessio fieret: ita phurnutus interpretatur nec abhorret ad hebraica et nostra disciplina qua mammona iniquitatis et daemonem et divitias intelligimus: eunde quoque plutonem et daemonis et diaboli et sathane signamus nominibus” [The Greeks appointed Pluto as master of the underworld and king of the gods. Since nothing among the perishable things might exist without arriving to him and becoming his, he is regarded as a thief and does not differ from Mammona, that in Christianity and Judaism we perceive as the demon [itself], inequality, and excessive riches. I consider Pluto the same in name of the demon, the devil, and Satan.]

⁵²⁶ Ibid. Vv. 335-39: “Quo post devictam mortem furvasque phalanges / Prostratas tetrae et fundamina diruta portae / Conscendis victor populo spectante fideli / Septem mox olli flammatae munera linguae / Largiris...”

⁵²⁷ Pico della Mirandola, *Staurostichon*, in X. Vv 108-12: “quoties renouarit mystica lethi / Signa sui, postquam sedes ferrugine nigras / Inuisit, pulsisque aeterna luce tenebris / Atque catenato resolutis patribus hoste / Sublimis superas Christus remeavit ad arces.”

shadows of Erebus, which could not bear the frightening arrival of the prince of light, or the mighty scepter of the Cross pierced, and reddened by the mark of victory over Tartarus. [...] Then, they saw the ghosts of the dead pushed inside Tartarus and the prisoner fathers returned to the high vaults. And, drawn through the skies, entering the Olympian realms, they saw you, prince, sit at the right of the Father, and the faithless despots abandon their fierce madness, submitting the scepters that used to be threatening not long ago, heads to your feet.⁵²⁸

If one considers the passage above, it is almost impossible to avoid noticing the uncanny – although possibly indirect – similarity of Pico’s passages with Melito’s *Homily*, where Christ exclaims: “I am he who put down death, and triumphed over the enemy, and trod upon Hades, and bound the Strong One and brought man safely home to the heights of the heavens.”⁵²⁹ On the same subject, the resemblance between Pico’s hymn and Nicodemus’ recount of Christ’s Harrowing of Hell is quite extraordinary, despite the absence of this source in the author’s exegetical text. One of the most important sections of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, in fact, regards the recount of Christ’s descent to hell. It is a story that involves the newly converted Christians Karinus and Leucius, the twin sons of Simeon, who were said to have returned from the dead. According to their apocryphal gospel, the twins sat enveloped in the darkness of Hades, when suddenly – just like in Pico’s narration – a bright light pierced the shadows and made the patriarchs and prophets rejoice. In the apocryphal gospel, the pious men begin to review their messianic prophecies, first Isaiah, then Simeon, and finally John the Baptist. Seth recalls what the archangel Michael foretold him about the coming of the Savior, when he had gone to

⁵²⁸ Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani Principis: Concordiaequae Comitum Hymni Heroici Tres Ad Sanctissimam Trinitatem: Ad Christum: Et Ad Virginem Mariam*. II 687-96; 699-705: “Stygias pertransis victor ad umbras / atque pios auferis diri de faucibus Orci. / Tumque truces subito formidant lumine turbae / illidensque caput foribus: perque avia Pluton / descendens Erebi pallentes suscitatur umbras: / quae nec terribilem potuerunt ferre corusci / principis adventus: transfixi aut stipitis ingens / sceptrum Tartarii rutilans insigne triumphi. [...] Detrusos igitur videre in Tartara Manes: / captivosque patres supera ad convexa reverti / inde per aëros tractus: per Olympica regna / intrantem: patris princeps te assistere dextrae / spectarunt: subitoque trucem demittere reges / infidos rabiem: nec non minitancia pridem / scepra tibi: pedibusque tuis summittere colla.”

⁵²⁹ Johannes Quasten, *Patrology* (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press; Utrecht, Spectrum Publishers, 1950). 1:242-45. In Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds*. 273.

paradise to ask for the oil of mercy for Adam.⁵³⁰ All this deeply echoes in Pico's hymn, where the harrowing of hell is seen through the eyes of the prophets, who recount of their vision of Christ's life, their salvation from the spires of Hades, and the victory of Christianity all over the civilized world.⁵³¹

But let us return to the Gospel of Nicodemus. While the prophets are thus rejoicing, Satan tells Hades to prepare for the reception of Jesus Christ, who had bragged that he was the Son of God and that he, Satan, was tricking into the underworld after his death. But when Hades learns that it was the same Jesus who had raised Lazarus from the dead, and he hears a powerful voice demanding entry for the king of glory, he casts Satan out of his dark abode and orders the denizens of Hades to bar the gates. Treading on Death, the king of glory seized Satan and hands him to Hades, who reproved Satan for causing Christ's death and their own destruction. Then Jesus extends his hand to Adam and makes a sign of the cross over him and over all the saints, who praise and glorify their Savior.⁵³² Notwithstanding the fact that, in Pico, Hades plays a very different role – acting as a servant to Satan rather than a neutral entity, happily abiding to Christ's commands – the story contained in his hymn remains incredibly faithful to that of pseudo-Nicodemus. The gates are mentioned, and so is the army of the dead and the final sign of the cross over the masses.⁵³³

⁵³⁰ See Izydorzcyk, *The Medieval Gospel of Nicodemus: Texts, Intertexts, and Contexts in Western Europe*. 5.

⁵³¹ Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani Principis: Concordiaequae Comitum Hymni Heroici Tres Ad Sanctissimam Trinitatem: Ad Christum: Et Ad Virginem Mariam*. II, 679: "Quod spectant supero commoti lumine vates" [This observe the prophets, inspired by a celestial light] The long section that follows (680-714) must be interpreted as a long prophetic vision.

⁵³² See Izydorzcyk, *The Medieval Gospel of Nicodemus: Texts, Intertexts, and Contexts in Western Europe*. 5.

⁵³³ My argument, of course, does not want to undermine the possible influence of several medieval renditions of the Harrowing of Hell. From Dante's *Divina Commedia* to the paintings found in the basilica of Santa Maria Novella, Gianfrancesco Pico certainly had a vast array of sources to use. This, however, does not exclude the deep intertextual relationship with the Gospel of Nicodemus.

Pico's recount of Hell, as we have seen, is a unique product of the mind that spans from late antique descriptions of aerial demons to medieval infernal visions, united by the late ancient and early medieval legend of the harrowing of hell. Another important aspect of Pico's depiction of hell not to be underestimated, however, is the narrative of ancient Hades and Tartarus. Despite Pico's clearly medieval rendering of the netherworld, his vision of hell is largely based on ancient pagan sources. A clear example of this can be found right after Pico's poetic recount of Christ's harrowing of hell, which is followed by a comparison with another example of katabasis, that of Hercules: "These were not the powers of the knotty club of false Alcides, which the made-up giant Typhoeus dreaded, for which the makeshift wild beast of Lerna and the imaginary mouths of the fiery Chimaera trembled."⁵³⁴ As in the episode of Orpheus and Euridice contained in the *Votum Pro Salute Coniugis*, that of Hercules' underworldly voyage does not stand alone in Pico's work as a metaphor in his collection of poems.⁵³⁵ Of course, when Pico approaches himself to an ancient myth, it is always to create a chiasmus between his religion and that of the ancients, from what is right and what is wrong. This, however, does not undermine the enormous quantity of non-Christian sources employed by Pico in the creation of his own hell. The long note on the nature of Tartarus is a clear example of this phenomenon. In the exegetical explication, in fact, Pico cannot restrain himself from mixing the Christian authority of Sedulius (5th century), Lactantius, and St. Peter, with Plato, Aristotle, and Homer.⁵³⁶ Even the idea of the

⁵³⁴ "Non ficti Alcidae haec nodasae robora clavae: quam fictus metuit ingenti mole Typhoeus: qua mentita trucidis trepidavit bellua Lernae: oraque flammivomae trepidarunt ficta Chimerae."

⁵³⁵ The episode is also commented in Pico's exegetical text, with a reference to his *De rerum praenotione*. See Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani Principis: Concordiaequae Comitum Hymni Heroici Tres Ad Sanctissimam Trinitatem: Ad Christum: Et Ad Virginem Mariam*. 26r: "iactabant igitur orpheum inferna petisse: quae res a nobis alibi confutata et in magiam relata." [They also boasted that Orpheus reached hell, which has been disproven and related to magic elsewhere by yours truly].

⁵³⁶ Ibid. 20v. For a deep analysis of the journey to the underworld contained in Plato's *Phaedo*, see Radcliffe G. Edmonds, *Myths of the Underworld Journey: Plato, Aristophanes, and the 'Orphic' Gold Tablets* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). 159-219.

infernial chasm is here contended between the authority of the Apostles, Aristophanes,⁵³⁷ Diomedes Grammaticus, and Vergil's *Aeneid*.⁵³⁸

11. Depicting an Age of Error

Since the beginnings of Christianity, Christian writers sought to build a model of the progress of humankind from primitive polytheism towards a more refined monotheism. The notion of the progress of humankind towards the one God, in fact, had already appeared in earlier Christian apologetics. According to this scheme, there had been an original *scientia dei* innate in all humans and a form of pure monotheism that polytheism later corrupted. Orosius (375 – c. 418 AD), for instance, after having stated that aspiration towards the divine is universal in all humans, declared that humankind naturally advances from polytheism to monotheism. To Orosius, humans could not remain completely ignorant of God. However, they had erred to

⁵³⁷ Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani Principis: Concordiaequae Comitit Hymni Heroici Tres Ad Sanctissimam Trinitatem: Ad Christum: Et Ad Virginem Mariam*. 18r. Here Pico is probably referring to Dionysus' underground journey recounted in Aristophanes' *The Frogs*. See Aristophanes, *Frogs*, 1-180 in Aristophanes and Kenneth James Dover, *Frogs* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1997). See also Radcliffe G. Edmonds III, "Who in Hell Is Heracles? Dionysus' Disastrous Disguise in Aristophanes' *Frogs*," in *Initiation in Ancient Greek Rituals and Narratives: New Critical Perspectives*, ed. David Brooks Dodd and Christopher A. Faraone (London; New York: Routledge, 2003).

⁵³⁸ Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani Principis: Concordiaequae Comitit Hymni Heroici Tres Ad Sanctissimam Trinitatem: Ad Christum: Et Ad Virginem Mariam*. 18r. In this passage, Pico clearly mentions the third book of the *Aeneid* ("ver. in tertio aene."). The section in question could be the following. See Virgil and John Dryden, *The Aeneid (1753)* (Auckland: Floating Press, 2009). III. 116: "With haste the frightened mariners obey. / First Palinurus to the larboard veer'd; / Then all the fleet by his example steer'd. / To heav'n aloft on ridgy waves we ride, / Then down to hell descend, when they divide; / And thrice our galleys knock'd the stony ground, / And thrice the hollow rocks return'd the sound, / And thrice we saw the stars, that stood with dews around. / The flagging winds forsook us, with the sun; / And, wearied, on Cyclopien shores we run. / The port capacious, and secure from wind, / Is to the foot of thund'ring Aetna join'd. / By turns a pitchy cloud she rolls on high; / By turns hot embers from her entrails fly, / And flakes of mounting flames, that lick the sky. / Oft from her bowels massy rocks are thrown, / And, shiver'd by the force, come piecemeal down. / Oft liquid lakes of burning sulphur flow, / Fed from the fiery springs that boil below." In this context, Pico could also refer to book VII. See *ibid.* 287: "In midst of Italy, well known to fame, / There lies a lake (Amsanctus is the name) / Below the lofty mounts: on either side / Thick forests the forbidden entrance hide. / Full in the center of the sacred wood / An arm arises of the Stygian flood, / Which, breaking from beneath with bellowing sound, / Whirls the black waves and rattling stones around. / Here Pluto pants for breath from out his cell, / And opens wide the grinning jaws of hell. / To this infernal lake the Fury flies; / Here hides her hated head, and frees the lab'ring skies."

invent many Gods out of their fear, as they believed in God in many aspects. Thus, Orosius, Justin Martyr, and other apologists explain the emergence of polytheism in antiquity.⁵³⁹

Similarly, Gianfrancesco Pico builds his poetic construction of antiquity as a degeneration from the state of grace and the contemplation of God in the garden of Eden to a state of error represented by animism and polytheism.

Oppressed by the same nature it used to command, humanity, plagued by sickness and old age, forgot the true God and began worshipping the elements, which would later generate the cult of the pagan gods: “From this, blind antiquity deduced that you, prince, / shook the heavenly abodes with these lightnings, / [blind antiquity] that began worshipping stones, [and] which, armed with black poison / madly deified portents in golden temples.”⁵⁴⁰ This section is particularly important in order to understand what pagan religion meant in the eyes of Gianfrancesco Pico. To the author, the premises of natural philosophy and ancient religions are the same, as they both generate from the desire to understand nature and their mysteries. Pagan religion, moreover, appears here as a cult based on the worshipping of natural forces just as the Neoplatonists of his time turned their hymnic prayers into planetary intelligences, and astrologers justified history through the influence of the stars and planets.⁵⁴¹ To Pico, most of these portents were nothing but the deceptions of fallen angels, tricking humans into their

⁵³⁹ Kahlos, *Debate and Dialogue. Christian and Pagan Cultures C. 360–430*. 144.

⁵⁴⁰ Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani Principis: Concordiaequae Comitum Hymni Heroici Tres Ad Sanctissimam Trinitatem: Ad Christum: Et Ad Virginem Mariam*. 12v. Vv. 223-36: “ex illo superas te princeps flectere sedes / credidit his telis quondam obcaecata venustas / quae coluit lapides, quae diro armata veneno / portenta auratis templis male sana dicavit.”

⁵⁴¹ I am primarily referring to Pico’s reference to what is probably the neoplatonic use of the concept *ὄχημα*, the subtle, aethereal casing the the soul acquires in its passage from the celestial spheres to the realm of matter, to attempt a spiritual alignment with the planetary entities that command the skies and acquire the forms and powers with which the celestial entities command the inferior spheres. See Proclus and E. R. Dodds, *The Elements of Theology: A Revised Text with Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963). 313-21; Robert Klein and André Chastel, *La Forme Et L’intelligible: Écrits Sur La Renaissance Et L’art Moderne* ([Paris]: Gallimard, 1983). 65-88; Tonino Griffiero, *Il Corpo Spirituale: Ontologie “Sottile” Da Paolo Di Tarso a Friedrich Christoph Oetinger* (Milano: Mimesis, 2006). For the concept of *ὄχημα* in relation with Pico, see Pico della Mirandola and Pappalardo, *La Strega (Strix) Di Gianfranco Pico*. 136.

worship.⁵⁴² Most importantly, this reconstruction of pagan cult acts as a warning to his contemporaries, and especially to those who celebrated rituals in the name of Nature. In the introduction to the *Hymni heroici tres*, in fact, Pico states that “Deaf and mute Nature should not be called in help of mortals; the intelligences that are in charge of Nature are not conditioned by mentioning their names, and evoked ghosts and summoned Manes are not pleased by poems.”⁵⁴³ This sentence, which recalls in many ways Paul and Augustine’s theological battle against the gods, is a good point of entry to Pico’s own history of antiquity.

After the flood and the fall of Sodom and Gomorrah, according to Pico, the devil and his *mesnie* of demons devised a new way to trick humanity into abandoning God. The hoax, this time, was that of re-enacting the original sin on a larger scale, using a device of mass deception - idolatry:⁵⁴⁴

With a thousand blasphemous crimes, [Satan] spit out false idols and consecrated a temple to them and, stealing the worship of God, he decided to wage war against the Thundering one, ordering that sacrifices of lean lambs be prepared for him and that big bulls be put down to the altar so that an expert haruspex may reveal the secrets hidden in the pulse and in the main organs, so that the human race, unknowingly and eager [to know] the future, may shudder in the face of adversity and may observe favorable events without reason. Yet unsatisfied with all this, he poured oracles around the corrupt world: few men only were enlightened by the truth from the high heavens, only a few were able not to be deceived from the verses and the rhythms of the impious oracular hymns, hymns that the black demon spread from the caves to deceive the world dominated by different

⁵⁴² Ibid. 12v. note 1: “Ex illo lupas metu fulminium quae alio [gn] deum humana non curare putabant commoti ad supplica et portanda templis innumera constrigerunt: sed demonibus decepti cultum; [quae] uni debet deo monstris et inanibus rebus tribuerunt.”

⁵⁴³ Ibid. 1v: “Non enim advocat surda et muta natura in auxilia mortalium: nec quae illi praesunt mentes eorum vocabulorum nomenclatura censent nec accer sitae umbrae aut evocati manes carminibus suffragant.”

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid. 359-64: “Ille quidem indignans superas conscendere in arces / humani patrem generis versutus inivit / consilium pomi. Sed enim qui perfidus hausit / posse ipsum crimen lachrymas abolere calentes / innumeras struxit fraudes, quas protinus auxit / vana superstitio.” [Deemed unworthy of rising to the heavenly spheres, in conspiracy against the father of mankind, he [the Devil] put into action the plan of the apple. So the evil one, who swallowed the abundant tears that could erase the crime, invented innumerable deceptions, which soon alimeted maddening superstition.]

predictions and so that mankind could never go back to the secret palaces of paradise along the straight path.⁵⁴⁵

Excluded from a privileged dialogue with the divine, therefore, humanity – according to Pico – was fooled by Satan into worshiping idols and listening to the false prophets of paganism. This suggestive passage is not only important for its relevance in Pico’s narrative of antiquity, but it is also fundamental in order to stress the author’s stand regarding pagan oracles in relationship with his contemporaries, and most importantly Marsilio Ficino.

During the last decade of the 15th century, Ficino and Savonarola had been rivals in the struggle for the soul of Florence. Both humanists saw the city as a cradle of change and spiritual renovation, and both believed in the necessity of reforming the Catholic Church. The way in which they wanted to acquire these objectives, however, was almost diametrically opposed. We have already seen how Ficino played a central role in the revival of ancient spiritual hymns. Among the vital differences between their doctrines, however, there was also their conception of prophecy. The previous chapter dealt with Pico’s attack against astrology, and his support of ‘true’ prophecy: that of the prophets of the Scriptures and, of course, of his mentor Savonarola. The friar of San Marco based all his propaganda regarding spiritual reformation on his alleged prophetic powers. To Savonarola, in fact, humanity was unable to comprehend anything by rational means, and the only source of knowledge had to be divine revelation received through

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid. vv. 381: “Nam mille in crimina divos / impia deduxit fictos temploque dicavit / atque dei cultum usurpans bellare tonanti / decernit, caesarum ovium sibi facta parari / mandat et ingentes tauros procumbere ad aram / utque hinc fumantis fibrae consultus haruspex / et pulsu et membris salientibus abdita pandat, / utque hominum genus, ignarum cupidumque futuri / horreat adversos subita formidine casus / eventusque bonos nulla ratione sequatur. / Quis non contentus, pollutum oracla per orbem / plurima diffudit, pauci quibus aethere ab alto / illuxit verum, pauci quibus impia sortis / carmina cum modulis non imposuere malignae, / carmina quae furuis daemo fundebat ab antris / luderet ut domitum variis ambagibus orbem / et genus humanum directo tramite nunquam / duceret ad caelsi secreta palatia caeli.”

the sacred art of prophecy.⁵⁴⁶ This radical form of fideism, shared by both Pico and Savonarola, was to say the least revolutionary since – as noted by Popkin – it posited prophets as the only arbiters of truth, thus rejecting the claims of the Church as the sole true interpreter of God’s revelation through the Sacred Scriptures.⁵⁴⁷ Savonarola’s role as a prophet, therefore, was a key aspect of his predication. It was therefore fundamental, for the Dominican friar, to create a strong distinction between ‘true’ and ‘false’ prophecy and prophets. The question at hand is central even in the case of sacred poetry. As we have seen, to Savonarola only true prophets could express themselves in verses, because their poetry comes directly from the divine and is thus devoid of any impurity.

Ficino, too, saw himself as a prophet. He was deeply convinced that his mission of reviving Neoplatonic wisdom was divinely inspired and meant to lead to the *renovatio* of the spirituality of his time.⁵⁴⁸ He also considered that Florence was the place where the renovation of the Church could be achieved through a return to the spirituality of the first Christians (Jesus and Paul), the Platonists and the ‘real’ Aristotelians (that is the Neoplatonic interpreters of Aristotle).⁵⁴⁹ Ficino’s doctrine of revealed prophetic knowledge, however, celebrated both Christian and pagan oracles as ‘true’ prophets. In Book XIII of his *Platonic Theology*, written

⁵⁴⁶ See Maude Vanhaelen, “Ficino’s Commentary on St Paul’s First Epistle to the Romans (1497): An Anti-Savonarolan Reading of Vision and Prophecy,” in *The Rebirth of Platonic Theology: Proceedings of a Conference Held at the Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies (Villa I Tatti) and the Istituto Nazionale Di Studi Sul Rinascimento (Florence, 26-27 April 2007): For Michael J.B. Allen*, ed. James Hankins and Fabrizio Meroi, Villa I Tatti / the Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, 30 (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 2013). 219.

⁵⁴⁷ Popkin, “The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle.” 21.

⁵⁴⁸ Vanhaelen, “Ficino’s Commentary on St Paul’s First Epistle to the Romans (1497): An Anti-Savonarolan Reading of Vision and Prophecy.” 206-07. On this subject, see Hankins, “Plato in the Italian Renaissance.” 267-359; Michael J. B. Allen, *Synoptic Art: Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1998). 1-49, with reference to Ficino’s letters to Pannonius and Paul of Middleburg; Cesare Vasoli, “Il Mito Dei ‘Prisci Theologi’ Come Ideologia Della ‘Renovatio,’” in *Quasi Sit Deus: Studi Su Marsilio Ficino*, ed. Cesare Vasoli (Lecce: Conte, 1999). 11-50.

⁵⁴⁹ Vanhaelen, “Ficino’s Commentary on St Paul’s First Epistle to the Romans (1497): An Anti-Savonarolan Reading of Vision and Prophecy.” 207.

between 1469 and 1474 and published in 1482, Ficino lists Plato and, implicitly, himself among the divinely inspired prophets, Diotima and Socrates, the Sibyls, the Delphi priests as well as the Hebrew prophets, and he is not afraid to underline similarities between the divine rapture of Saint Paul's soul and the frenzies experienced by the philosophers of pagan antiquity.⁵⁵⁰ In the same book, Ficino compares the fire that transported Paul and Elias to heaven, with the fire described by the Magi and the Platonists.⁵⁵¹ Later, in Book XVI, he goes as far as to compare the Neoplatonic rituals of magic, sacrifice and demonology with the Christian rituals of prayer and fasting, indeed reconsidering Christian rituals in the light of Neoplatonic mysticism.⁵⁵² Ficino, therefore, certainly recognized that divine prophecy was superior to human predictions just like Savonarola. In his line of thought, however, Plato and the Neoplatonists held the same weight as the prophets of the Sacred Scriptures, and their prophetic illumination, erotic ecstasy, alienation and furor, obtained through divine and theurgic rituals (often including poetry and hymn singing)⁵⁵³ were as effective as their Old Testament counterparts, as they all confirmed the

⁵⁵⁰ Marsilio Ficino et al., *Platonic Theology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001). XIII, 2, 8 (IV, pp. 130-131): "Mentes vero divinas illa prae caeteris praesagia indicant, ut in Phaedro vult Plato, quia sine arte et consilio fiunt, qualia sunt quae de Diotima vate et Socrate et Epimenide Plato refert; quae de Sibyllis Varro una cum Platone; quae de Pythiis oraculis historici narrant et philosophi paene omnes confirmant, praesertim Platonici; quae de somniis experiuntur omnes; quae de divinis prophetis tradunt Hebraei."; See also XIII, 2, 6 (IV, p. 128) translated by Maude Vanhaelen in Vanhaelen, "Ficino's Commentary on St Paul's First Epistle to the Romans (1497): An Anti-Savonarolan Reading of Vision and Prophecy." 214-15: "The divine theologian Paul, in the divine abstraction of the soul, ascended to the third heaven of the celestial hierarchies. One day, with God inspiring them, several Galileans too were suddenly transformed from being fishermen into sublime theologians. All antiquity testifies that in times prior to them many priests, inspired by demons, often danced in frenzy and proclaimed marvels." For Ficino's interpretation of St Paul's raptus in Platonic and Chaldaean terms, see Ficino et al., *Platonic Theology*. XIII, 5, 3 (IV, pp. 210-213).

⁵⁵¹ *Platonic Theology*. XIII, 4, 16 (IV, p. 206).

⁵⁵² *Ibid.* XVI, 7, 18 (V, p. 310): "Sed eiusmodi invidorum ambitiosorumque daemonum violentiam expugnari Platonici per philosophiam et sacrificia posse putant, quod Orphici nobis Hymni demonstrant. Christus autem, verus medicus animorum, ieiunio atque oratione hoc fieri praecipit." See also Vanhaelen, "Ficino's Commentary on St Paul's First Epistle to the Romans (1497): An Anti-Savonarolan Reading of Vision and Prophecy." 215.

⁵⁵³ Brian P. Copenhaver, "Iamblichus, Synesius and the Chaldaean Oracles in Marsilio Ficino's *De Vita Libri Tres*: Hermetic Magic or Neoplatonic Magic?," in *Supplementum Festivum: Studies in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, ed. James Hankins, John Monfasani, and Frederick Purnell (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1987). 441-45.

mysteries of what would have become the Catholic Church.⁵⁵⁴ Moreover – and this is quite important in order to understand Savonarola and Gianfrancesco’s rejection of Ficinian Neoplatonism – Ficino rejected Augustine, who had identified all pagan *daimones* with the evil demons of the Bible, and adopted the notion that pagan demons were not necessarily ‘bad spirits’, and that pagan ‘good demons’ were equivalent to Christian angels.⁵⁵⁵

Ficino’s attempt at comparing pagan and Christian prophets was certainly outrageous in the eyes of Gianfrancesco Pico. The passage that we have seen, therefore, is meant to underline that pagan prophets – in Pico’s narrative – were not in contact with God, nor did they foreshadow the reestablished concord that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ would have brought. Their knowledge, together with their art, therefore, had to be considered demonic and treacherous by nature, as it originated from the Devil himself. The only few able to break the silence between humanity and the divine in ancient times, according to Pico, were the prophets of the Scriptures, and no one else. This means that any form of prophecy and sacred poetry – elements that Pico and Savonarola saw as intertwined – cannot exist outside the favor and the influence of the Christian God.

⁵⁵⁴ *Op.*, 962-63 in Vanhaelen, “Ficino’s Commentary on St Paul’s First Epistle to the Romans (1497): An Anti-Savonarolan Reading of Vision and Prophecy.” 214: «Post haec Plato, cum prophetam et sacerdotem divinis occupatum sapientiae humanae longe admodum intervallo praeposuisset, describit mentem quandam divino prorsus amore flagrantem ecstasimque amatoriam patientem atque furorem alienationemque huiusmodi, non solum humanae prudentiae, sed divinis etiam muneribus omnibus anteponit. Vbi plane comprobatur apostolicum illud: Maior horum charitas. Mitti ante Prophetas a Deo et qua ratione mittantur, Avicenna etiam in libro divinorum multis rationibus Platone consentit»; *Op.*, 963-64 in *ibid.* 211: “Contuli heri tecum et cum genero tuo Gerardo Ianfilatio pro viro, quid in Philebo Plato de amicis Dei sentiat, vel inimicis. Placuit ergo tibi ut ipsa verba Platonis ad te scriberem, et quae ibidem sit expositio nostra. Accipe igitur atque lege feliciter. Verba Platonis haec sunt. Vir iustus et pius et probus, nonne Deo amicus est, iniustus autem et improbus, inimicus? Est profecto. Plurima quidem spe unusquisque ducitur. Interiores enim sermones quidam sunt in unoquoque nostrum, quos et opiniones et spes nominare solemus, sunt quietiam phantasmata picta. Nam cuique licet fingere se cumulum auri maximum possidere oblectamentisque variis abundantem, omni suavitate perfundi. Annon dicendum opiniones imaginationesque eiusmodi bonis viris quia Deo amici sunt, veras frequenter evadere, malis autem saepe numero falsas? Dicendum certe. Pravis utique viris oblectationes quaedam adsunt, saepe confictae ac denique falsae, falsis igitur voluptatibus pravi saepe numero gestiunt, homines autem boni gaudiis semper veris aluntur. Hactenus Plato.”

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 216. See also Allen, *Synoptic Art: Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation*. 125-147; Maude Vanhaelen, “L’entreprise De Traduction Et D’exégèse De Ficino Dan Les Années 1486 - 1489: Démons Et Prophétie à L’aube De L’ère Savonarolienne,” *Hvmanistica*. 5, no. 1 (2011). 126-128.

12. *Silencing the Pagan World*

If the first hymn introduces the matter of pagan religion and culture, the second hymn of the tryptic, dedicated to the figure of Jesus Christ, gives us an even better picture of pagan antiquity. Here, in a very long set of verses, Pico creates a compelling dystopian vision of ancient times, demonstrating a surprising knowledge of pagan mythologies. “A thousand portents of gods by human form antiquity, blind, had already introduced into the wicked temples of Europe,” writes Pico, describing the world before the coming of the Messiah, “a thousand statues of savage beasts [antiquity] had built in the arid Libya, and a thousand other altars of sovereigns for the regions of Asia, deceived beyond measure by a frenetic zeal.”⁵⁵⁶ In this long section of the poem, Pico laments the state of things before the Revelation: men-like deities were worshiped in Europe, beast-shaped gods in North Africa, Asian peoples deified powerful men. Pico’s description begins with the Olympian creed, then he proceeds outlining the Egyptian religion, Orphic devotion, Roman sacrifices, the cult of Baal, and many others:

Thus, with other rituals, vain superstition corrupted other regions. In fact, it made sacred solemn mockeries of praise and celebrated honors of heroes for those wretched mortals who founded cities with the laws, with violence erected walls and with various tricks guided the docile ingenuity of the people. For them, [superstition] instituted temples, fires, altars, deceived by a malicious demon, who, bend with deceit the astonished humanity, easily reduced it to his dominion.⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁶ Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani Principis: Concordiaequae Comitum Hymni Heroici Tres Ad Sanctissimam Trinitatem: Ad Christum: Et Ad Virginem Mariam*. II, 44-48: “Mille per Europam divuum portenta nefandis / intulerat templis multum occaecata vetustas. / Mille per arentem Libyam simulacra ferarum: / milleque per tractus Asiae delubra potentum / struxerat: insano nimium delusa favore.”

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid. II, 83-91: “Sic alias aliis foedavit ritibus oras / vana superstitio. Nam, qui iam legibus urbes / fundarunt: rigido straverunt moenia bello / et varias docile ingenium duxere per artes / his quondam miseris mortalibus inclyta laudum / commenta: et claros divuum sacravit honores. / Ollis templa: focos: aras: delusa maligno / daemone constituit: falsis qui vocibus orbem / attonitum flectens facile in sua iura redegit.”

Despite its apparent overwhelming power over the world, according to Pico, the Devil's empire⁵⁵⁸ had to finally end. The silence between men and God must be broken and true religion finally restored. In order to do this, God had to send his son as a sacrifice for humanity's sins and thus restore the original covenant. To Pico, the birth of Jesus Christ marks the beginning of the end for the ancient pagan religions. The first symptoms of the demons' loss of power in the material world is the decadence of their temples, their prophets, and their hymns. "You would have seen these temples, these cults, these oracles of the gods collapse," he writes, "at the advent of Christ, and fall in ruin. The Pythian priestess sang no song, [and] the Delphic oracles sung by the lying Phoebus too stayed silent when the sacred childbirth of the propitious Virgin scattered a bright light in the world: a light that would have repelled the Tartarean shadows."⁵⁵⁹ According to the poet, the short interregnum between Christ and the gods lasted until his final sacrifice. After that, the ancient gods flew into the dark recesses of the caves, incapable of communicating with humans anymore. Thanks to the apostles' preachings, moreover, the deities left their last temples in ruin and, in a long procession, fled, banished to the underworld.⁵⁶⁰

Old Andrew scattered the voluble Achaeans. Apollo from Patara, fearing an encounter with him, flew away, submitted the eminent lands of Peloponnesus, and plunged head

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid. II, 291.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani Principis Concordiæque Comitum Hymni Heroici Tres, Ad Sanctissimam Trinitatem, Ad Christum, & Ad Virginem Mariam.* II 157-63: "Haec templa: hos cultus: atque haec oracula divuum / adventu Christi ruere: et collapsa referri / aspiceres. Nullos recinebat Pythia cantus, / delphica vaniloqui cantata oracula Phoebi / conticuere prius quam sacrum virginis almae / clara puerperium sparsisset lumina mundo: / lumina tartareas propulsatura tenebras."

⁵⁶⁰ *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani Principis: Concordiæque Comitum Hymni Heroici Tres Ad Sanctissimam Trinitatem: Ad Christum: Et Ad Virginem Mariam.* II 175-85: "Sed postquam superas victor remeravit ad arces morte triumphata: [...]. Extemplo fremuere dei: siluitque nefastus spirituum cantus: furisque recessit ab antris. At querulae voces tacitumque per avia murmur hinc exaudiri passim: mox agmine facto templa reliquerunt: et victo profinus orbe terga dedere feri: vacuumque per aera fusi: et victi infernas subito petiere latebras." [But after the conqueror returned to the citadel above triumphing over death [...] immediately the gods roared, and the nefarious chant of the spirits grew quiet and receded from the dark caverns. But one could still hear mournful voices and a secret whispering in the wilderness. Soon, the gods left the temples in a flock, and at once surrendered their backs to the conquered world, scattered in the air and the void, and defeated immediately pointed at the hidden recesses of the underworld.]

first into the infernal chasm, knocking over the cart in the cloven summit of Parnassus and unyoking the vain horses from the false helm. Even Bacchus, throwing away the trembling Ivy from the sweating forehead, falling head first from the summit of mount Nysa reached the dreadful hollows of the deep Styx. [...] The nine Muses ran away through the wilds, and Pan, god of Arcadia, abandoning the woods clouded by a dreadful rust-colored dust, crying, relinquished the deep forest of Mount Lykaion accompanied by a devoted dancing procession of Naiads and Dryads, and by the hounds of Trivia. And even Cyprian Venus, matron of luxury, mother of passions, torn her hair to pieces, sailed to Lethe with her shell covered with foam. Falling from the ancient seat of Capitolium, Jupiter, accompanied by a crowd of gods, reached the horrible darkness, pushed away from the light.⁵⁶¹

This passage, like the others celebrating the fall of the pagan gods into hell, has a meaning that goes beyond its suggestive beauty. To Pico, in fact, remembering the end of paganism through the progressive conversion of the peoples of Europe had to serve as a warning for those who thought that Christian faith could be declined through a pagan lexicon. In the paragraphs above, we have seen how Pico's dystopian vision of antiquity largely depended on narratives of a world conquered by the devil, like that of Saint Paul. The same can be said about the author's apparent optimism toward the overwhelming victory of Christianity over the Devil. Since the Book of Revelation clearly states that the struggle with the Devil will be decided with the second coming of Christ and the Last Judgement, to Pico, as well as to the ancient Christian apologists he often quotes, the war against the demons remains a central, and yet delicate issue.⁵⁶² The Evangelists

⁵⁶¹ Ibid. 503-23: "Tumque senex varios Andreas fudit Achaeos / Cuius congressum metuens pataraeus Apollo / aufugit Pelopisque insignes nomine terras / cessit et inferno praeceps se condidit antro / Parnasi bifido prosternens culmine plastrum / Et ficto abiungens vanos temone iugales. / Et Bacchus tremulos madida de fronte corymbos / Abiiciens caelso praeceps de vertice Nysae / Antra petit Stygii iam formidata profundi. / Amphitryonidae furibunda licentia Thebas / Liquit et Eurystheis iussis graviora subivit. / Atque novem subito fugere per avia Musae. / Et caligantes dira ferrugine lucos / Pan deus Arcadiae fugiens, nemora alta Lycaei / Moerens, concessit nymphis comitatus honoro et / Naiadum Dryadumque choro Triviaeque molossis. / Quin et luxuriae nutrix et mater amorum / Dilaniata comas spumanti Cypria concha / Appulit ad Lethem. Capitoli sede vetusta / Iupiter excedens turba comitante deorum / Horrendas petiit luce impellente tenebras."

⁵⁶² In hindsight, I believe Pico could be interpreting the present through the lens of Joachimite prophecy. This matter, however, would deserve a chapter on its own. On this subject, see Richard Kenneth Emmerson and Ronald B. Herzman, *The Apocalyptic Imagination in Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992). See also Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979). 158-68; Marjorie Reeves, *Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future: A Medieval Study in Historical Thinking* (Stroud: Sutton Pub., 1999). Chapter four and five.

and the Church Fathers were often uncertain about it. For many of them, as for Pico, it seems that the crucifixion of Jesus has already effectively overthrown Satan. In John 12:31, for example, Jesus, near death, says, “now shall the prince of this world be cast out.” In John 16:1,1 he states, “the prince of this world is judged.” Paul too believes that through his death, Jesus destroyed the power of the Devil.⁵⁶³ However, in other passages of his work, Satan is depicted as fully active.⁵⁶⁴ Origen sees the power of Satan and his servants as diminishing due to the decline of the ancient religions and the rise of Christianity.⁵⁶⁵ Yet, this optimistic narrative is often counterbalanced by the constant threat of the devil’s temptations, an aspect that will develop in medieval times until it becomes a paranoid race against an all-powerful entity.⁵⁶⁶ Since Satan’s greatest offence, for the Church Fathers, laid in the persistence of pagan superstition,⁵⁶⁷ all Christians had to be aware of the lures of pagan worship until the end of times. This point is so vital in Pico’s poetic argument, that it often becomes the main reason that brought about Christ’s sacrifice.

So that the grand magus may stay silent, and the descendant of Apollo may despair, unable to revive Glaucus with tawny gold, found guilty for his faults, you [Christ] suffered the cruel whip lashes, the slapping, the mockery, the laughter, the insult, the thorns; crucified with nails, pierced through the cross you hanged until the bitter suffering shattered the link of sweet life.⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶³ Hebrews 2:14: “quia ergo pueri communicaverunt sanguini et carni et ipse similiter participavit hisdem ut per mortem destrueret eum qui habebat mortis imperium id est diabolus” [Therefore because the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner hath been partaker of the same: that, through death, he might destroy him who had the empire of death, that is to say, the devil]

⁵⁶⁴ See I Peter 5:8: “sobrii estote vigilate quia adversarius vester diabolus tamquam leo rugiens circuit quaerens quem devoret” [Be sober and watch: because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour.]

⁵⁶⁵ Origen, *Homilia in librum Jesu Nave, XV* in Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom*. 23.

⁵⁶⁶ See *ibid.* 24-34.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 23.

⁵⁶⁸ Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani Principis: Concordiaequae Comitum Hymni Heroici Tres Ad Sanctissimam Trinitatem: Ad Christum: Et Ad Virginem Mariam*. 276-81: “Ut sileat magus antistes et Apolline cretus / Dispereat, fulvo nec Glaucou suscitetur auro, / Pro meritis damna expertus, crudelia suffers / Flagra, alapas, lusus, risus, opprobria, sentes, / Suffixus clavis, transfixo stipite pendes / Et dulcis vitae nexus dirumpit amaror.”

The symbolism contained in this passage is quite evident. In the first verse Pico merges ‘*magus*,’ a word that incorporates astrologers as well as magic users, with ‘*antistes*,’ which is the high priest, and the mouthpiece of the gods. In combining these two terms, therefore, the author aims to attack those who, in his time, practiced astrology and/or magic, and believed that they understood the will of the Christian God through unorthodox practices like neoplatonic rituals, including music and hymn singing. It is not a case, in fact, if Pico also refers to a certain descendant of Apollo, apt to revive Glaucus, the prophetic sea-god of the Greek pantheon. This character, I argue, is most certainly Nicander of Colophon (2nd century BC), Greek poet, physician and grammarian, born near Colophon, where his family held the hereditary priesthood of Apollo.⁵⁶⁹ Nicander’s citations preserved by Athenaeus (active between the end of the 2nd and the beginning of the 3rd century AD) mention Glaucus in more than a passage,⁵⁷⁰ and his passion for medicine and pharmacology is well demonstrated by his surviving poems *Theriaca* and *Alexipharmaca*.⁵⁷¹ We have already seen that Nicander was among the authors that Pico mentions in his notes to the ancient gods, which means he at least had a superficial knowledge of the author and his writings. Poet, healer, and high priest of Apollo, Nicander very well represents everything that Pico despised in the pagan revival of his time. Further, his attempted reawakening of Glaucus, I argue, directly mirrors the attempt of another “doctor of the soul” – namely Ficino – to revive pagan prophecy through the means of poetry. According to Pico, just as Christ had managed to silence the pagan high priests of antiquity, the author is attempting to

⁵⁶⁹ See John Scarborough, “Nicander,” in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. Simon Hornblower, Antony Spawforth, and Esther Eidinow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): “Nicander says he was ‘nurtured by the snow-white city of Claros’ (*Theriaca* 958), and that he lives among ‘the tripods of Apollo in Claros’ (*Alexipharmaca* 11), indicating that he was probably a priest of Apollo at Claros.”

⁵⁷⁰ Athenaios and S. Douglas Olson, *The Deipnosophistae*, Loeb Classical Library Edition (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1929). 7. 294C (pp. 328 - 333).

⁵⁷¹ Scarborough, “Nicander.”

prevent the efforts of a newly born caste of paganizing *vates*, reviving their gods with poetry and rituals.

The Neoplatonic poets, however, were not the only victims of Pico's attack against pagan antiquity contained in his second hymn. The epic description of St. Peter's conversion of Rome, in fact, sees the apostle fighting against the powers of astrology and the Jewish Kabbalah:

Peter tamed the lands of Bythinia, and subjugated even Rome the superb, compelling it to obey your law. Against him neither the vast Roman phalanxes – illustrious for their ranks – nor the strength or the rich of the powerful, nor human forces or the Demon's perverted tricks could stand. Neither the ancient sephirothic sect of the Kabbalah, nor the treacherous zodiacal signs that the ancient constructed – celestial signs not made, but made up – resisted.⁵⁷²

In Gianfrancesco's mind, his uncle Giovanni Pico's syncretistic attempt of harmonization of the Kabbalah with Christian theology was a condemnable error.⁵⁷³ The same Kabbalah that drew him close to Reuchlin during his early intellectual activity was now seen as one of the forces fighting against the victory of Christianity. Pico's reaction against the cult of the Sephirot, however, seems mild in comparison to his renovated attack on astrology, and especially on

⁵⁷² Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani Principis: Concordiaequae Comitum Hymni Heroici Tres Ad Sanctissimam Trinitatem: Ad Christum: Et Ad Virginem Mariam*. Vv. 526-34: "[...] Bithynnaeque rura / Perdomuit Petrus, Romae quoque frena superbae / imposuit, legique tuae parere coegit. / Cui non multifido restant romanae phalanges / Ordine conspicuae non vis aut gaza potentum / Humanae aut vires perversi aut Daemonis astus. / Non Cabalae servata diu Sephirotica turba / Non quae struxerunt fallacia signa profani / Signa orbis non facta quidem sed ficta resistunt."

⁵⁷³ Pico's Christian Kabbalah has been subject of extensive analysis during the last decades. For further information on the subject, see Kocku Von Stuckrad, "Christian Kabbalah and Anti-Jewish Polemics: Pico in Context," in *Polemical Encounters: Esoteric Discourse and Its Others*, ed. Olav Hammer and Kocku von Stuckrad (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007).; Bernard McGinn, "Cabalists and Christians: Reflections on Cabala in Medieval and Renaissance Thought," in *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews: From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. Richard H. Popkin and Gordon M. Weiner (Dordrecht; Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994). 11-34; William G. Craven, *Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola: Symbol of His Age: Modern Interpretations of a Renaissance Philosopher*, *Travaux D'humanisme Et Renaissance* (Geneve: Librairie Droz, 1981). Especially chapter 5 and 6; Joseph Dan, *Kabbalah* (New York: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2007). 61-70; Sheila J. Rabin, "Pico on Magic and Astrology," in *Pico Della Mirandola: New Essays*, ed. M. V. Dougherty (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). 152-79; Brian Ogren, *Renaissance and Rebirth: Reincarnation in Early Modern Italian Kabbalah* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2009). 212-38.

Christian astrology. In the last chapter we have seen how Gianfrancesco, in his *Staurostichon*, attempted to debunk astrology to win the trust and attempt the conversion of Emperor Maximilian I. Such systematic attacks continue in his hymns, this time directed toward an Italian readership. Just as in his previous poem, here he returns to the myth of Babylon as the cradle of astrology. This time, however, astrology seems to be linked directly to Manicheism and its devotion to the stars:⁵⁷⁴

May the son of Picenum be forever silent, he who invented that Christ in his stable was poured in celestial light because the Capricorn – which, filthy, never abhors stables – gazed upon him from its far house.⁵⁷⁵ It was not Capricorn to put humble poverty united with the Thundering one in a common cradle full of hay. May the Babylonian mob of the

⁵⁷⁴ See John F. Matthews, “Manichaeism,” in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. Simon Hornblower, Antony Spawforth, and Esther Eidinow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): “A developed form of Gnosticism founded by the Syriac-speaking Babylonian Mani (AD 216–76). At first influenced by a baptismal Gnostic sect such as the Mandaeans (some of whose hymns the Manichees used), he left the sect at the age of 24, after two visions convinced him that he was a manifestation of the Paraclete promised by Jesus. After visiting India, he returned to the Sasanid empire, where he enjoyed friendly relations with the Sasanian royal family and aristocracy including King Sapor I; but Mazdean opposition under Bahram I led to his execution. A systematic catechism (*Kephalaia*), preserved in Coptic, was edited in his name. His doctrine was a religion of redemption in which dualistic myth provided a rationale for an ascetic ethic. A precosmic invasion of the realm of light by the forces of darkness had resulted in the present intermingling of good and evil, the divine substance being imprisoned in matter. In Jesus the Son of God came to save his own soul, lost in Adam. The Elect, to whom all worldly occupations and possessions were forbidden, participated in redemption, and were destined for deliverance from transmigration. The community also included an inferior order of Hearers who by keeping simple moral rules could hope for rebirth as one of the Elect. Proscribed in the Roman empire as a subversive foreign cult by Diocletian (whose edict is preserved) and later emperors, it was attacked by Neoplatonists (Alexander of Lycopolis c.300, Simplicius c.540) and by Christians (Hegemonius, Titus of Bostra, Serapion of Thmuis, Ephraem Syrus, Epiphanius, Augustine). Nevertheless, and despite repeated suppression by imperial legislation, it spread rapidly in the west. Augustine, whose *Confessions* are a prime document of Manichaeism in the Roman empire, was a Hearer for nine years. Eastwards, the advent of Islam drove it across central Asia to survive in China till the 14th cent. Important texts and paintings were found (1895–1912) at Turfan in Chinese Turkestan, and many Coptic papyri in Egypt in 1933. In the medieval west the legacy of Manichaeism passed to the Paulicians and Bogomils. Significant new material on the early religious experience of Mani, including his break with the baptismal sectarians and his first missionary journeys, is provided by the account of his life in Greek in the so-called Cologne Mani-Codex, published in 1970.” For a thorough account of the intricacies of this fascinating religion see Michel Tardieu, *Manichaeism* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2008). See also Geo Widengren, *Mani and Manichaeism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965). Recent accounts on the subject can be found in John Kevin Coyle, *Manichaeism and Its Legacy* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2009); Manichaeism International Conference on and Jason BeDuhn, “New Light on Manichaeism: Papers from the Sixth International Congress on Manichaeism, Organized by the International Association of Manichaeism Studies,” (2009).

⁵⁷⁵ This section of the passage refers to the Medieval astrologer Cecco d’Ascoli (hence, Picenum), who casted a natal chart for Christ and ended up burned at the stake. See Anna Maria Partini and Vincenzo Nestler, *Cecco D’ascoli; Un Poeta Occultista Medievale* (Roma: Edizioni mediterranee, 1979). See also Mario Alessandrini, *Cecco D’ascoli* ([Roma: G. Casini, 1955).

nefarious augur be forever silent. May Mani be silent under the eternal burden, and so anyone else who belches that sidereal conjunctions, Saturnine rotations, or the stars sitting on the ninth sky move in a distant path.⁵⁷⁶

Bringing together medieval and ancient astrologers in some kind of sect or cultish conspiracy, Pico's attack traces the origin of this cult to another 'pagan' prophet, Mani (c. 216–274 AD), founder of Manichaeism, a gnostic religion that in late antiquity found itself in competition with Christianity, Neoplatonism, Mithraism and other, more traditional forms of cult. In this context, however, the author seems to refer to Mani as a gnostic prophet-astrologer in charge of the Babylonian astrological tradition. Pico's knowledge on the subject matter is most certainly derived from St. Augustine's take on Manichaeism. The Manicheans, according to the theologian, could afford to be indulgent towards astrology, at least with regards the supposed beneficent influence of heavenly bodies upon human lives. "The books of the Manichees are indeed full of lengthy fables about the heaven and the stars and the sun and the moon," states Augustine in his *Confessions* (5. 7. 12).⁵⁷⁷ As far as celestial phenomena were concerned, however, Augustine is clear in stating that his of the main problems with Manichean enlightenment is that they/it were/was not explained through a pondered system, but as a host of divine beings, of which a true believer had to be convinced of their real physical existence.⁵⁷⁸ It is safe to say, however, that astronomy was not one of the Manicheans' strong suits, as their inability to predict lunar phases and eclipses was one of the main reasons that brought Augustine

⁵⁷⁶ Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani Principis: Concordiaequae Comitum Hymni Heroici Tres Ad Sanctissimam Trinitatem: Ad Christum: Et Ad Virginem Mariam*. Vv. 656-67: "Aeternum sileat piceni ruris alumnus / qui stabulo fustum caelesti lumine Christum / commentus: quoniam tunc prospectaret ab ima / aede caper: stabulis qui nunquam foedus abhorret. / Paupertas humilis summo coniuncta Tonanti / non caper in vili posuit cunabula foeno. / Aeternum sileat Babylonica turba nefandi / augurii: sileat aeterno pondere Manes: / illos nec quisquam sociata aut sydera: sive / Saturni exilia: aut nono sidentia caelo / lumina: longinquo movisse a limite iactet."

⁵⁷⁷ See Augustine and Mark Vessey, "Confessions," (2007).

⁵⁷⁸ Leo Charles Ferrari, "Astronomy and Augustine's Break with the Manichees," *Revue des études augustiniennes* 19 (1973). 270.

to doubt their teachings.⁵⁷⁹ In this case, Pico is possibly referring to Augustine's humbling realization that as a Manichean he had been worshipping heavenly bodies, but these bodies were themselves subservient to the calculations and predictions of the astronomers.⁵⁸⁰ However, I argue, Pico's use of Manichaeism is not necessarily an attempt to properly reconstruct Manichean theology, but rather an explicit attack against those philosophers who believed the stars to be celestial entities acting as intermediaries between humanity and God. In other words, Ficino's newly rediscovered Neoplatonic *daimones*. The use of the city of Babylon, here, is at least twofold, as it indicates the birthplace of Mani, and the Augustinian and Savonarolan symbol of moral corruption and decay.

A similar discourse can be made about the medieval Christian astrologer from southern Italy, Cecco d'Ascoli, and his attempt to explain the birth of Christ through the theory of Great Conjunctions already denounced in his *Staurostichon*. On this subject, the second hymn also tackles the cult of the magi, revamped, once again, by Marsilio Ficino. References to the magi, whose veneration of the infant Christ is recorded in the second chapter of the gospel of Matthew (2. 1-12), are frequent in the writings of the Florentine philosopher, especially in his letters.⁵⁸¹ The clearest expressions of his interest and faith in the Magi can be found in the *Apologia*, accounting for the more magical elements in the *De vita*, and in a homily on the interpretation of the star that guided the Wise Men.⁵⁸² That sermon, *De stella magorum*, deeply shaped the perception and treatment of the Magi not only in the Neoplatonic tradition of the Renaissance but

⁵⁷⁹ Augustine and Vessey, "Confessions." 5.7.12. See also Tim Hegedus, "Early Christianity and Ancient Astrology," (2007). 47-49.

⁵⁸⁰ Ferrari, "Astronomy and Augustine's Break with the Manichees." 271.

⁵⁸¹ Stephen M. Buhler, "Marsilio Ficino's De Stella Magorum and Renaissance Views of the Magi," *Renaissance Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (1990). 348.

⁵⁸² For the mention of the magi in Ficino's *Apologia*, see Ficino and Kristeller, *Opera Omnia*. 572-74. See also Buhler, "Marsilio Ficino's De Stella Magorum and Renaissance Views of the Magi." 348.

in broader Christian and literary traditions as well.⁵⁸³ In Ficino's presentation, the Magi are active participants in the *prisca theologia*, the body of knowledge and practice that was supposed to exist as a parallel revelation obtained by the gentiles before the coming of Christ; something that, as we have seen, went diametrically against Savonarola and Pico's Christian exclusivism. To Ficino, the Magi are a fundamental figure for his syncretistic narrative of the past. Being gentiles guided by the stars toward the birthplace of Jesus, they were the living justification of the idea that even non-Christian individuals and practices could have been worthy inheritors, as well as direct recipients, of some awareness of the truly divine. As we have already seen, Ficino deemed pagan seers as worthy as biblical prophets: Hermes Trismegistus and Zoroaster were sometimes regarded as comparable to Moses, if not as pupils of Moses himself. The same goes for their supposed philosophic progeny, from Orpheus to Pythagoras to Plato, who were often compared with other Old Testament prophets. In the examples of the Christian age, Ficino elegantly compares the Magi, three pagan astrologers, with Simeon and Anna, two of Judaea's earliest witnesses of the Messiah's arrival. Insofar, as Stephen M. Buhler righteously affirms, Ficino

[...] reveres the Magi as validators of the gentile philosophic tradition in which they participated; for him, they appear in the gospel not only as kings who represented the other nations who would receive the benefits of the Incarnation and Redemption, but as astrologers who knew the teachings of pagan wisdom and who practiced their art in accordance with them.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸³ In his study of the Jesuits' attitudes toward the Magi D. P. Walker suggests how certain directions taken in Ficino's accounts persist in subsequent perceptions and treatments of the Magi and the "good astrology of the Patriarchs." D. P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology; Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1972). 226. As Buhler clearly demonstrates in his 1990 article on the Magi, Ficino's *De stella magorum*, along with some of Ficino's other observations on the Magi, was widely known throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and was frequently cited. See Buhler, "Marsilio Ficino's *De Stella Magorum* and Renaissance Views of the Magi." 351.

⁵⁸⁴ "Marsilio Ficino's *De Stella Magorum* and Renaissance Views of the Magi." 348-49.

In these areas of concern, Ficino's celebrations of both the Magi's faith and their astrological skill carried considerable authority not only in Florence, but in the European courts as well.

The figure of the Magi was most certainly a complicated issue for Gianfrancesco Pico, because their benign presence is recorded in one of the gospels, therefore a direct condemnation of the Wise Men could not be achieved without admitting that the source itself was faulty. Pico's strategy on this subject is quite brilliant, as he removes the agency of the astrological instruments that Magi used to know the coordinates to the birth of the Messiah, and restores the preeminence of divine prophecy – a fundamental tenet of Savonarolan belief – under the guise of divine intervention:

What guided the mages from the sky were not comets, which their tail is said to bring ruin to wretched people. He who did not know the star of Edom was carried on the right footpath, and lead the Wise Kings to the crib of the Lord in the Nabatean region. Soon he stopped, pointing at the sleeping prince's abode and, performed his duty, he disappeared into the light clouds.⁵⁸⁵

In his recounting of the arrival of the Wise Men, therefore, Pico transforms the falling star of the Gospel of Matthew into a shepherd/angel, directing the magi towards their destination.⁵⁸⁶ Their arrival to the scene of the nativity, therefore, had nothing to do with their faulty astrological calculations, but was the result of a divine vision capable of reconciling the presence of pagan astrologers in the nativity scene. “The prophets saw all this, inspired by a divine light,” he states in the next verse, in order to re-establish the idea that the only true form of prediction lies in

⁵⁸⁵ Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani Principis: Concordiaequae Comitum Hymni Heroici Tres Ad Sanctissimam Trinitatem: Ad Christum: Et Ad Virginem Mariam*. 672-78: “Non qui multifidos rutilanti vertice crines / exitio fertur miseris afferre cometes / duxit ab orbe magos: quem non novisset Idume / Sydus in recto delatum tramite: reges / ad praesepe dei Nabataeo a littore vexit: / mox stetit ostentans recubantis principis aedem: / inque leves abiit perfuncto munere nubes.”

⁵⁸⁶ In the third hymn Pico re-examines the arrival of the Magi, and returns to the original story found in the Gospel of Matthew. The Magi here are simply “sydere ductos” [guided by a star]. The situation, however, is partially different, because at this point he is examining some sort of fresco. See *ibid.* 73.

divine inspiration. Thus confirming his Savonarolan faith, in spite of all the arcane arts of his time.⁵⁸⁷

13. Conclusion

This chapter has shown how Pico constructed his vision of antiquity in the religious hymns contained in his 1507 collection *Hymni Heroici Tres*. First, I plunged Pico's poetic production in the lively context of Savonarolan poetry and against the growing tradition of theurgical hymns. Then, we analyzed the sources with which Pico constructed his narrative of Europe's pagan past, his vision of the gods as demons, and the function that Pico's narrative of antiquity - as empire of demons - had in attacking his contemporaries' experimental forms of pietas.

In these last paragraphs, we have also dealt with the celebration of the end of paganism as an attempt to silence the new 'paganizing' poetic, theological, and philosophical trends of Pico's time. The silence of these ancient prophets, after the arrival of the word of Jesus Christ is depicted as a complete triumph of Christianity by Pico. Yet, it hides the fear of a possible inner, and outer, defeat. Pico's attraction to an age of gods, despite his desire to depict it as a time of error and grief, is painfully manifest in every verse of his hymns, in every detailed description of the ancient deities, in every single source employed to apparently debase their existence as divine entities and toss them inside the large cauldron of hell. It is a struggle of a man who desperately wants to believe in the Christian God in spite of his profound fascination for ancient paganism. A desire that Pico recognizes as a juvenile error, and begs the Christian God for his pardon

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid. vv. 679: "Quod spectant supero commoti lumine vates"

And forgive anything that managed to be unfortunately planted in the crooked thorns of young age, and in the – alas – once insidious path, when I sailed toward the port of Circe with the rower of the foolish Athenian and, forgetful of the native land, deprived of reason, I drank from the cups of the Smyrnian vine of Pramnium.⁵⁸⁸

Despite his numerous prayers, as we will see in the next chapter dedicated to the 1513 poem *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis*, Pico will often steer his ship towards Circe. “When God begins to seem impossibly distant,” states Walter Stephens, “Western Christians rediscover angels and demons.”⁵⁸⁹ In an age like that of antiquity, where great deeds were achieved without any apparent help from the Christian God, Pico could not avoid seeing almighty demons. Demons that ruthlessly infested his mind, and those of his contemporaries, with tales of marvelous journeys, miraculous powers, transformations, divinations, doubts. Demons that, in the long run, could eradicate Christianity from the world, bringing with them a second age of error like the one that preceded the arrival of the Messiah. The same demons that, in an even more virulent way, infect Pico’s remarkable, visionary poem *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis*.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid. 722-26: “et quaequae admisit pravis male consita dumis / aetatis tenerae: nimiumque heu lubrica quondam / semita: Circaeos ithacensi remige portus / cum stulti appulimus: Pramniae et pocula vitis / hausimus immemores patriae, rationis egeni”

⁵⁸⁹ Stephens, *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief*. 370.

Chapter 4

“Apud Naharvalos antiquae religionis lucus ostenditur. Praesidet sacerdos muliebri ornatu, sed deos interpretatione Romana Castorem Pollucemque memorant. ea vis numini, nomen Alcis. nulla simulacra, nullum peregrinae superstitionis vestigium; ut fratres tamen, ut iuvenes venerantur [...]”⁵⁹⁰
Tacitus, *Germania*, 43, 4.

Against Venus: The Quest for Beauty and Love in *De Venere et Cupidine Expellendis*

1. Introduction: Burying Demons, Unearthing Gods

When the Emperor Constantine (272 – 337AD) chose to declare Christianity ‘*religio licita*,’ thus initiating a process that would have brought on the spreading of the Christian religion at the expense of all others, the images of the gods dominated the landscape of the entire Roman empire. From Africa to northern Europe, Asia to Spain, the statues of the numerous divinities of the late ancient Roman pantheon populated temples, public fountains, crossroads, and city squares. Constantine himself did not reject pagan statuary, but conversely he embraced its beauty with such passion that he filled his new imperial capital – Constantinople – with divine effigies.⁵⁹¹ This would not come as a surprise, as in Constantine’s empire Christians were still a

⁵⁹⁰ Tacitus, *Germania*, 43, 4: “In the territory of the Naharvali on is shown a grove, hallowed from ancient times. The presiding priest dresses like a woman; according to the Roman *interpretation* they speak of the gods as Castor and Pollux. That is their *vis*, their name is Alci. There are no images, there is no trace of foreign cult, but they are worshipped as young men and as brothers.” Transl. by Maurizio Bettini in Maurizio Bettini, “Interpreting the Gods: Divinities ‘in Translation’ between the Romans and the Others,” (McGill University 2016).

⁵⁹¹ Barbara Graziosi, *The Gods of Olympus: A History* (2013). 158.

minority.⁵⁹² Most of its citizens still worshipped the ancient gods, thus welcoming their effigies in the public as well as in the private sphere.⁵⁹³ It was only gradually, with the Christian authorities' suppression of pagan cults and the increasing conversion of imperial citizens, that the people started to feel discomfort and resentment towards the effigies of the pagan gods.⁵⁹⁴ Classical art began to be considered as the symbol of an unholy cult that – according to Paul – “sacrificed to demons, and not to God.”⁵⁹⁵

Following the Bible's admonitions, pagan statues and temples were now being destroyed all over the Christianized Roman empire, for fear of their demonic influence.⁵⁹⁶ In 402 AD, for example, Bishop Porphyry of Gaza (347 – 420 AD) confronted a nude figure of Venus/Aphrodite with a mob of believers bearing crosses. According to Marcus Diaconus, “the demon who inhabited the statue, being unable to contemplate the terrible sign, departed from the marble with great tumult, and, as he did so, threw the statue down and broke it into many

⁵⁹² Even if there is little evidence on it, historians generally claim that Christians represented between 8 and 12 percent of the population by the year 300; see Ramsay MacMullen, “The Second Church: Popular Christianity A.D. 200-400,” (2009). 102 n. 18.

⁵⁹³ Graziosi, *The Gods of Olympus: A History*. 161.

⁵⁹⁴ I am referring especially to the persecution of paganism happened under Theodosius, which begun in 381 AD. Already in the 380s, as Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, Theodosius I confirmed Constantine's ban on pagan sacrifice, outlawed haruspicy with death penalty, pioneered the criminalization of magistrates who did not enforce anti-pagan laws, disbanded many pagan associations and destroyed pagan temples. Between 389 and 391 he declared the “Theodosian decrees,” which established a practical ban on paganism. Visits to shrines and temples were forbidden, the remaining pagan holidays abolished, the sacred fire in the Temple of Vesta in the Roman Forum smothered, the Vestal Virgins dismissed, auspices and witchcraft practitioners severely punished. In 392 he became Emperor, the last Emperor of the whole empire. From this moment until the end of his reign in 395, while pagans remained outspoken in their demands for tolerance and forbearance, he allowed and/or participated in the destruction of many temples, shrines, holy sites, images and objects of piety throughout the empire. He issued a comprehensive law that prohibited any public non-Christian ceremony. See Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire: (A.D. 100-400)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984). 55-56, 76-77, 97-101.

⁵⁹⁵ Corinthians 10:20.

⁵⁹⁶ See, for example, Exodus 34:12-14: “Watch yourself that you make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land into which you are going, or it will become a snare in your midst. But rather, you are to tear down their altars and smash their sacred pillars and cut down their Asherim [cult objects related to the worship of the fertility goddess Asherah, the consort of the god Ba'al] – for you shall not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.”

pieces.”⁵⁹⁷ The recently converted Christian empire, in fact, had trouble recognizing pagan imagery and architecture simply as beautiful objects of the past. To their eyes, the sacred spaces and the images of their pagan fathers and/or forefathers still brimmed with some powerful *vis*, an evil force that needed to be cast out in order to truly enforce the cult of Christ. For centuries, Christian preachers wandered the European countryside to destroy the ancient temples and erect new ones in their place. Few statues were spared by relocating them from their shrines into urban public spaces. Many were mangled, mutilated or destroyed altogether. However, as Cyril Mango writes:

[...] Many statues survived even so, and the demons within them underwent, as it were, a gradual change of personality. From being actively maleficent, became vaguely sinister; the best thing to do was to leave them alone. Statues became talismans and fulfilled a useful role by averting various mities [sic] and minor nuisances [...]. [Others were] considered as the magical doubles of prominent men or even nations. In short, as the original significance of the statues was forgotten, new “folkloristic” significance arose in the popular.⁵⁹⁸

As such, despite the efforts of many members of the clergy, pre-Christian statuary survived its eradication. Some statues were left to decay gradually, leading “a gloomy secret life on earth in the darkness of old ruined temples or enchanted forests,”⁵⁹⁹ and attracting both the fascination and the scorn of many. Some were kept in secret for familial devotion, progressively becoming objects of practical magic and other forms of popular religion. Others were hidden, carefully buried underground in the fields of their owners.⁶⁰⁰

⁵⁹⁷ Marcus Diaconus and G. F. Hill, *The Life of Porphyry, Bishop of Gaza* (Oxford; Clarendon Press; Toronto: H. Frowde, 1913). 59 – 61.

⁵⁹⁸ Cyril Mango, “Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 17 (1963). 59

⁵⁹⁹ Heinrich Heine et al., *The Works of Heinrich Heine* (London: W. Heinemann, 1891). 337.

⁶⁰⁰ Graziosi, *The Gods of Olympus: A History*. 164-65.

It is in the 15th century that, despite some earlier cases,⁶⁰¹ this buried past began to resurrect in Italian lands as the symbol of an ancient, semi-unknown culture partially lost to the ages. With the advent of the humanist intellectual movement in Italy,⁶⁰² the idea of an antiquity that endured in the Middle Ages began to shake.⁶⁰³ The vestiges of the classical period became the Other, a set of ancient art forms, thought and religious practices with its own fascinating identity. A mirror in which Renaissance intellectuals began to reflect themselves.⁶⁰⁴ It is at this time that Italian humanists like Ciriaco of Ancona began to travel to Greece and Byzantium to see the remnants of classical civilization with fresh eyes.

21 March. Arrived at Delphi. I first saw the best part of the ancient ruins, as well as the most noble and varied walls, the skill of whose architects is quite striking. Then the round Temple of Apollo, collapsed on all sides, and beside it a wondrous amphitheater of great

⁶⁰¹ An early case of this trend can be found in 1345 Siena, when a freshly delved nude figure of Venus leaning on a dolphin had been placed in the center of the town square. See Joscelyn Godwin, *The Pagan Dream of the Renaissance* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002). 4-5.

⁶⁰² Martin McLaughlin, "Humanism," ed. David Robey, *The Oxford Companion to Italian Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2005), //www.oxfordreference.com/10.1093/acref/9780198183327.001.0001/acref-9780198183327-e-1655.: "Humanism was the major intellectual movement of the Italian Renaissance. Its programme was largely initiated by Petrarch, who found in Cicero's *Pro Archia*, a text he discovered in Liège in 1333, the key term *studia humanitatis*, referring to poetry and those subjects that have affinities with it, namely grammar, rhetoric, moral philosophy, and history—a list which is linked both etymologically and in substance to the modern concept of the humanities. In Renaissance Latin the term *humanista* designated one who taught these five subjects, in Latin and often in Greek, and it is on this term that the meaning of the word 'humanism', in its Renaissance sense, is based. Petrarch's and the humanists' preference for these subjects also implied a rejection of those associated with Aristotelian Scholasticism: logic, physics, and metaphysics."

⁶⁰³ Paolo Viti and Gilbert Ouy, "Humanism, Humanists," ed. André Vauchez, *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages* (James Clarke & Co', 2001), //www.oxfordreference.com/10.1093/acref/9780227679319.001.0001/acref-9780227679319-e-1361.: "Two essential factors concurred to the definition of the process of renewal under way: the recovery and re-evaluation of the classical culture of Rome and then Greece: and the certainty that man, with his strength and rationality, was capable of choosing his destiny and his place in the world. These convictions were the hinges of the culture that was set up in antithesis and disharmony with that of the medieval schools. Indeed, a lively polemic developed towards the entire Middle Ages, since to it – understood as a formless period of ignorance lasting from the 600s to the 1200s – the humanists attributed the loss of the memory and use of the letters of ancient Rome, which had disappeared under the rule of ignorant and indifferent barbarians."

⁶⁰⁴ Erwin Panofsky, "Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art," (1972). 112-113: "The 'distance' created by the Renaissance deprived antiquity of its realness. The classical world ceased to be both a possession and a menace. It became instead the object of a passionate nostalgia... The Renaissance came to realize that Pan was dead... The classical past was looked upon, for the first time, as a totality cut off from the present; and, therefore, as an ideal to be longed for instead of a reality to be both utilized and feared. The Middle Ages had left antiquity unburied and alternately galvanized and exorcised its corpse. The Renaissance stood weeping at its grave and tried to resurrect its soul."

stones, with thirty-three steps, and, in the highest citadel of the exalted city below the cliffs, richly adorned with marble steps, the hippodrome six hundred paces long. Then I saw the smashed statues. And most noble inscriptions in Greek and Latin letters, and, both inside and out through the fields, huge marbles and ornate tombs, and rocks graven with marvelous skill. [...] All this I have seen at Delphi, today called 'Castri' by the foolish Greek rabble, utterly ignorant about where Delphi had been.⁶⁰⁵

Thus, antiquity presented itself to the eye of the Renaissance humanist: a binary vision, divided between continuity (Castri) and discontinuity (Delphi). In light of this newfound antiquary interest for classicism, ancient art and architecture became increasingly fashionable.⁶⁰⁶ Objects of this period were now in great demand. Statues and other effigies were sought out, unearthed, and sold like treasures.⁶⁰⁷ Whatever the excavations could not provide was promptly made by contemporary artists, who began to create new forms of imitation and representation of antiquity.⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰⁵ Ciriaco of Ancona, *Epigrammata reperta per Illyricum apud Liburniam* (Rome, 1654), pp. 27, 31: "Ad XII. K. April. Delphos adveni. Ubi nam primum diruta magna ex parte vetusta, atque nobilissima moenia conspexi diversaque architectorum ope conspicua. Exinde collapsum undique rotundum Apollinis Templum, et Amphitheatrum juxta admirandum magnorum lapidum gradibus XXXIII. et in sublimi Civitatis arce altissimis sub rupibus ornatissimum gradibus marmoreis hippodrom. DC. p. longitudinis. Vidi que constractas hinc inde statuas. Epigrammataque tam Graecis quam Latinis litteris nobilissima, ac intus, et extra per agros marmorea ingentia, atque ornatissima sepulchra, rupesque incisas arte mirabili. [...] Haec omnia apud Delphos vidi, quae hodie Castri ab innepto Graecorum vulgo nuncupatur, et ubinam Delphi fuissent, penitus ignorant."

⁶⁰⁶ The consciousness of this rupture is also an innovation brought about by Petrarch; see, for instance, his "Collatio Laureationis" in the analysis by Gerhard Regn and Bernhard Huss, "Petrarch's Rome: The History of the Africa and the Renaissance Project," *MLN* 124, no. 1 (2009).

⁶⁰⁷ See, for example, the letter that Cristoforo Romano sent to Isabella d'Este, great collector of ancient artifacts, regarding the utter difficulty to provide her of new pieces of art due to the extremely high request of the time. The letter can be found in Clifford M. Brown, "Lo Insaziabile Desiderio Nostro De Cose Antique': New Documents on Isabella D'Este's Collection of Antiquities," *Cultural aspects of the Italian Renaissance / ed. by Cecil H. Clough*. (1976).

⁶⁰⁸ The Cardinal and humanist Pietro Bembo has left important evidence of this trend in book II of the *Prose della volgar lingua* (1515 ca.). Here the Venetian writer celebrates the new dignity that the visual arts were regaining in Rome, thanks to the imitation of the classical models. Bembo, in fact, declares that many artists had begun gathering in Rome in order to admire such examples and imitate them to the best of their capacities. See Pietro Bembo in Paola Barocchi, *Scritti D'arte Del Cinquecento* (Milano-Napoli: R. Ricciardi, 1971). 1535: "[Gli artisti] mirano in quegli esempi, e di rassomigliarli col loro arificio procacciando, tanto più sé dovere essere alla loro fatica lodati si credono, quanto essi più alle antiche cose fanno per somiglianza ravvicinare le loro nuove; perciò che sanno e veggono che quelle antiche più alla perfezion dell'arte s'accostano, che le fatte da indi innanzi."

With the revival of pagan aesthetics, however, also came a revived interest in pagan culture and religious practices. The humanist intellectual elite of the time began a process of interpretation of classical and patristic sources on the many aspects of pre-Christian religion and thought, among which the gods of ancient Greece held a prominent place. Thanks to this process, the Olympian deities became objects of comparison with all forms of religion active in the early modern period. Of course, this approach brought with it the necessity for a new reading that could come to terms with the ‘truth’ of Christian revelation. A reading that did not always see the advent of the Christian Church as a positive event, as Lorenzo Ghiberti’s well-known passage from *I commentarii* (1452-1455) demonstrates:

The Christian faith achieved victory in the time of the Emperor Constantine and Pope Sylvester. Idolatry was most stringently persecuted so that all the statues and pictures, noble, and of antique and perfect venerability as they were, were destroyed and rent to pieces. With the statues and pictures were consumed books, commentaries, drawings and the rules by which one could learn such noble and excellent arts. In order to abolish every ancient custom of idolatry it was decreed that all the temples should be white. At this time the most severe penalty was ordered for anyone who made any statue or picture. Thus ended the art of sculpture and painting and all the knowledge been achieved in it. Art came to an end and the temples remained white about six hundred years.⁶⁰⁹

Experts of the past centuries, like Julius von Schlosser and Erwin Panofsky, have drawn attention on the unique feature of this passage. Schlosser saw in Ghiberti’s outspoken disapproval toward the decay of ancient art, the first comprehensive account of the epoch, which the Renaissance

⁶⁰⁹ Translation by Tilmann Buddensieg, “Gregory the Great, the Destroyer of Pagan Idols. The History of a Medieval Legend Concerning the Decline of Ancient Art and Literature,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 28 (1965). 44: “Adunche al tempo di Constantino imperadore et di Silvestro papa sormontò su la fede christiana. Ebbe la ydolatria grandissima persecutione in modo tale, tutte le statue et le picture furon disfatte et lacerate di tanta nobiltà et antica et perfetta dignità et così si consumaron colle statue et picture et vilumi et comentarii et liniamenti et regole davano amaestramento a gloria et egregia et gentile arte. Et poi levare via ogni anticho costume di ydolatria costituirono tutti essere bianchi. In questo tempo ordinarono grandissima pena a chi facesse alcuna statua o alcuna pictura et così finì l’arte statuaria et la pictura et ogni l’arte stettero e templi bianchi circa d’anni 600.”

intellectual began to call the Middle Ages.⁶¹⁰ For Panofsky, Ghiberti is the first humanist to link the disappearance of antique art as an act of deliberate human destruction, implying its possible restoration through an equally deliberate revival.⁶¹¹ In this case, Ghiberti's fervent testimony is important in illustrating the process of re-evaluation of pagan imagery that began with the 15th century Italian humanists. Almost one thousand years after the official Christianization of the Roman Empire, a certain elite of Christian thinkers started asking the same questions that animated many late ancient apologists: who are the gods that the ancients used to worship? How can they be defined in Christian terms? A new metanarrative of the past was taking shape. Once again, the interpretation of the pagan gods became an important topic of intellectual discussion. Many humanists – often acquainted with the concept of *Prisca theologia*⁶¹² – tried to apply an inclusivist approach, granting the deities a positive role in approximating the unreachable idea of the Christian God, thus developing several interesting forms of religious hybridism through the newly-found works of Plato, Plotinus and the Neoplatonic movement of the late ancient period.⁶¹³ Many others, though, chose to follow the example of Paul of Tarsus and opted for an exclusivist approach, throwing the ancient divinities into the deep – and rather spacious – spires of Hell. Pre-Christian mythology, in fact, provided a particularly intense, rich, and flexible repertoire for representations of an ever-present evil. A repertoire that authors like Gianfrancesco Pico effectively used in order to demonize pagan antiquity.⁶¹⁴

⁶¹⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹¹ Panofsky, "Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art." 25.

⁶¹² See Chapter 1.

⁶¹³ That said, one must not forget that the legacy of the Pseudo Dionysius had already provided Medieval readers with a similar approach, taken account even by Aquinas. On this subject, see Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1992). See also David Keck, "Angels & Angelology in the Middle Ages," (1998). 49-61.

⁶¹⁴ Patricia Simons, "The Crone, the Witch, and the Library: The Intersection of Classical Fantasy with Christian Vice During the Italian Renaissance," in *Receptions of Antiquity, Constructions of Gender in European Art, 1300-1600*, ed. Marice E. Rose and Alison C. Poe (Boston: Brill, 2015).

The aim of this chapter is to analyze one of the most eminent examples of religious exclusivism in the Italian Renaissance, that is Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola's *interpretatio* of pagan mythology in his poem known as *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis*. The importance of Pico's poetical blame of the pagan gods, in fact, is manifold. On one hand, it describes a lesser known Renaissance trend, a form of dialogue with antiquity that nonetheless characterized the early modern period: a discourse still based on the incorporation of ancient thought and religious practices, like the concept of *Prisca theologia*, but with the opposite aim of re-absorbing ancient deities into the rank of demons. On the other hand, the poem is a precious example of anti-Platonic propaganda, aiming as it is to discredit the platonic metaphor of *Venus Urania* and *Venus Pandemia*, together with the idea that the mundane beauty of art could contain a glimpse of divine perfection. Another important topic that this chapter seeks to analyze is the spiritual and mental process that Pico includes in his poem to free their readers from the influence of pagan imagery. Pico's *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis*, was not composed with the sole aim of scorning the pagan gods of love and desire, and the philosophical ideas that brought about their rediscovery. The final objective of the author was that of teaching his readers how to fight worldly desires, and aim for the gifts of eternal salvation. It will then show how these two elements – the demonization of earthly love/desire, and the exaltation of a Christian imagery of death and suffering – harmoniously inform each other and translate into a new form of Platonic love.

The chapter will proceed as follows. The first part will focus on a concise description of the poem, its history, its fortune, and its legacy. Secondly, I will describe the context where the poem was conceived and the quarrel on beauty and love to which it contributes. Thirdly, I will move on to a close reading of the work. In this second part of the chapter, I will analyze how

Venus and Amor – although “banished” – survive into Pico’s philosophy of love as symbols of earthly beauty and desire. I will then introduce Pico’s own reinterpretation of the Platonic *scala amoris* through the mental images of humanity’s fragility and suffering, Mary’s chastity, and wounds and blood of Jesus Christ.

2. *De Venere et Cupidine Expellendis: History and Legacy of the Hymn.*

As briefly mentioned in the opening paragraphs of this dissertation, Gianfrancesco Pico conceived of his poem during a time of dire need. Banished from his lands for a second time in 1511, in 1512 the nobleman visited Pope Julius II in order to beseech his help in reconquering the counties he had lost to his brothers. During the long days, waiting between his hearings, the lord of Mirandola had the opportunity to wander through the pontiff’s statue garden, the *Cortile del Belvedere*, and to reflect on the presence of pagan deities in that sacred place. This vision, abhorrent to the eyes of the author, prompted Gianfrancesco Pico to compose the poem known as the *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis carmen*, edited and published between 1512 and 1513. The poem is a 323-verse heroic poem dealing with the treacherous influence of earthly beauty and love in ancient and modern times. Due to the complexity and the intricacy of the themes here addressed, one can only attempt to make a complete summary. The poem begins with an invocation to the Virgin Mary in order to banish the twofold figures of Venus and Amor (verses 01 – 08), and it continues with a short synopsis of how the two gods were born according to Plato’s symposium and other ancient mythological traditions (vv. 09 – 26). The third section is dedicated to a rereading of several love myths included in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and other classical works. Here, Pico mentions the tales of Apollo and Daphne, Endymion and Selene, Orpheus and Eurydice, Pirithous and Persephone, and the many transformations of Zeus (vv. 27

– 49). After that, the author briefly explains the reasons why beauty and love affect the human spirit (vv. 53 – 57) and exhorts his young readers to ascend to the heavens with the help of the Virgin Mary instead of aiming to the assistance of the Neoplatonic Venus and her divinely imparted frenzy (vv. 58 – 70). He, then, describes the causes and the nefarious effects of the influence of Venus and Cupid, a magnetic force that brings men to brief and painful moments of lust (vv. 71 – 105). After that, we find a series of metaphors describing the lustful thirst caused by Venus and Cupid (vv. 106 – 123), and another section of *exempla* based on classical sources. This time, instead of gods, Pico thoughtfully focuses on the human victims of erotic frenzy: Agamemnon, Diomedes, the Maenads, Acteon, Sappho, Dido, Thisbe, and many others (vv. 124 – 138). The second tier of *exempla* is dedicated to myths of bestial transformation and human reincarnation, and it ends with an open accusation to Hermotimus, allegedly one of Pythagoras' earlier incarnations (vv. 139 – 175). Verses 175 – 196 are an exhortation to youths to flee the languid poison of “false Babylon” – Rome – and its temples crawling with monsters. Divine law, Pico suggests, is the remedy against such creatures (vv. 197 – 202). After that, the author dedicates several verses to the necessity of choosing the proper wife (vv. 203 – 223), and to the fundamental importance of chastity before marriage. Pico, then, explains the benefits of a strong will against the guilty pleasures provided by Venus. Eye contact must be prevented, seductive whispers shunned (vv. 224 – 249), otherwise one can become a slave to Venus and Cupid. Verses 250 – 275 are dedicated to the infernal tortures inflicted upon the slaves of beauty and love after their brief moment of pleasure. After this short parenthesis, Pico returns to his personal selection of *remedia amoris*, among which we find the sight of rotting corpses, the cold embrace of snow and self-mutilation (vv. 276 – 302). In a nutshell: Celestial Venus and all of Plato's

“lofty ghosts” must be avoided at all cost, as our love must be directed to the figure of the crucified Christ, savior of humanity, and to God’s eternal rewards (vv. 303 – 323).

Little is known about the influence that the poem had on early modern readership. As far as we are able to understand from the sources available today, the work had been published for the first time in 1513 by Giacomo Mazzocchi, better known as Jacobus Mazochius (active 1505 – 1527,⁶¹⁵ a learned bookseller, printer, and noted antiquarian in papal Rome during the first half of the 16th century) together with a letter to Pico’s friend Lilio Giraldi and two other hymns dedicated to Saint Laurence and Saint Gimignano.⁶¹⁶ A second edition, edited by Johann Schott,⁶¹⁷ appeared the same year in Strasbourg inside a collection dedicated to the theme of love. Here, Pico’s poem precedes Baptista Mantuanus’ elegiac carmen *In amorem* and a Latin translation of Lucian’s poem *In cupidinem*.⁶¹⁸ Lilio Gregorio Giraldi (1479 – 1552), friend of Gianfrancesco Pico and addressee of the 1512 letter contained in the first editions of the *De Venere*, devotes a short but heartfelt reference to Pico’s poem in his *De Poetis nostrorum temporum dialogi duo* (1545).⁶¹⁹ After this honorable mention, the poem seems to disappear

⁶¹⁵ For further details on the *editio princeps* of the *De Venere et Cupidine Expellendis*, see Leonardo Quaquarelli and Zita Zanardi, *Pichiana: Bibliografia Delle Edizioni E Degli Studi* ([Firenze]: L.S. Olschki, 2005). 265-66.

⁶¹⁶ Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola, *Illustrissimi Ac Doctissimi Principis Jo. Francisci Pici Mirandulae... De Venere & Cupidine Expellendis Carmen: Item Eiusdem Laurentius & Geminianus Hymni* (Rome: Iacobus Mazochius, 1513). For further information on Giacomo Mazzocchi, see Dennis E. Rhodes, “Further Notes on the Publisher Giacomo Mazzocchi,” *Pap. Br. Sch. Rome Papers of the British School at Rome* 40 (1972).

⁶¹⁷ An important book publisher active between 1500 and 1544. See Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). 214.

⁶¹⁸ Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola, Baptista, and Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Mirandulae Dn. De Expellendis Venere & Cupidine Carmen Heroicu[M]; Eiusdem Hymnus De Diuo Laurentio. Baptistae Mantuani Elegia in Amorem; Eiusdem in Venerem Heroicu[M]. In Cupidinem Nocium Carmen Luciani* ([Strasbourg]: Ioannes Schottus Argentinae Pressit, 1513).

⁶¹⁹ Lilio Gregorio Giraldi and John N. Grant, *Modern Poets* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011). 34: “[Gianfrancesco Pico] composed a poem about expelling and driving out Venus and Cupid, and such was his great fondness for me that he sent me a copy of this. He was the first to reintroduce hymns written in dactylic hexameters after they had fallen into disuse for many centuries, and he certainly alone found the way to hold up for display of pagan learning.” For further information on Giraldi and his relationship with Pico, see Rosa Alhaique Pettinelli, “Roma, Ponte Tra Antico E Moderno Per Due Umanisti Ferraresi: Lilio Gregorio Giraldi E Celio Calcagnini,” in *Roma, Centro ideale della cultura dell'antico nei secoli XV e XVI: Da Martino V al sacco di Roma, 1417-1527*, ed. Silvia Danesi Squarzina (Milan: Electa, 1989). 365-70.

from the pages of the 16th century collections and chronicles discovered so far. A later edition was included in the 1608 collection *Delitiae CC Italarum poetarum huius superiorique aevi illustrium*, edited by Jan Gruter (1560 – 1627), testifying its circulation in the early 17th century.⁶²⁰ The 1712 collection *Carmina illustrium poetarum Italarum*, edited by Joannes Cajetanus Tartinius is proof of the poem’s survival well into the 18th century.⁶²¹

Although the scarcity of contemporary and later sources on the *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis* seems to indicate a relative lack of interest towards this poem in Latin hexameters, the text had great relevance in scholarly publications during the second half of the 20th century.⁶²² This is especially due to Ernst Gombrich, who decided to include the text as a primary source for his article *Hypnerotomachiana*.⁶²³ Although Gombrich concentrated his efforts on the letter to Giraldi, considering Pico’s poem “[...] little more than a pastiche of the conventional themes of Platonic love and the *remedia amoris* known from Lucretius and Ovid, culminating in a devout exhortation to Christian chastity,”⁶²⁴ the importance of Pico’s work as a text source became progressively manifest.⁶²⁵ Pico’s letter quickly converted into an important early witness to Julius II’s *Cortile del Belvedere*, thus appearing in more and more scholarly works dedicated to the statue garden. Well aware of Pico’s contribution to the subject, Hans Henrik Brummer quoted the letter to Giraldi in his often cited thesis *The statue court in the*

⁶²⁰ AA.VV., *Delitiae Cc Italarum Poetarum Huius Superiorique Aevi Illustrium*, ed. Jan Gruter (Frankfurt 1608). 205-2016.

⁶²¹ Giovanni Gaetano Bottari, “Carmina Illustrium Poetarum Italarum,” (1719).

⁶²² The earliest reference to Pico’s *De Venere* in the 20th century is most probably an article written by Guido Manacorda’s in 1908. See Guido Manacorda, “Notizie intorno alle fonti di alcuni motivi satirici ed alla loro diffusione durante il Rinascimento,” *Romanische Forschungen* 22, no. 3 (1908).

⁶²³ Ernst H. Gombrich, “Hypnerotomachiana,” *Journal of the Warburg and the Courtauld Institutes* XIV (1951). 120-24.

⁶²⁴ Ibid. 123.

⁶²⁵ Gombrich himself will use Pico’s *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis* again in 1991, comparing Gianfrancesco Pico’s take on 16th century Rome to that of Ulrich von Hutten (1488 – 1523), German scholar, poet, satirist and reformer. See E. H. Gombrich, “Archaeologists or Pharisees? Reflections on a Painting by Maarten Van Heemskerck,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 54 (1991). 255.

Vatican Belvedere (1970).⁶²⁶ After him, Pico's work has been mentioned by a large variety of scholars, among which we find Leonard Barkan (1993), Francesco Tateo (1998), Sofia Maffei (1999), Regina Stefaniak (2000), Stephen J. Campbell (2004), Jill Burke (2006), Brian Curran, Robert H. F. Carver (2007), Patricia Simons, Katherine M. Bentz, and Matteo Soranzo (2015).⁶²⁷ Notwithstanding the widely recognized importance of the *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis* as a text source for art and philosophy historians, few academics ventured into the analysis of the poem itself, namely Luis Marques (2013), who provided the first modern translation and analysis of the poem.⁶²⁸

3. "Sunt idola antiquarorum:" The Representations of Venus and Pagan Aesthetics in the Italian Renaissance

Although Pico's *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis* originated as a reflection on the presence of the statues of pagan gods in the *Giardino del Belvedere*, to consider it only a poetic invective against Julius II's statue garden would be reductive and misleading. Pico's hymn, in fact, was not only meant to cast out the two gods from the sacred space of the Vatican, but also

⁶²⁶ Hans Henrik Brummer, "The Statue Court in the Vatican Belvedere" (Almqvist & Wiksell, 1970). 273-74.

⁶²⁷ See Leonard Barkan, "The Beholder's Tale: Ancient Sculpture, Renaissance Narratives," *representations Representations*, no. 44 (1993). 143-44; Francesco Tateo, "I due Pico e la tematica d'amore nel Cinquecento," in *Giovanni e Gianfrancesco Pico. l'opera e la fortuna di due studenti ferraresi.*, ed. Patrizia Castelli (Florence: Leo Olschki, 1998). 313 - 324; Salvatore Settis, Sonia Maffei, and Ludovico Rebaudo, *Laocoonte, fama e stile* (Roma: Donzelli, 1999). 174; Regina Stefaniak, "Raphael's Madonna Di Foligno: Vergine Bella," *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History* 69, no. 3-4 (2000). 175. Stephen J. Campbell, *The Cabinet of Eros: Renaissance Mythological Painting and the Studiolo of Isabella D'este* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). 89; Jill Burke, "Sex and Spirituality in 1500s Rome: Sebastiano Del Piombo's Martyrdom of Saint Agatha," *The Art Bulletin* 88, no. 3 (2006). 488; Brian A. Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance: The Afterlife of Ancient Egypt in Early Modern Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). 171-2; Robert H. F. Carver, *The Protean Ass: The Metamorphoses of Apuleius from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). 252-3; Simons, "The Crone, the Witch, and the Library: The Intersection of Classical Fantasy with Christian Vice During the Italian Renaissance." 277; Katherine M. Bentz, "Ancient Idols, Lascivious Statues, and Sixteenth-Century Viewers in Roman Gardens," *ibid.* 420. See also Matteo Soranzo, "Un'identità Religiosa Nel Primo Cinquecento," *Italian Studies* 70, no. 1 (2015). 54-55.

⁶²⁸ Luiz Marques, "L'attacco Di Giovanni Francesco Pico Della Mirandola Alla "Venus Felix" E Alla Stanza Della Segnatura," *FIGURA Studi sull'immagine nella tradizione classica* I, no. 1 (2013).

to challenge the morality of its contemporary readers' imagination, their desires, fears and common beliefs. This has mainly to do with the representation of Venus in poetry and in the visual arts, and the Neoplatonic re-evaluation of the Olympian goddess of love as metaphor of heartily and celestial beauty/love. Yet, as we will see, the poem also seeks to establish a dialogue between the different discourses animating the fantasy and common imagery of early 16th century Italy – an issue that Pico also addressed in his earlier treatise, *De imaginatione*.⁶²⁹

Among the several 16th and 17th century testimonies on the Belvedere garden available today, many humanists and poets seem to focus their attention on its majestic sculpture collection.⁶³⁰ Since its discovery in the first months of 1506, for example, the Laocoon underwent an immediate and long lasting fame in the world of letters,⁶³¹ testified by humanists like Giovanni Cavalcanti and Pietro Bembo.⁶³² Moreover, Bembo's letters to Filippo Beroaldo il Giovane (1472 – 1518) and Gianfrancesco Pico's associate Cardinal Jacopo Sadoletto (1477 – 1547)⁶³³ on their poetic compositions indicate the presence of an entirely new trend of lyrical works dedicated to the statues in order to celebrate the glory of Julius II's pontificate.⁶³⁴ On this

⁶²⁹ See Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola and Harry Caplan, *On the Imagination* (New Haven; London: Pub. for Cornell University, Yale University press; H. Milford, Oxford University Press, 1930).

⁶³⁰ For an extensive description of the Belvedere garden, see Chapter 1.

⁶³¹ On this subject, see Sofia Mazzei. "La fama di Laocoonte nei testi del Cinquecento" in Settis, Maffei, and Rebaudo, *Laocoonte, Fama E Stile*. 85.

⁶³² See *ibid.* 106. Giovanni Cavalcanti (1444 – 1509) was a friend of Marsilio Ficino and a member of his Accademia Platonica. For further information on Cavalcanti, see Mario Emilio Cosenza, *Biographical and Bibliographical Dictionary of the Italian Humanists and of the World of Classical Scholarship in Italy, 1300-1800* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1962). 952-3.

⁶³³ According to Santangelo and Brummer, Pico met Sadoletto during one of his prior visits to Rome (1508 – 1510) thanks to the influence of the Roman Academy, founded by Pomponio Leto and revived under Angelo Colocccio. At that time, the Academy often gathered in the famous *Horti Colotiani*, which became an important center of humanistic learning during the first decades of the 16th century. See Giorgio Santangelo, "La Polemica Fra Pietro Bembo E Gian Francesco Pico Intorno Al Principio D'imitazione," *Rinascimento.*, no. 3-4 (1950). 323. For Sadoletto's contacts with the Roman Academy, see Richard M. Douglas, *Jacopo Sadoletto, 1477-1547: Humanist and Reformer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959). 8 ff.

⁶³⁴ See Pietro Bembo and Ernesto Travi, *Lettere* (Bologna: Commissione per i testi di lingua, 1987). 220: "Reliquorum carmina mihi etiam probantur, non tam quidem ut illa Sadoletiana, nec omnia eodem modo, sed probantur tamen" [I also appreciated the other poems, certainly not as those of Sadoletto, and not all of them the same way, but I appreciated them nonetheless.] For a detailed compilation of the poetic works dedicated to the Belvedere Laocoon, see Settis, Maffei, and Rebaudo, *Laocoonte, Fama E Stile*. 116 – 150.

subject, it would suffice to mention that in 1513, the year in which Pico's *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis* was published, the humanist Evangelista Maddaleni de' Capodiferro (1450 c. – Early 16th century) gave the press a poem celebrating Julius II's newest acquisition for his statue garden, the freshly excavated sculpture of a reclining female figure known at the time as the Cleopatra.⁶³⁵ The poem evokes the memory of the passion that linked the Queen of Egypt with Julius Caesar as a simile to underline the fervor with which Pope Julius II loved her effigy.⁶³⁶ Moreover, according to the poem, the pontiff, reincarnation of the Roman *dictator*, symbolically reconquered the water of the Nile by integrating the sculpture as part of a luxurious fountain.⁶³⁷ The Apollo Belvedere, another of the garden's statues, received literary attention as well. This is due to its intricate relationship with the pope himself. The sculpture was already part of Julius II's collection before his papacy, and often acted as a symbol for the Pontiff's political mission in public holidays and celebrations.⁶³⁸ An unpublished Renaissance poem of the time describes the Apollo Belvedere as a symbol for the political achievements of Julius' papacy. The hymn contained in the codex Vaticano Latino 10377, folio 63 verso, known as *Ibidem Apollo Loquitur* was conceived as a statement made by the statue itself, which articulately considers the Vatican

⁶³⁵ Elisabeth B. MacDougall, *Fountains Statues and Flowers: Studies in Italian Gardens of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks research library and collection, 1994). 37. For details concerning the installation of the Cleopatra, now identified as Ariadne Belvedere, see Brummer, "The Statue Court in the Vatican Belvedere." 154. For the discovery of the statue, see Walther Amelung, *Die Sculpturen Des Vaticanischen Museums* (Berlin 1903). 636, n. 414. For further information on Battiferro, see Gianni Ballistreri, "Capodiferro, Evangelista Maddaleni De', Detto Fausto," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (Treccani, 1975).

⁶³⁶ See Capodiferro, Fausto, *De fonte Cleopatrae* in Brummer, "The Statue Court in the Vatican Belvedere." 221, vv. 5-6: "Quantum me, vivam, Caesar mundi arbiter, arsit / Marmoream tantum Iulius alter amat."

⁶³⁷ Capodiferro, Fausto, *De fonte Cleopatrae in ibid.* 221-2, vv. 18-21, 24-25: "Fons parvus licet est: simulacrum credite Nilum / Veraque sum limphis, quae, Cleopatra, fruor. / Niliacas Caesar domuit, has Iulius undas / Duxit: solum annis iste Secundus erat." "Niliace Caesar me vinxit magnus ad undas / Prefecitque suis Iulius alter aquis."

⁶³⁸ See the letter from Stabellini to Isabella d'Este dated February 1513, in *ibid.* 223, where the humanist describes the 1513 parade in honor of Julius II's rule: "Et nel medesimo modo procedendo era tirato un tempi inscrito ne le porte T. APOLLINIS DELPHICI. Ne la sommità de cui entro una cuba era un giovane con l'arco in mano, da la cintura in giù nascoso in significatione de Apolline et atorno al tempio giacevano varii homini da soe sagitti trafitti..." According to Brummer, even the image of Apollo in the so-called Bramantino sketchbook interprets the Sun God as a symbol of Julius II's papacy. See *ibid.*

its new home,⁶³⁹ and interprets its role as “symbolically connected with the pontiff’s Jovian deeds ‘pro Italia et pro libertate Latina.’”⁶⁴⁰

Perfectly interconnected with this temporary poetic genre of celebration of Julius II’s statues, Pico’s work addresses the effigies of Laocoon, Apollo and the Cleopatra only partially,⁶⁴¹ while focusing on another artwork present in the Belvedere garden, the statue of Venus and Cupid known as *Venus Felix*.⁶⁴² According to the author, in fact, the sculpture had a preeminent role in the arrangement of the statue garden, up to the point of calling Julius II’s *giardino* “the grove of Venus and Cupid.”⁶⁴³ The eminent role of Venus, granted by Bramante and Julius II in the *Giardino del Belvedere* and celebrated by Andrea Fulvio (c. 1470–1527) in his *Antiquaria Urbis* (1513) as “keeper” of the “sacred garden” of the Hesperides,⁶⁴⁴ becomes

⁶³⁹ Apollo Loquitur, in *ibid.* 225 vv. 20-25: “Non ego nunc Delphos maternaqua Littora, Delon / Aut Cynthum Xanthumve colam; nec quicquid ubique est / Numine sub Phoebi Tripodesque tacere iubentur. / Haec mihi certa domus: heic sedibus altus avitis / Iule tuis repona fero de quercubus, aut si / Plus vaticani te oblectat montis imago.”

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 226. Apollo loquitur in

⁶⁴¹ The Laocoon is only briefly mentioned in the letter to Lilius Giraldi. See Pico della Mirandola, *Illustrissimi Ac Doctissimi Principis Jo. Francisci Pici Mirandulae... De Venere & Cupidine Expellendis Carmen; Item Eiusdem Laurentius & Geminianus Hymni*. 8v: “Hinc Pergamei Laocoontis ex sculptum uti est a Vergilio proditum simulacrum. Inde pharetrati uisitur species Apollinis, qualis apud Homerum expressa est, sed et quodam in Angulo spectrum demorsae ab aspide Cleopatrae, cuius quasi de mammis destillat fons uetustorum instar aqueductum.” [On one side there is the statue of Laocoon the Trojan, carved as he is described by Vergil. On the other one sees the figure of Apollo with his quiver as he is pictured by Homer. But in a corner you also see the spectre of Cleopatra bitten by the snake: as if from her breasts, a fountain flows in the manner of the ancient aqueducts and falls into an ancient marble sarcophagus, upon which the deeds of Emperor Trajan are carved.]

⁶⁴² Marques, “L’attacco Di Giovanni Francesco Pico Della Mirandola Alla “Venus Felix” E Alla Stanza Della Segnatura.”

⁶⁴³ Pico della Mirandola, Baptista, and Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Mirandulae Dn. De Expellendis Venere & Cupidine Carmen Heroicu[M]; Eiusdem Hymnus De Diuo Laurentio. Baptistae Mantuani Elegia in Amorem; Eiusdem in Venerem Heroicu[M]. In Cupidinem Nociuum Carmen Luciani.*: “venero cupidineoque nemori.”

⁶⁴⁴ Andrea Fulvio, *Antiquaria Urbis, Per Andream Fulvium* (Rome: Mazzocchi, Jacopo, 1513). 36v: “Stat quoque cum puero Citherea cupidine paruo, / Quae nuda aligero blandis aridet ocellis / Hesperidum seruans pomaria sacra sororum.” [There also stands with the little child Cupid, Aphrodite, lady of Cythera, / whom, naked, smiles with charming eyes at the winged one / watching over the sacred orchard of the Hesperides.] In his *Cleopatra*, Baldassarre Castiglione will return on this utopian concept applied to the Belvedere garden. See Baldassarre Castiglione, Cesare Gonzaga, and Pierantonio Serassi, “Poesie Volgari, E Latine Del Conte Baldessar Castiglione Corrette, Illustrate, Ed Accresciute Di Varie Cose Inedite: Agguimtevi Alcune Rime E Lettere Di Cesare Gonzaga Suo Cugino,” (1982). 293: “Et cum exusta siti Icarius canis arva perurit, / Huc potum veniunt volucres, circumque, supraque / Frondibus insulant; tenero tum gramine laeta / Terra viret, rutilantque suis poma aurea ramis; hic ubi odoratum surgens densa nemus umbra / Hesperidum dities truncus non invidet hortis.” The verses had been englicized by Alexander Pope. See Alexander Pope and John Butt, “The Poems of Alexander Pope: A One-Volume Edition of the Twickenham

here the reason for the decadence of Rome and its transformation into a new pagan Babylon, a concept very dear to both Savonarola and his follower Gianfrancesco. Pico's choice on this subject matter was not casual, as at the time the figure of Venus was defining itself not only as a central element of statue gardens, but also, and more importantly, as a pivotal component of Renaissance art and philosophy in all Italian lands.

When one thinks of the visual adaptation of classical culture during the revival of ancient imagery that characterized the Italian 15th and 16th centuries,⁶⁴⁵ it is almost impossible to avoid the numerous figures and works of art dedicated to the goddess Venus. Sandro Botticelli's *Venus Anadyomene* (The Birth of Venus, 1484 – 1486) is possibly the most explicit specimen of this phenomenon, as it was inspired by the poems of Angelo Poliziano (1454 – 1494),⁶⁴⁶ the Neoplatonic allegories of the Florentine philosophers under the Medici, and by the resurgence of classical aesthetics in the Roman court.⁶⁴⁷ Although the *Venus Anadyomene* is one of the most notorious examples of such resurgence, it is only one of the many contemporary artworks depicting the Olympian goddess of love. Even if we isolate the case on Botticelli alone, the artist received an impressive number of commissions for paintings portraying Venus, among which one may recall the *Primavera* (Allegory of Spring, 1482), the *Venus Pudica* (Venus of Berlin),

Text with Selected Annotations,” (1990). 113, vv. 64-71: “And while the Dogstar burns the thirsty field, / These to the birds refreshing streams may yield; / The birds shall sport amidst the bending sprays, / and fill the shade with never ceasing lays; / New greens shall spring, new flow'rs around me grow, / And on each tree the golden apples glow; / Here, where the fragrant Orange groves arise, / Whose shining scene with rich Hesperia vies.”

⁶⁴⁵ On this subject, see Kocku von Stuckrad, “Visual Gods: From Exorcism to Complexity in Renaissance Studies,” *Aries* 6, no. 1 (2006).

⁶⁴⁶ More precisely, the Birth of Venus was inspired by strophe 100 - 103 of the first book of the *Stanze per la Giostra*, where the author describes the scene of the birth of Venus as seen on the bas-reliefs on the portal of the Palace of Venus in Cyprus: “Giurar potresti che dell'onde uscissi /la dea premendo colla destra il crino, / coll'altra il dolce pome ricoprissi; / e, stampata dal piè sacro e divino, / d'erbe e di fior l'arena si vestissi; / poi, con sembianze lieto e peregrino, / dalle tre ninfe in grembo fussi accolta, / e di stellato vestimento involta.” See also Emile Gebhart and Victoria Charles, *Botticelli*, (2012). 121, 138

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 137

the *Venus and Mars* (1483), the *Calumny of Apelles* (1484), and the fresco painting *Venus and the Three Graces Presenting Gifts to a Young Woman* (1483-1486).⁶⁴⁸

The Italian pictorial classicism of the second half of the 15th century represented by Sandro Botticelli went hand in hand with the ideological and practical recovery of ancient art in Rome, that saw in Julius II's garden one of its more remarkable examples. The rise of spectacular and elaborate collections of antiquities in 15th century Rome quickly became a distinctive feature of the eternal city, an element that attracted the attention of artists and intellectuals alike. Botticelli himself had been deeply affected by the resurgence of classical aesthetics in Pope Sixtus IV's court.⁶⁴⁹ Together with the popes, even noble families, wealthy prelates, and antiquarian scholars began amassing collections of ancient sculptures and inscriptions for display in palace courtyards and villa gardens.⁶⁵⁰ This trend continued until the last quarter of the 16th century, reaching its apogee between 1500 and 1516.⁶⁵¹ By the 1550s, ancient sculptures had become prominent visual attractions in most of the large garden and villa

⁶⁴⁸ On this subject, see Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958). 111-28. On Botticelli's artistic production related to Venus, see Emile Gebhart and Victoria Charles, *Botticelli* (New York: Parkstone International, 2012). See also Charles Dempsey, *The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli's Primavera and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).

⁶⁴⁹ Emile Gebhart and Victoria Charles, *Botticelli*, (2012). 121, 138.

⁶⁵⁰ The literature on the history of the collecting and display of antiquities in Renaissance Rome is quite extensive. Among the many works on the subject, useful overviews include Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture, 1500-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981). Patricia Giudicelli-Falguieres, "La cité fictive. Les collections de cardinaux, à Rome, au 16eme siecle," in *Les carrache et les décors profanes: actes du colloque organisé par L'ecole Française de Rome, Rome, 2-4 Octobre 1986*, ed. André Chastel (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1988). 215-33; Isa Belli Barsali, "I giardini di statue antiche nella roma del '500," in *Gli orti farnesiani sul Palatino*, ed. Vincenzo Cazzato and Giuseppe Morganti (Rome: Ecole française de Rome: Soprintendenza archeologica di Roma, 1990). 341-72; David R. Coffin, *Gardens and Gardening in Papal Rome* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991). Claudia Lazzaro, *The Italian Renaissance Garden: From the Conventions of Planting, Design, and Ornament to the Grand Gardens of Sixteenth-Century Central Italy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).; William Stenhouse, "Visitors, Display, and Reception in the Antiquity Collections of Late-Renaissance Rome," *Renaissance Quarterly* 58, no. 2 (2005). 397-434; and Kathleen Christian, *Empire without End: Antiquities Collections in Renaissance Rome, C. 1350-1527* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

⁶⁵¹ Marques, "L'attacco di Giovanni Francesco Pico Della Mirandola alla "Venus Felix" e alla Stanza Della Segnatura." 13 See also Stenhouse, "Visitors, Display, and Reception in the Antiquity Collections of Late-Renaissance Rome." 399.

estates surrounding the city. Through the possession and display of ancient statues in gardens, these powerful collectors aimed to cultivate and promote their magnificent and noble identity, sustained by their wealth, liberality, and a newly found *Romanitas*.⁶⁵² With the spread of humanist ideas, and the growing interest in the material and literary remains of ancient Rome during the fifteenth century, the idea of *Romanitas* became a means of declaring authoritative Roman imperium and cultural superiority as inherited from classical antiquity.⁶⁵³

Interestingly enough, many collectors of Pre-Christian art were connected to the Catholic Church. Looking for more effective and majestic symbols capable of celebrating their connection with the glory of ancient Rome – and following Sixtus IV’s notion that by exposing and taking care of Rome’s ruins, they would be helping the city as a whole – many powerful and wealthy members of the Church began to acquire any archeological treasure they could get their hands on. Thanks to their enormous revenues, bishops and cardinals were able to not only saturate the contemporary antiquities market, but also to buy the land where antiquities could usually be found, generating an intense period of excavations.⁶⁵⁴ Among their most prized items were the portraits of pagan gods and goddesses, Venus in particular. After the rediscovery of the *Venus Felix* in 1509 – relocated in Donato Bramante’s *Cortile del Belvedere* by order of Pope Julius II – new excavations led to the discovery of twelve other major statuary works,⁶⁵⁵ among which

⁶⁵² See Bentz, “Ancient Idols, Lascivious Statues, and Sixteenth-Century Viewers in Roman Gardens.” 418-419: “A term rarely used in antiquity, *Romanitas* was first coined by Tertullian (*De pallio* 4.1) to mock the Carthaginian imitation of Roman social habits in attempts to claim a Roman identity. Its negative association faded during the Middle Ages as the Church absorbed the practices of Roman law, thus combining the ideas of Roman identity and culture with the idea of *Christianitas*.”

⁶⁵³ Ibid. See also Christian, *Empire without End: Antiquities Collections in Renaissance Rome, C. 1350-1527*. Chapter 1-2. Recent scholarship in classical archaeology and ancient history has questioned the validity of the concept of *Romanitas* to define social identity within an ancient context. See Louise Revell, *Roman Imperialism and Local Identities* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). 1-39.

⁶⁵⁴ Stenhouse, “Visitors, Display, and Reception in the Antiquity Collections of Late-Renaissance Rome.” 400-01.

⁶⁵⁵ See Marques, “L’attacco Di Giovanni Francesco Pico Della Mirandola Alla “Venus Felix” E Alla Stanza Della Segnatura.”

one finds the *Venere al bagno*,⁶⁵⁶ the Venus of *Palazzo Pitti*,⁶⁵⁷ the Venus of Cardinal Ippolito d'Este,⁶⁵⁸ and one majestic *Venus Capitolina*.⁶⁵⁹ Following the ancient Greek and Roman idea of Venus as a garden divinity, the concept of gardens as *sito di Venere* progressively became a common theme in the Italian Renaissance.⁶⁶⁰ Moreover, thanks to the 1514 bull *Supernae dispositionis arbitrio*, which stipulated that a cardinal's house should be "an open house, and a harbor and refuge especially for upright and learned men,"⁶⁶¹ scholars and artists began to have regular access to these collections, thus providing a continuous source of inspiration.⁶⁶²

Even if the fascination with antiquities and the passion for collecting and displaying ancient works was widespread in Renaissance Rome and Italy, not everyone shared a positive point of view on ancient art. Already in 1446 circa, the Florentine architect Antonio di Pietro Averlino (c. 1400 – c. 1469), known as Filarete, scornfully affirmed that an image of Venus could only be a suitable adornment in the Palace of Vice.⁶⁶³ Moreover, between the end of the 15th and the first decades of the 16th century – years before the aesthetic and moral revolution of the Counter-Reformation – a certain number of prelates, intellectuals and critics began to disapprove of the pagan and idolatrous nature of ancient sculpture. As the Protestant

⁶⁵⁶ Luis Marques identifies this copy with the well-known 'Venus Mazzarini,' in possession of the Getty Museum since 1954. See *ibid.* n. 56.

⁶⁵⁷ According to Marques and Phyllis Pray Bober, this statue is most probably the same that was in cardinal Andrea della Valle's collection. See *ibid.* and Amico Aspertini and Phyllis Pray Bober, *Drawings after the Antique: Sketchbooks in the British Museum* (London: Warburg Institute, University of London, 1957). 48.

⁶⁵⁸ According to various sources, this Venus corresponds to the one documented in the *Codex Escorialensis* (fol. 31) as property of the Vatican. See Phyllis Pray Bober, Ruth Rubinstein, and Susan Woodford, *Renaissance Artists & Antique Sculpture: A Handbook of Sources* (London, England; Oxford: H. Miller; Oxford University Press, 1986). 60.

⁶⁵⁹ See Haskell and Penny, *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture, 1500-1900*. 318.

⁶⁶⁰ Brummer, "The Statue Court in the Vatican Belvedere." 22, n 47. See also Augusto Marinoni, "Il Regno E Il Sito Di Venere," *Atti del IV Convegno internazionale di studi sul rinascimento / Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento*. (1957).

⁶⁶¹ Gigliola Fragnito, "Cardinals' Courts in Sixteenth-Century Rome," *The Journal of Modern History* 65, no. 1 (1993). 33: "patens hospitium, portusque ac refugium proborum et doctorum maxime virorum." Fragnito's translation.

⁶⁶² Louis Marchesano, "A Social History of Representing Antiquities: Civility and Antiquarianism in Rome, 1550 - 1700" (2001). 61-88.

⁶⁶³ Brummer, "The Statue Court in the Vatican Belvedere." 229.

Reformation gained momentum and the Council of Trent's influence became progressively more invasive, ancient statues increasingly became the objects of contempt and ridicule by certain viewers, collectors, and intellectuals.⁶⁶⁴ Such protestations often anticipated or backed the concerns expressed on sacred and profane images in post-Tridentine Italy: the immorality of nudity and overtly sexual themes, and the importance of proper decorum.⁶⁶⁵ On this subject, the figure of Venus was often under the spotlight, due to the explicitly sensuous and provocative nature of many Renaissance portraits dedicated to her.⁶⁶⁶ Yet there were other issues that influenced or conditioned the negative reception of ancient sculpture. One of the most frequently recurrent themes in the condemnation of ancient sculpture throughout the 16th century was the charge of idolatry.⁶⁶⁷

This, as we have seen, was not a novelty in the history of Christianity. Ideas about the dangers of pagan demon-worship and the sinister, immortal *vis* of ancient sculpture derived from centuries of attempts to eradicate paganism, a task rooted and celebrated in early Christian and

⁶⁶⁴ Bentz, "Ancient Idols, Lascivious Statues, and Sixteenth-Century Viewers in Roman Gardens." 419.

⁶⁶⁵ Carlo Ginzburg, "Titian, Ovid and Sixteenth-Century Codes," in *Titian's "Venus of Urbino"*, ed. Rona Goffen (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997). 25 – 26.

⁶⁶⁶ A good example of this issue is the letter that Bishop Antonio Agustín, a noted classical scholar and expert in canon law, sent to the antiquarian Fulvio Orsini in Rome in 1566: "Io dubito che bisogni sotterrare tutte le statue ignude, perche non venga fuori qualche informazione di esse: & certo parevano male quelli termini maschii della vigna di Cesis & di Carpi, & quel Hermafrodito col Satiro nella Capella, & altra pitture in Casa d'un altro Senatore patrone del famoso Mario. Et la vigna di papa Giulio Terzo con tante Veneri & alter lascivie. Che se bene alli studiosi giovano, e alli artefici, li Oltramontani si scandalizzano bestialmente, & fama malum vires acquirit eundo. Così va perdendo provincie la vostra Urbs Alma Regina Provinciarum." ["I doubt that it would be necessary to bury all the nude statues to avoid the resurgence of information about them. However, those masculine herms from Villa Cesi and Villa Carpi look certainly bad, like that Hermaphrodite with the Satyr in the chapel, and other paintings in the house of another senatorial patron of the famous Mario, and the garden of Pope Julius III with so many Venuses and other lascivious figures. Although they are beneficial to young scholars and artists, the Protestants over the Alps are bestially scandalized by these images, and the evil rumors gain strength. This is why our City, the Gracious Queen of the Provinces, goes on losing territories."]. Letter of 12 November 1566, in Antonio Agustín, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 7 (Lucca: Rocchius, 1772), 247–8. My translation is based on Bentz, "Ancient Idols, Lascivious Statues, and Sixteenth-Century Viewers in Roman Gardens." 432. A more positive vision of Venus' sensuality can be found in Pietro Aretino, "Letter to Francesco Gonzaga. August 6, 1527," in James Turner, "Profane Love: The Challenge of Sexuality," *Art and love in Renaissance Italy / Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York*. Ed. by Andrea Bayer. (2008). 178: "I believe that the most rare master Jacopo Sansovino will adorn your chamber with a *Venus* so true and so alive that it fills with lust the mind of everyone who beholds it."

⁶⁶⁷ Bentz, "Ancient Idols, Lascivious Statues, and Sixteenth-Century Viewers in Roman Gardens." 420.

medieval tradition. As the writings of Marcus Diaconus and other apologists testify, early Christians widely believed that demons dwelled inside pagan statues, and Byzantine hagiographies repeatedly tell tales of evil forces cast out of ancient statues through their destruction.⁶⁶⁸ This fear for the images of the ancient gods may have been directly linked to pagan religious practices that preceded Christianity, and competed with it for centuries, like the theurgical practice of *telestikè* (τελεστική), which concentrated on the consecration and animation of statues so as to obtain oracles from them.⁶⁶⁹ The cult of divine images (ἁγάλματα), moreover, became especially important for Neoplatonists and often mixed with the magical teachings of *telestikè*. Philosophers like Porphyry and Iamblichus both wrote treatises on the subject, although one is lost and the other exists only in fragments.⁶⁷⁰ But even before Iamblichus and Porphyry, Plotinus wrote about divine images, which he saw as something linked with a relation of sympathy with the World- Soul, and thus capable of receiving a portion of it.⁶⁷¹ He also argued that divinities do not think discursively about the divine, as they contemplate

⁶⁶⁸ Mango, “Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder.” 58-64. During the last decade, Anthony Kaldellis has argued that Mango’s assessment of the Early Christian and Byzantine suspicion of pagan statues is oversimplified. See Anthony Kaldellis, “Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History, and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity,” (2004). 40-41. And *The Christian Parthenon: Classicism and Pilgrimage in Byzantine Athens* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). 178-90.

⁶⁶⁹ See W. J. Hanegraaff, “Sympathy or the Devil: Renaissance Magic and the Ambivalence of Idols,” <http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeII/Sympdevil.html>.: “*Telestikè* seems to have been part of theurgy from its very origins in a (no longer extant) book of that title written during the 2nd century C.E. by Julian the theurgist, the assumed author of the basic ‘code of theurgy’ known as the *Oracula Chaldaica* [...]. According to Proclus, Julian helped the Emperor Marcus Aurelius in his campaign against the Dacians by means of a consecrated human head made of clay; when turned against the enemy, it sent out flashes of lightning which drove the barbarians away in a panic [...]. Like theurgy generally, the efficacy of *telestikè* was explained in terms of *sympatheia* [...]. Each god had its “correspondences” in the animal, vegetable and mineral world, and such natural substances could therefore be used as a *symbolon* of its divine cause. The substances in question were known only to the priest (*telestès*), who concealed them inside the statue.”

⁶⁷⁰ Denis J. J. Robichaud, “Ficino on Force, Magic, and Prayers: Neoplatonic and Hermetic Influences in Ficino’s Three Books on Life,” *Renaissance Quarterly Renaissance Quarterly* 70, no. 1 (2017). 76. On the subject of *telestikè* in Iamblichus, Hanegraaff states: “*Telestikè* clearly implies the belief that invisible beings “take possession” of a material receptacle (the statue); ecstatic experiences such as referred to by Plotinus, however, imply that the soul leaves the body. What is puzzling in Iamblichean theurgy is the suggestion that the one is inseparable from the other: possession of statues seems to have been seen as a means for having ecstatic experiences.”

⁶⁷¹ Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen McKenna, vol. 3 (Boston: The Medici Society Ltd., 1924). 4.3.11.6.

forms as images.⁶⁷² Similarly, Porphyry gave divine images an eminent place in his re-organization of the *Enneads*. In the final chapter of the corpus, in fact, he uses the metaphor of the mysteries to depict the union with the One in the temple's inner sanctum "as someone entering into the inner sanctum leaves behind him the statues arranged in the temple."⁶⁷³ Moreover, one must not forget the famous "god-making" passages of Hermes Trismegistus' *Asclepius*, which directly influenced the development of Renaissance magic.⁶⁷⁴ In *Asclepius* 23-24, Hermes explains how the images of the gods are both divine in form and human in matter, as they are the product of humanity's continuous struggle to imitate divinity, representing its gods in resemblance of its own features, just as the One made his gods eternal to resemble him. Statues, to Hermes, are "ensouled and conscious, filled with spirit and doing great deeds," and they can "foreknow the future and predict it by lots, by prophecy, by dreams and by many other means; [...] make people ill and cure them, bringing them pain and pleasure as each deserves."⁶⁷⁵

And so, he continues:

What we have said of mankind is wondrous, but less wondrous than this: it exceeds the wonderment of all wonders that humans have been able to discover the divine nature and how to make it. Our ancestors erred gravely on the theory of divinity; they were unbelieving and inattentive to worship and reverence for God. But then they discovered the art of making gods. To their discovery they added a conformable power arising from the nature of matter. Because they could not make souls, they mixed this power in and called up the souls of demons or angels and implanted them in likenesses through holy and divine mysteries, whence the idols could have the power to do good and evil.⁶⁷⁶

⁶⁷² Robichaud, "Ficino on Force, Magic, and Prayers: Neoplatonic and Hermetic Influences in Ficino's Three Books on Life." 76-77.

⁶⁷³ Plotinus, *The Enneads*, 3. 6.9.11.17-19. See also Ibid.

⁶⁷⁴ Hanegraaff, "Sympathy or the Devil: Renaissance Magic and the Ambivalence of Idols".

⁶⁷⁵ Hermes Trismegistus. *Asclepius*. 37. Transl. Brian P. Copenhaver, *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a New English Translation, with Notes and Introduction* (Cambridge [England]; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁶⁷⁶ Hermes Trismegistus. *Asclepius*. 24. Transl. Ibid. 89-90.

Renaissance Neoplatonists like Marsilio Ficino were very aware of the immanent *vis* that ancient philosophers attributed to statues. Sebastiano Gentile, for example, detected several connections between Ficino's *De Vita* 3 and the Parisian manuscript of the *Enneads*.⁶⁷⁷ If one looks in the manuscript at the specific passage in question where Plotinus discusses statues, one finds, as Gentile observes, two relevant marginal annotations in Greek written by Ficino. In the first Ficino notes, "How the ancient wise men through statues and sacred things made the gods present in them"; and, in the second, "in what manner and whence comes the power of the magi and prophets."⁶⁷⁸ In the third book of his *De vita coelitus comparanda*, Ficino revives Plotinus' thought by affirming that the images of the gods must be understood according to an emanative continuum that converges in the world soul that is present in all things. To Ficino, therefore, the images of the gods are, first, the intelligibles, but also the non-discursive forms that emanate from the intelligibles into seminal reasons present in medicines and figures, prayers and divine names, hieroglyphs, or religious images and statues of worship.⁶⁷⁹ Later philosophers and occultists like Cornelius Agrippa would return to the magical use of divine images, stating that the perfect *magus* should be capable of giving a soul to an image, and making statues alive with the soul of the divinity itself:

[...] such images work nothing, unless they be vivified in such a way that either a natural, or celestial, or heroic, or animastical, or demonic, or angelic virtue is in them or adheres to them. But who will give a soul to an image and make a stone to live, or metal, or wood, or wax, and 'raise out of stones Children unto Abraham'. Certainly, no insensitive sculptor will come into the possession of this arcanum, nor will he be able to give what he does not

⁶⁷⁷ Sebastiano Gentile et al., *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Ermete Trismegisto = Marsilio Ficino and the Return of Hermes Trismegistus*, trans. Cis van Heertum and Anna Laura Puliafito (Firenze: Centro Di, 2001). 106-07; 111-12.

⁶⁷⁸ Robichaud, "Ficino on Force, Magic, and Prayers: Neoplatonic and Hermetic Influences in Ficino's Three Books on Life." 49.

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 77.

have: nobody has [such powers], but he who has gained control over the elements, has overcome nature, has transcended the heavens and the angels, and attains to the Archetype itself, as a cooperator of which he can indeed do anything [...].⁶⁸⁰

During the Renaissance as in late antiquity, therefore, the idea of the ancient statues as an active receptacle of the supernatural caused both fascination and suspicion. By the 13th and 14th centuries, heroic legends about Pope Gregory the Great's campaigns for the destruction of ancient religious art, in order to wipe out heresy and pagan culture, were well established and promoted throughout Western Europe.⁶⁸¹ Similar fears of idolatry and contemporary idol worship did not end with the advent of the humanist movement, but conversely inspired several Renaissance prelates and reformers. A clear example of this trend can be found in Girolamo Negro's testimony of Pope Adrian VI's (r. 1522 – 1523) visit to the Belvedere garden. Touring Julius II's *Giardino* in 1523, the Dutch pope was shown the famous Laocoon and other statues, upon which he disdainfully commented: "these are the idols of the ancients." The pontiff's attitude was greatly alarming for the Italian humanist, who wrote: "I have little doubt that he will do what it is said that Saint Gregory did, and that all these statues, the living memory of the glory of Rome, will be crushed into lime for the building of Saint Peter's basilica."⁶⁸²

⁶⁸⁰ Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim and V. Perrone Compagni, *De Occulta Philosophia Libri Tres* (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1992). Transl. in Hanegraaff, "Sympathy or the Devil: Renaissance Magic and the Ambivalence of Idols". "[...] nihil operari imagines eiusmodi, nisi vivificentur ita quod ipsis aut naturalis aut coelestis aut heroica aut animastica aut daemoniaca vel angelica virtus insit aut adsistat. At quis modo animam dabit imagini et vivificabit lapidem aut metallum aut lignum aut ceram atque "ex lapidibus suscitabit filios Abrahae"? Certe non penetrat hoc arcanum ad artificem durae cervicis nec dare poterit illa qui non habet: habet autem nemo, nisi qui iam cohibitis elementis, victa natura, superatis coelis, progressus angelos, ad ipsum Archetypum usque transcendit, cuius tunc cooperatore effectus potest omnia [...]."

⁶⁸¹ See Buddensieg, "Gregory the Great, the Destroyer of Pagan Idols. The History of a Medieval Legend Concerning the Decline of Ancient Art and Literature."

⁶⁸² Letter of Girolamo Negro to Marcantonio Michelli, 17 March 1523, in Girolamo Ruscelli and Francesco Ziletti, "Delle lettere di principi, le quali o si scriuono da principi, o a principi, o ragionano di principi," (1581). v.1. 112-13: "Et essendoli ancora mostrato in Belvedere il Laocoonte per una cosa eccellente e mirabile, disse; sunt idola antiquarorum. Di modo, che dubito molto, un di non faccia quell che dice haver fatto à San Gregorio, et che di tutte queste statue, viva memoria della gloria Romana, non faccia calce per la fabrica di San Pietro."

Another notable example of destructive attitudes toward ancient effigies in the Renaissance can be found in writings and sermons of the late fifteenth-century Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola, mentor – as it has been discussed in the previous chapters - of Gianfrancesco Pico. His famous ‘bonfires of vanities’ in Florence, in fact, were aimed at destroying not only material and luxury goods, but also pagan effigies and “sculptures and Cupid-idols” in the name of Christian morality.⁶⁸³ During this period, Savonarola often compared himself to Pope Gregory the Great, and did not hesitate to smash pagan statues and burn ancient texts.⁶⁸⁴ Thus Jacopo Nardi, Florentine writer and historian close to the Savonarolan order of the Piagnoni, describes the event:

So they went everywhere, seeking and begging, and at every house where they received some such thing, they gave a certain very devout but brief blessing, either in Latin or the vernacular, which had been prescribed for them by the said friar; indeed, from the beginning of the forty days of Advent up to Carnival, they were given or collected an amazing multitude of such disgraceful statues and paintings, and also wigs and women’s hair ornaments, bits of silk, cosmetics, orange flower water [for the complexion], musk, perfumes of many sorts, and similar vanities, and then beautiful and expensive gaming tables, chessboards, playing cards and dice, harps and lutes and citterns and similar musical instruments, the works of Boccaccio and *Morganti*, and books of all sorts, and an amazing quantity of books of magic and superstition.⁶⁸⁵

⁶⁸³ Christian, *Empire without End: Antiquities Collections in Renaissance Rome, C. 1350-1527*. 195.

⁶⁸⁴ See Piero Parenti, *Storia Fiorentina IV.cxxv* in Girolamo Savonarola et al., “Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola Religion and Politics, 1490-1498,” (2006). 251: “[...] on account of their detestation and abomination of vanity, and of gambling, and of all vices and sins, there was to be built on the Piazza della Signoria a certain round structure of wood, in the manner of a hut or pyramid, in tiers going up to a good height, on the summit of which was the figure of Satan, with other devils at its foot, and on it were to be burnt lascivious pictures, vanities such as ladies’ wigs, mirrors, cosmetics, dolls, perfumes, panel paintings, sculptures, gods of love, playing cards, dicing tables, chessboards, lutes and other musical instruments, books by different poets, and other similar things appertaining to ostentation or lasciviousness.” See also Alessio Assonitis, “Fra Girolamo Savonarola and the Aesthetics of Pollution in Fifteenth-Century Rome,” in *Rome, Pollution, and Propriety: Dirt, Disease, and Hygiene in the Eternal City from Antiquity to Modernity*, ed. Mark and Kenneth R. Stow Bradley (2012). 145

⁶⁸⁵ Iacopo Nardi, *Istorie della città di Firenze I.cxxi* in Savonarola et al., “Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola Religion and Politics, 1490-1498.” 254. In this passage it is important to note that, among the many unholy books brought to burn in the bonfires, Nardi puts particular emphasis in the presence of Pulci’s *Morgante Maggiore*, described by Pasquale Villari as “a spirited, graceful medley of strange and sparkling fancies, in which an invocation to the Virgin is followed by another to Venus, and this again by a satire on the immortality of the soul.” See Pasquale Villari and Linda Villari, *Life and Times of Girolamo Savonarola* (London: T.F. Unwin, 1888).

Savonarola's assertions on antiquities and the antiquarian tradition were rather clear: ancient monuments represented the clear impermanence of paganism, and the Roman renewal of such aesthetics was a clear sign of papal immoderation and pagan revival. He strongly condemned the custom of decorating buildings with mythological themes and ordered the statues of the Olympians to be destroyed and replaced with Christian images, and he often assured his followers that God was soon going to send hordes of Barbarians to destroy Rome and those defiled sanctuaries and churches, symbols of pride and corruption.⁶⁸⁶

Savonarola's disbelief and fear towards the antiquarian tradition and the revival of pagan aesthetics was passed on to two of his most zealous followers, namely Gianfrancesco Pico and Fra Zanobi Acciaiuoli. Acciaiuoli, who was later appointed librarian by Pope Leo X, is better known for having published the scholarly editions of two major works by influential apologists of late antiquity: Eusebius of Caesarea's *Opusculum contra Hieroclem* (1502), and Theodoret of Cyrrhus' *De curatione graecarum affectionum* (1519).⁶⁸⁷ Both works – according to Alessio Assonitis – were re-introduced to highlight the impossibility of conciliation “between Christian spirituality and pagan materialism,” and to warn his contemporaries about the abuse of pagan culture, seen as a venom or a contagion.⁶⁸⁸ A quest, that of Acciaiuoli, deeply felt by Gianfrancesco Pico as well. Acciaiuoli's most notable work is most certainly the 1518 *Oratio in laudem Urbis Romae*. In his treatise to the glory of Rome, *urbs nova et Christiana*, Acciaiuoli

⁶⁸⁶ Assonitis, “Fra Girolamo Savonarola and the Aesthetics of Pollution in Fifteenth-Century Rome.” 145.

⁶⁸⁷ “Fra Zanobi Acciaiuoli's *Oratio in Laudem Urbis Romae* (1518): Antiquarianism and Savonarolism at the Time of Raphael,” in *Watching Art: Writings in Honor of James Beck / Studi in Onore Di James H. Beck*, ed. Lynn Catterson and Mark Zucker (Rome/Todi: Ediar Editrice, 2006). 55.

⁶⁸⁸ “Fra Girolamo Savonarola and the Aesthetics of Pollution in Fifteenth-Century Rome.” 146. See also “Fra Zanobi Acciaiuoli's *Oratio in Laudem Urbis Romae* (1518): Antiquarianism and Savonarolism at the Time of Raphael.” 56.

asserted that the glorious past of pagan Rome was best conveyed by the “immense archaeological carcass scattered around the [...] city.”⁶⁸⁹

The same destructive spirit that animated Savonarola and later Adrian VI can be found in Gianfrancesco Pico, and the same can be said about the vision of ancient art as a marker of pagan fragility and impermanence that the friar of San Marco and his follower Zanobi Acciaiuoli both shared.⁶⁹⁰ In the letter to Konrad Peutinger published with the Strasbourg edition of the *De Venere et Cupidine expellis*, in fact, the author celebrates the mangled state of many statues in the Belvedere garden as a sign of Christian victory against paganism, and as a sign of the weakness and ephemerality of the latter. He writes:

Yet, it was certainly right to admire the quality of this statue [the Venus Felix] and [its] craftsmanship, and admire with wonder at the same time the darkness of vain superstition thus chased away from the light of true religion, since the images of the gods themselves cannot be seen if not truncated, broken, and almost completely fading away.⁶⁹¹

Gianfrancesco Pico's invective against the antiquarian aestheticism of his time continued even after the writing and publishing of his *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis*. During the Fifth Lateran Council, the young Pico reminded pope Leo X of Savonarola's prophecy of Rome as the new Sodom and Gomorrah, urging the new pontiff to save the Church before divine

⁶⁸⁹ “Fra Girolamo Savonarola and the Aesthetics of Pollution in Fifteenth-Century Rome.” 146. See also “Fra Zanobi Acciaiuoli's Oratio in Laudem Urbis Romae (1518): Antiquarianism and Savonarolism at the Time of Raphael.” 56.

⁶⁹⁰ “Fra Zanobi Acciaiuoli's Oratio in Laudem Urbis Romae (1518): Antiquarianism and Savonarolism at the Time of Raphael.” 56.

⁶⁹¹ Pico della Mirandola, Gianfrancesco *Ioannis Francisci Mirandulae Dn. De Expellendis Venere & Cupidine Carmen Heroicu[M]; Eiusdem Hymnus De Diuo Laurentio. Baptistae Mantuani Elegia in Amorem; Eiusdem in Venerem Heroicu[M]. In Cupidinem Nociuum Carmen Luciani.*: “Sed sane eo in simulacrum simul et artificis ingenium licebat suspicere et simul admirare vanae superstitionis tenebras verae luce religionis ita fugatas, ut nec ipsorum Deorum imagines nisi truncae et fractae et pene prorsus evanidae spectaretur.” A modern transcription of Pico's letter to Peutinger can be found in Brummer, “The Statue Court in the Vatican Belvedere.” Appendix II.

punishment.⁶⁹² The problem of the cult of non-Christian effigies was all the more important for Pico because his personal form of devotion, although driven by a strong desire for Church reform, was strongly based on the cult of sacred images. In his later *Dialogus de adoratione*, Pico takes a decisive stand against the iconoclastic tensions that were progressively engulfing the territories of the Protestant Reformation.⁶⁹³ While praising the destruction of pagan imagery, Pico could not abide the mutilation of sacred images depicting the saints. To him, without the help of images through the vessel of imagination, it is impossible to formulate an idea of the divine to which they cling.⁶⁹⁴ Thanks to the help of images, moreover, the subject is guided to the unreachable object of his desire. For this reason, therefore, devotion necessitates the use of sacred images, whether in physical or mental form.⁶⁹⁵ The power that Pico attributes to effigies makes pagan imagery – I argue – all the more dangerous and heretical, as such imagery automatically drives their beholders to form a mental picture of it, to desire its form, and by desiring it, they *de facto* desire the false idols of antiquity.

As the case of Gianfrancesco Pico, Acciaiuoli, Adrian VI, and Savonarola's 'bonfire of vanities' suggests, the attitudes of Italian society towards the display of pagan-themed artworks in the public or private sphere were not unanimous in the 15th-16th centuries. The progressive reawakening of Classical culture and aesthetics, as a matter of fact, also brought about the rediscovery of Greco-Roman mythology as an easily comprehended and ready-made treasury of

⁶⁹² Cesare Vasoli, "Gianfrancesco Pico E L'oratio De Reformandis Moribus," in *Giovanni E Gianfrancesco Pico: L'opera E La Fortuna Di Due Studenti Ferraresi*, ed. Patrizia Castelli (Firenze: Olschki, 1998). 249-50.

⁶⁹³ Further readings on the subject are Carlos M. N. Eire, *War against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986). See also Lee Palmer Wandel, *Voracious Idols and Violent Hands: Iconoclasm in Reformation Zurich, Strasbourg, and Basel* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Worth of mention is also Sergiusz Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts: The Protestant Image Question in Western and Eastern Europe* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993).

⁶⁹⁴ Claudio Moreschini, *Rinascimento Cristiano: Innovazioni E Riforma Religiosa Nell'italia Del Quindicesimo E Sedicesimo Secolo* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2017). 62; 64.

⁶⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 65.

moral and sensual themes and forms, for the elite and the masses alike.⁶⁹⁶ This was of course a worrisome outcome for those who, like Gianfrancesco Pico, did not abide to the Neoplatonist concept of ancient gods as symbols of ideas. Due to its immediacy, the visual arts became the most powerful medium of distribution of pagan themes: mythological images started to populate the private chambers of the popes, as well as brothels and taverns,⁶⁹⁷ influencing the sacred and erotic fantasy of those who were able to witness such artworks. Pico's personal crusade against Venus and Cupid took place in an historical moment where a wide part of Italian culture had already accepted the ambiguity and duplicity of the iconological and symbolic value of pagan images at the time.⁶⁹⁸

On this subject, Pico was not the only one to express open scorn and distrust. In 1513, the same year of publication of *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis*, two Camaldolese hermits wrote a long letter to Leo X, entitled *Libellus ad Leonem X*.⁶⁹⁹ Like Pico's poem, the *Libellus* exhorted the pope to purify and restore Christianity to Peter's See. The pope was also advised to eradicate the treacherous temptations of pagan literature, philosophy, and theology, and, at the same time, to fortify the cultural formation of the clergy, regulating their ambition, superstition, ignorance, and arrogance. Just like the young Pico, the Venetian hermits also addressed the ignominious degradation of the papal city, for Rome – according to them – had become a shameful and

⁶⁹⁶ Ginzburg, "Titian, Ovid and Sixteenth-Century Codes." 27.

⁶⁹⁷ See David Freedberg, "Johannes Molanus on Provocative Paintings. De Historia Sanctarum Imaginum Et Picturarum, Book Ii, Chapter 42," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 34 (1971). 241, 14 -15: "Why should I expatiate in the liberties taken in paintings and sculpture? What is disgraceful to name is freely painted and presented to the eyes. These subjects stand forth in public, in the taverns and market place, and are willy-nilly thrust on our view. They could even inflame Priam for all the coldness of his age, and rouse Nestor's loins. Yet the law and our magistrates still hesitate!" Possibly, the most iconic example of sensual/erotic imagery in the papal private chambers is 1519's *Stufetta di Bibbiena*, made explicitly for Cardinal Bernardo Dovizi da Bibbiena. The walls, painted by Giovanni d'Udine, depict the scenes of Cupid and Psyche from Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. See Godwin, *The Pagan Dream of the Renaissance*. 128 – 29.

⁶⁹⁸ Tateo, "I Due Pico E La Tematica D'amore Nel Cinquecento."

⁶⁹⁹ Paolo Giustiniani and Pietro Quirini, *Libellus: Addressed to Leo X, Supreme Pontiff*, trans. Stephen Beall and John J. Schmitt (2016).

despicable brothel, and its tangible depravity clearly mirrored that of the Church.⁷⁰⁰ The issue was not unknown to the Church hierarchies, although their voice gained authority years after Pico's *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis*. We have already seen Pope Adrian VI's disgust toward the statues of the *Cortile del Belvedere* in 1523. Another clear example of such awareness is the work of Dominican humanist Ambrogio Catarino Politi (1484 – 1553), who in 1542 wrote a treatise – *De cultu imaginum* – in order to persuade the Vatican to fight the spreading of pagan sensual images with their sacred counterparts, thus expanding on Gianfrancesco Pico's concerns regarding the items found in Julius II's *Cortile del Belvedere*.⁷⁰¹

Fears and admonitions about the display and viewing of ancient imagery as acts of idolatry continued with greater strength and urgency following the Council of Trent (1545–63). At the end of the sixteenth century, due to the delicate concerns of heresy and Reformist defection from the Church, protests against the admiration of pagan imagery as idolatrous behavior grew in number and became more severe. In 1566 Niccolò Cusano, agent of the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian II, wrote that Pope Pius V (r. 1566–72) felt it was unfitting for a successor of Peter to have pagan idols in his palace, and thus he sold or gave away many works to noble or royal collectors outside Rome.⁷⁰² Three years later, diplomatic bulletins began to affirm that the pontiff was planning to demolish the Villa Belvedere's garden theater as well as the Colosseum and other Roman architectural remnants, "in order to remove the temptation from visitors to Rome to pay more attention to pagan than to Christian things."⁷⁰³

⁷⁰⁰ Vasoli, "Gianfrancesco Pico E L'oratio De Reformandis Moribus." 233-237. See also Assonitis, "Fra Zanobi Acciaiuoli's Oratio in Laudem Urbis Romae (1518): Antiquarianism and Savonarolism at the Time of Raphael." 57.

⁷⁰¹ Ginzburg, "Titian, Ovid and Sixteenth-Century Codes." 23 – 24.

⁷⁰² Bentz, "Ancient Idols, Lascivious Statues, and Sixteenth-Century Viewers in Roman Gardens." 423

⁷⁰³ *Avviso* of 26 March 1569, von Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. 17, 113, 407 in *ibid.* 423-24: "Intendo ha in oltre gran' caprizzo, di far guastar L'Anfiteatro, chiamato volgarmente il Colisseo et alcuni archi trionfali, che sono le più belle et rare antichita di Roma sotto pretesto che sono cose gintili et per levarne a fatto la memoria et l'occasione siano viste da quelli che vengono a Roma più per vedere le dette cose che per visitar limina Petri et andar alle sette chiese et a vedere le reliquie de' martiri et santi di Dio..."

It is not yet known if Pope Pius V was somehow acquainted with Gianfrancesco Pico's works. It is however fascinating to see how they both shared the same fears and the same intentions toward pagan statuary. In fact, in his letter to Lilius Giraldi published with the hymn, Gianfrancesco Pico clearly states:

And so, while I consider that I am placed amongst these very animals accustomed to the grove of Venus and Cupid, I wrote these verses on how to chase out Venus herself and Cupid. Chasing them out, I say, certainly not from the grove - how such a thing could be accomplished by me? – but from the souls of the wild beasts.⁷⁰⁴

Thus, according to the author, his battle against Venus and Cupid had to be limited to the souls of those who dwelt in the garden because of his lack of influence in the Vatican during the pontificate of Julius II. One can only wonder what would have happened had Pico lived during the pontificate of Pius V.

Many other post-Tridentine treatises – such as Gilio da Fabiano's *Dialogo degli errori de' pittori* (1564),⁷⁰⁵ and Johannes Molanus' *De picturis et imagibus sacris* (1570) – seem to be animated by a spirit akin to that of Gianfrancesco Pico.⁷⁰⁶ In his later *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images* (1582), moreover, reformer and Bishop Gabriele Paleotti constantly disapproved

⁷⁰⁴ Pico della Mirandola, *Illustrissimi Ac Doctissimi Principis Jo. Francisci Pici Mirandulae... De Venere & Cupidine Expellendis Carmen; Item Eiusdem Laurentius & Geminianus Hymni*. Letter to Lilius Giraldi: "Haec itaque inter animalia Venereo Cupidinoque nemori assueta cum me positum existimarem. De ipsa venere et cupidine expellendis carmina istaec faciebam / expellendis inquam non sane extra lucum: qui enim a me parari id posset operis? Sed ab animis ferarum."

⁷⁰⁵ This work is more easily accessible in Paola Barocchi, *Trattati D'arte Del Cinquecento, Fra Manierismo E Controriforma*, vol. 2 (Bari: G. Laterza, 1960). The text also provides a useful introduction and commentary to the work.

⁷⁰⁶ Johannes Molanus, *De Picturis Et Imaginibus Sacris Liber Unus: Tractans De Vitandis Circa Eas Abusibus, & De Earundem Significationibus. Eiusdem Responsio Quodlibetia, Ad Tres Quaestiones, Quae Versa Pagina Indicanur* (Lovanii: Apud Hieronymum Wellaeum, 1570). Subsequent editions all appeared under the title *De Historia Sanctarum Imaginum et Picturarum*. For further information on Molanus' treatise, see Freedberg, "Johannes Molanus on Provocative Paintings. De Historia Sanctarum Imaginum Et Picturarum, Book Ii, Chapter 42."

of the possession and exhibition of ancient statues and images of Greco-Roman deities.⁷⁰⁷ “What invention is more diabolical than that of false gods?” asks Paleotti to his readership, recalling the accusation of idolatry against the Catholic Church brought forth by Protestant intellectuals before and after the Council of Trent.⁷⁰⁸ Similar arguments were popular in later treatises on art, such as Jesuit theologian Antonio Possevino’s 1595 *Tractatio de poesi & pictura ethnica, humana, & fabulosa*, where even the simple sight of pagan statues became despicable to the saints in heaven.⁷⁰⁹

All these post-Tridentine concerns about the influence and effects of pagan imagery, and how the display of ancient art might damage the contemporary viewing public, or worse, harmfully affect the very essence of the Catholic Church, are nothing but a wider reverberation of what Gianfrancesco Pico discussed in *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis* more than fifty years before the Council of Trent.⁷¹⁰ Gianfrancesco Pico’s *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis* represents an early stage in the diatribe on unholy art, and it is a key element to understanding

⁷⁰⁷ See especially Book 2, Chapter 10 of Paleotti’s *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane* in Barocchi, *Trattati D’arte Del Cinquecento, Fra Manierismo E Controriforma*, 2. 117–503. All excerpts quoted from this text derive from the recently published English translation, Gabriele Paleotti et al., *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images* (2012).

⁷⁰⁸ “E questo e quello da campo maggiore agli eretici di nominarci idoloatri: che, se noi avessimo le sole imagini de’santi, non resterebbe forse luogo al loro inganno, ma sendo fra noi tante statue de’falsi dei e facendosene tante ogni giorno, non e meraviglia se con questo pretesto ci dimandando tutti idolatri e prendono occasione d’ingannare i popoli. Quando ci battezziamo facciamo giuramento di rinonziare alle invenzioni del Diavolo; ma quale invenzione e piu diabolica di quella d’falsi dei?” Barocchi, *Trattati D’arte Del Cinquecento, Fra Manierismo E Controriforma*, 2. 291-92; Paleotti et al., *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images*. 173-74.

⁷⁰⁹ Antonio Possevino and Cicognara Fondo, *Antonii Possevini Societas Iesu Tractatio De PoëSi & Pictura Ethica, Humana & Fabulosa Collata Cum Vera, Honesta, & Sacra: Adiectus Est in Hac Editione Nouus Index Qui Omnia No Tatu Digna Complectitur* (Lugduni: Apud Ioannem Pillehotti... 1595). Chapter 27. See also Bentz, “Ancient Idols, Lascivious Statues, and Sixteenth-Century Viewers in Roman Gardens.” 425-27; Anthony Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy, 1450-1600*, 4th ed. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). 114, and David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989). 371.

⁷¹⁰ See Tateo, “I due Pico e la tematica d'amore nel Cinquecento.” 315.

the insurgence of that wave of indignation against pagan sensual images that would have influenced the Counter-Reformation.⁷¹¹

4. Exalting Beauty: The Revival of the Twofold Venus

Although Gianfrancesco Pico addresses his poem against Venus and Cupid as representatives of this rediscovery of pagan imagery, *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis* is also a theological attack against the philosophy that permitted such an interpretation of art, beauty, and love, that is, the kind of Platonism traceable to the context of Florence. As we have seen, one of the main problems at the core of this vibrant diatribe on the depiction of pagan characters and scenes was the interpretation of such images. Following a path begun with Dante, Petrarca, Boccaccio, and Coluccio Salutati,⁷¹² the rediscovery of ancient mythology in the Renaissance often went hand in hand with the idea that ancient religion was not just a mere collection of fairy tales, but rather an early attempt to understand the human relationship to God. “The origin of Poetry” writes Salutati in his *De laboris Herculis* “[...] lies in the praise of divinity and virtue, which the heathens have in common with the true religion.”⁷¹³ Often relegated to the less dangerous theological category of physical theology – usually associated with the investigation of nature in terms of evidence of God’s creating power⁷¹⁴ – mythology found fertile ground to

⁷¹¹ In order to limit the paragraphs dedicated to the literature against pagan imagery, we decided to concentrate our efforts to the Catholic side of the diatribe. Yet, the Protestant discourse was characterized by an even stronger dislike for pagan and non-Reformist images. See, for example, Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts: The Protestant Image Question in Western and Eastern Europe*.

⁷¹² Boccaccio’s *De genealogia deorum gentilium* had provided a useful encyclopedia of ancient mythology that often served as a handbook for Renaissance poets and artists. See Jean Seznec and C. S. Lewis, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and Its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art* (1953). 258. For Coluccio Salutati’s religious philosophy, see Paul Richard Blum, “Philosophy of Religion in the Renaissance,” (2010). 64-65.

⁷¹³ *De laboribus Herculis*, I 1, p. 9 in “Philosophy of Religion in the Renaissance.” 65: ‘Est igitur poetrie, quam isti tam mordaciter impugnant, initium laudatio divinitatis atque virtutis quam gentiles hauerunt cum vera religione communem.’

⁷¹⁴ See, for example, Giovanni Boccaccio and Jon Solomon, *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011). *De genealogia deorum*, Preface and XV 8, Boccaccio 1956. 6.

grow. Salutati's rudimental version of the 'presupposition method' was later developed by Nicholas Cusanus, who – in line with the concept of *Prisca theologia* – saw Christianity, the true religion, as presumed by antiquity. Marsilio Ficino would go even further, playing on the typology of ancient wisdom and Christian belief, with the parallel of Socrates and Christ and of the ancient Egyptian and Christian cross as the most visible examples.⁷¹⁵ His intended confirmation of Christianity through ancient wisdom, as a matter of fact, turned cleverly into an *interpretatio Christiana* of that antiquity, to the effect that the Christian viewpoint enlightened the wisdom of the pagans as its natural continuation and realization in the search for the truth.⁷¹⁶

It is indeed Ficino who, in his commentaries to Plato's *Symposium*, reintroduced a vital concept to the Italian Renaissance, that of "sacred" and "profane" love, symbolized by the twofold Venus – *Venus Pandemia* and *Venus Urania*. *Venus Pandemia*, "vulgar" Venus, is the goddess that rules the earthly realm of physical desire and biological reproduction, whereas

⁷¹⁵ Blum, "Philosophy of Religion in the Renaissance." 72. See also Marsilio Ficino et al., *De Vita Libri Tres, Recens Jam à Mendis SitiQue Vindicati, Ac Summa Castigati Diligentia. Quorum Primus, De Studiosorum Sanitate Tuenda. Secundus, De Vita Producenda. Tertius, De Vita Coelitus Comparanda* (Parisiis: Apud Thomam Richardum, 1550). III, 3, 32-35.

⁷¹⁶ Blum, "Philosophy of Religion in the Renaissance." 118. I believe this is not the place to further discuss Marsilio Ficino's philosophy. In order to have a proper understanding of the general Platonic outline of Ficino's system of thought, his endeavor with ancient and Christian forms of Platonism, and his particular position within Humanism and Renaissance in making available and accessible the works of Plato, one should look to the works of Paul Oskar Kristeller, Michael J. B. Allen, James Hankins and Christopher Celenza – to name just a few. See Paul Oskar Kristeller and Virginia Lanphear Conant, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943). Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Il Pensiero Filosofico Di Marsilio Ficino* (Firenze: Casa editrice Le Lettere, 1988). *Marsilio Ficino and His Work after Five Hundred Years* ([Florence]: Leo S. Olschki, 1987). See also Marsilio Ficino and Michael J. B. Allen, *Marsilio Ficino and the Phaedran Charioteer: Introduction, Texts, Translations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981). Michael J. B. Allen, *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino: A Study of His Phaedrus Commentary, Its Sources and Genesis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). *Plato's Third Eye: Studies in Marsilio Ficino's Metaphysics and Its Sources* (Aldershot, Hampshire; Brookfield, Vt.: Variorum, 1995). *Synoptic Art: Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1998). Michael J. B. Allen, Valery Rees, and Martin Davies, *Marsilio Ficino His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2002). For James Hankins contribution on the subject, see James Hankins, "Plato in the Italian Renaissance," (1990). *Humanism and Platonism in the Italian Renaissance* (Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2003). "The Platonic Academy of Florence and Renaissance Historiography," in *Forme Del Neoplatonismo. Dall'eredità Ficiniana Ai Platonici Di Cambridge*, ed. Luisa Simonuti (Firenze: Olschki, 2007). See also Christopher Celenza, "The Revival of Platonic Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. James Hankins (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Venus Urania, or “celestial” Venus, ascends to the pure realm of “ideal form” through her “chaste, orderly, superior, divine and spiritual” beauty.⁷¹⁷ Although already mentioned by the humanist Marsuppini in 1433,⁷¹⁸ the early modern rebirth of Venus is mostly credited to Marsilio Ficino and his Neoplatonic reading of Plato’s *Symposium*. Following the ideas previously expounded by Plotinus,⁷¹⁹ Ficino, in his *De Amore*, postulates the existence of two Venuses: a heavenly Venus symbolizing divine love, and a sensual Venus, representing the physical love necessary for the continuation of the species. In human beings, the two Venuses represent the powers of intellect and procreation:

[...] Venus is two-fold: one is clearly that intelligence which he [Plato] said was in the Angelic Mind; the other is the power of generation with which the World-Soul is endowed. Each has as consort a similar Love. The first, by innate love is stimulated to know the beauty of God; the second, by its love, to procreate the same beauty in bodies. The former Venus first embraces the Glory of God in herself, and then translates it to the second Venus. This latter Venus translates sparks of that divine glory into earthly matter. It is because of the presence of sparks of this kind that an individual body seems beautiful to us, in proportion to its merits. The human soul perceives the beauty of these bodies through the eyes.⁷²⁰

Thanks to the work of Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, the Renaissance concepts of love and beauty became associated with the higher, platonic idea of *Eros*, a form of desire and pleasure that spurns, and yet communicates with the low desires of the body.

Thus Giovanni Pico della Mirandola defines the Neoplatonic twofold Venus:

⁷¹⁷ Turner, “Profane Love: The Challenge of Sexuality.” 178-79. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Cabalarvm Selectiora Obsvroraque* (Venice: Franciscum Franciscium Senesem, 1569). Fol 85v.

⁷¹⁸ Letter of Carlo Marsuppini to Lorenzo Valla (Ms. Riccardiano, c.201v). See Leandro Ventura, *Lorenzo Leonbruno: Un Pittore a Corte Nella Mantova Di Primo Cinquecento* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1995). 101. Andrea Comboni, “Eros E Anteros Nella Poesia Italiana Del Rinascimento: Appunti Per Una Ricerca,” *Italique*, no. III (2000). 7-21.

⁷¹⁹ Plotinus, *The Enneads*, 3. III, 5 [50]. 2, 15-45.

⁷²⁰ Marsilio Ficino and Sears Reynolds Jayne, *Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on Plato's Symposium: The Text and a Translation, with an Introduction* (Columbia [Mo.]: University of Missouri, 1944). 142

Since beauty is found only in visible things, and since there are two kinds of sight, one corporeal and the other incorporeal, there must also be two kinds of visible objects, and consequently two kinds of beauty. These two kinds of beauty are the two Venuses celebrated by Plato and by our poet, namely, corporeal or sensible beauty, which is called the earthly Venus, and intelligible beauty, which is called the heavenly Venus. Intelligible beauty is found among the Ideas [...]. Hence it follows that since love is a desire for beauty, just as there are two beauties, there necessarily must be two loves, earthly and heavenly, and just as the former desires earthly or sensible beauty, so the latter desires heavenly or intelligible beauty. This is why Plato says in the Symposium that there are necessarily as many loves as there are Venuses.⁷²¹

Both Ficino and Pico affirm that love is an innate desire for beauty, understood as grace and harmony,⁷²² and both affirm the superiority of heavenly Venus, because she leads to God, or supreme beauty. Ficino and Pico had different conceptions of twofold Venus. For Ficino, the two Venuses inhabit man's soul, with earthly Venus as reproductive power, and heavenly Venus as intellectual power. Pico instead, believed that the two Venuses were not a power, but a set of ideas in the angelic mind and in man's soul.⁷²³ Despite these differences, both philosophers believed that, in order to reach ideal beauty, one must go through earthly Venus, visible and

⁷²¹ Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Sears Reynolds Jayne, *Commentary on a Canzone of Benivieni* (New York: P. Lang, 1984). 105.

⁷²² See Ficino and Jayne, *Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on Plato's Symposium: The Text and a Translation, with an Introduction*. 128: "The attractiveness of this Orderliness is Beauty. To Beauty, Love as soon as it was born, drew the Mind, and led the Mind formerly un-beautiful to the same Mind made beautiful". See also Pico della Mirandola and Jayne, *Commentary on a Canzone of Benivieni*. 104: "The proceeding is the broad or general meaning of the word beauty. In this meaning it is related to the word harmony. Thus, God is said to have created the whole world by a musical or harmonic ordering. Although the word harmony in its general sense can mean the normal state of order in any composite thing, strictly speaking it means only the arranging of several notes which fit together to make a pleasant sound. In the same way, although the word beauty can be used for anything which is nicely put together, nevertheless it properly refers only to visible things, just as the word harmony properly refers only to audible things; and it is this visual beauty the desire for which is called love".

⁷²³ See Franco Bacchelli, *Giovanni Pico e Pier Leone da Spoleto: tra filosofia dell'amore e tradizione cabalistica* ([Florence, Italy]: L.S. Olschki, 2001). 122-25; and Simone Fellina, *Modelli di episteme neoplatonica nella Firenze del '400: le gnosologie di Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola e di Marsilio Ficino* (2014). 105-07.

perceivable: thus mundane beauty loses its connotation of object of sin and decay, and obtains an important role in the process of askesis toward God.⁷²⁴

Ficino and Pico's ideas would not have had such success without finding fertile ground to grow. The Renaissance reintroduction of Venus Urania and Venus Pandemia in the Christian Neoplatonic pantheon, in fact, came hand in hand with the rediscovery of a concept that exerted a continuous influence in the late ancient and medieval philosophical tradition of Europe, although almost detached from its original Platonic source: the concept of *kalokagathia*. This philosophical notion is deeply rooted in Christian theology. It is also central to Gianfrancesco Pico's critique of the twofold Venus, and of Platonic love in general, while being at the core of his own idea of divine love. *Kalokagathia* is a philosophical concept almost as old as Greek classical culture, for there was already evidence of the combination of the terms "beautiful"

⁷²⁴ Although both Ficino and Pico agree on the role of earthly beauty in the process of elevation toward divine beauty, it is important to underline that they did not share entirely their position on mundane beauty and love. Ficino, as a matter of fact, had a more positive approach toward them. See Ficino and Jayne, *Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on Plato's Symposium: The Text and a Translation, with an Introduction*. 132: "We shall praise, of course, that former physical beauty, and approve the other of just; and we shall always try to keep in mind that the greatness of love corresponds to the greatness of the beauty it desires. When the body is beautiful and the soul is not at all, let us be slow and reluctant to worship the bodily beauty, like the shadowy passing image of beauty. When the soul alone is beautiful, let us love ardently this immutable beauty of the soul. When either beauty happens to coincide with the other, let us be especially adoring, and thus we shall testify to our having belonged to the Platonic family, for it knows nothing but holy, joyful, heavenly, and divine things." Giovanni Pico does not celebrate bodily beauty, though he still recognizes its value in awakening the human soul. See Pico della Mirandola and Jayne, *Commentary on a Canzone of Benivieni*. 124: "I say that the sense judges that beauty has its origin in the body, and therefore the object of love in all irrational animals is coitus. But the reason judges very differently. The reason knows that the material body is not only not the source or cause of beauty, but is by nature entirely averse to and destructive of that beauty. Moreover the reason knows that the more one separates beauty from the body and considers it in itself, the more beauty has the proper dignity and excellence of its own nature. Therefore, the reason does not try to proceed beyond the image received in the eyes to the body itself; on the contrary, if the reason sees any trace of anything corporeal or material remaining in that image, the reason tries to purge the image of it as much as it can." See also *ibid.* 158: "Following this order, the poet shows how a man is led through six stages, beginning with material beauty, to his first end. First stage: when the soul is still turned toward the senses, there is presented to it through the eyes the particular beauty of Alcibiades, or Phedrus, or some other attractive body. The soul is attracted to that body and takes pleasure in its particular beauty. If the soul stops here, it is in the first stage, the stage which is the most imperfect and most material. At the beginning of this stanza [the sixth] the poet assigns a cause to the following effect, namely, how it happens that one is attracted to one person sooner than to another. Second stage: the second stage is when the soul, using its own inner faculty, refines inside the soul the image which it has received from the eyes, even though it is still material or sensible. The more spiritual the imagination makes the images (or the more it separates it from matter), the more perfect it makes the image, and the closer it brings it to ideal beauty. But it is still very far away."

(καλός) and “good” (ἀγαθός) during the 5th century B.C., in Herodotus (1.30).⁷²⁵ For the ancient Greeks, the concept of beauty was so multifaceted and overwhelming that *the Beautiful* could not be entirely separated from *the Good*. The Delphic oracle cannot avoid describing the most just as the most beautiful. Sappho exclaims that what is beautiful is good, and what is good will soon be beautiful.⁷²⁶ Heraclitus claims that “to god all things are beautiful and good and just, but men suppose some things to be just and others unjust.”⁷²⁷

With Plato, beauty gains an even more important and ubiquitous nature, lying in what is finite, perceivable in form, and in what is infinite, beyond form, connecting the measurable with the immeasurable. For the philosopher, beauty links the human world with nature and the Divine, all related to the Good, expressing what is ethical, invaluable in all things, inside and outside the reach of human comprehension. Beauty functioned as a key element, triggering the spiritual ascension toward the Divine. For example, in Plato’s *Symposium*, Socrates explains Diotima’s path to immortality as ascending a staircase, in which one shifts from the love of a beautiful body to the love of many beautiful bodies, until one loves beautiful bodies in general. It is only then that one can witness the divine spark, the true beauty in every person, arriving at last to the understanding of Beauty/Good itself, which can only be perceived with the mind.⁷²⁸

⁷²⁵ The origins of the term *kalokagathia* are still being discussed. The 20th century saw three major publications concerning the origin and meaning of the term *kalos kai agathos*. Hermann Wankel wrote a dissertation in 1961, Walter Donlan wrote an article reviewing Wankel’s thesis in 1973 and in 1995 Felix Bourriot wrote a two-volume work in which he attempts a history of the term *kalos kagathos* from Herodotus to Aristotle. See Thomas Brian Mooney, and Geoff Coad, “Kalos Kai Agathos: Homeric Origins,” *SMU Social Sciences and Humanities Working Paper Series* (2006).

⁷²⁶ Stephen D. Ross, “Beauty,” in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, ed. Michael Kelly (Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁷²⁷ Daniel W. Graham, “Heraclitus,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2015).

⁷²⁸ See Plato, Alexander Nehamas, and Paul Woodruff, *Symposium* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1989). 211c: “One goes always upwards for the sake of this Beauty, starting out from beautiful things and using them like rising stairs: from one body to two and from two to all beautiful bodies, then from beautiful bodies to beautiful customs, and from customs to learning beautiful things, and from these lessons he arrives in the end at this lesson, which is learning of this very Beauty, so that in end he comes to know just what it is to be beautiful.”

Centuries later, the Neoplatonist philosopher Plotinus (205 – 270 AD) would revisit the concept of beauty/good arguing that, through Beauty, the Soul moves into the realm of Truth, thus linking once again material and immaterial beauty in the quest for the ascension to the Divine:

The beauty in things of a lower order – actions and pursuits for instance – comes by operation of the shaping Soul which is also the author of the beauty found in the world of sense. For the Soul, a divine thing, a fragment as it were of the Primal Beauty, makes beautiful to the fullness of their capacity all things whatsoever that it grasps and molds.⁷²⁹

As a keen reader of Plato, Plotinus relied on the Platonic discourse to develop his own definition of beauty, where objects as well as people can inspire an intellectual ascent to knowledge. In Plotinus, objects can be beautiful for the ideal beauty that illuminates them. Beauty is the revelation of spirit in matter, and the act of witnessing the beauty of material things is a means to turn one's soul towards its own intellectual capacity, thus admiring one's own beauty.⁷³⁰

The influence of the philosophical idea of *kalokagathia* did not end with the advent of Christendom. On the contrary, many Christian thinkers embraced the idea of beauty as a symbolic reminder of the Divine. Theologians like Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD), Pseudo-Dionysius (5th – 6th century AD), Johannes Scotus Erigena (c. 815 – c. 877), Hugh of St. Victor (c. 1096 – 1141), Bonaventura da Bagnoregio (c. 1217 -1274), and Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274) based their theory of beauty on the Neoplatonists, defining beauty as the expression of the

⁷²⁹ Plotinus, *The Enneads*, 3. 1.6.6. For an analysis of Ennead 1.6, see Plotinus and Stephen Mckenna, *Plotinus on the Beautiful: Being the Sixth Treatise of the First Ennead* (Stratford-upon-Avon: Shakespeare Head Press, 1914). For an overview on the philosopher, see Kevin Corrigan and Plotinus, *Reading Plotinus: A Practical Introduction to Neoplatonism* (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 2005).

⁷³⁰ Plotinus, *The Enneads*, 3. 1.6.6: “Hence the Soul heightened to the Intellectual-Principle is beautiful to all its power. For Intellection and all that proceeds from Intellection are the Soul's beauty, a graciousness native to it and not foreign, for only with these is it truly Soul. And it is just to say that in the Soul's becoming a good and beautiful thing is its becoming like to God, for from the Divine comes all the Beauty and all the Good in beings.”

revelation of divine spirit profuse in all of God's creation.⁷³¹ In this context, divine eternity, infinity, perfection, and goodness shine everywhere as beauty.⁷³² The case of Saint Augustine, as we will see, is particularly important in understanding Pico's own vision of beauty. For Augustine, in fact, the vision of Divine Beauty, which is almost completely lost to mortals, can still be grasped in the mirror of created reality, albeit concealed by a veil of temporality and corporeity. To the theologian of Hippo, therefore, revelation of divine beauty within the mortal realm cannot be witnessed simply looking at worldly beauty, as per the Platonic ladder of desire, but in it and through it, with faith, hope, and love.⁷³³

The Renaissance rebirth of Neoplatonism that – as we have seen – followed the renewed accessibility of many Platonic and late ancient Neoplatonic sources, rekindled the philosophers' attention to the concept of *kalokagathia*, this time as an original, pre-Christian form of

⁷³¹ Further information on the Platonic tradition in the Middle Ages can be found in Stephen Gersh and M. J. F. M. Hoenen, *The Platonic Tradition in the Middle Ages: A Doxographic Approach* (Berlin; New York: W. de Gruyter, 2002). On the relationship between Augustine and Aquinas' concepts of beauty, see Aidan Nichols, "Redeeming Beauty: Soundings in Sacral Aesthetics," (2007). Chapter 1. For Aquinas' theory of beauty, see Alice Ramos, "Dynamic Transcendentals: Truth, Goodness, and Beauty from a Thomistic Perspective," (2012). Chapter 4.

⁷³² Pseudo-Dionysius introduces his theory of beauty in chapter 4 of *On the divine names (De divinis nominibus)*, as a synonym of the theonym Good. The hierarchical equilibrium and definition of all things on different ontological levels agreeing to their characteristic nature is preserved by Divine Beauty and by its manifestation. Eric D. Perl, "Pseudo-Dionysius," in *A Companion to Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jorge J. E. Gracia, Timothy B. Noone, and InterScience Wiley (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2006). 540-549, 543: "This goodness is also their beauty. For Dionysius, as for Plotinus and Augustine, the beauty of each thing is the form, the determination in it, which is what makes it to be. Thus, just as to be is to be good, so to be is to be beautiful. Each being is by being beautiful in its proper way." For a detailed account of the idea of beauty in Augustine of Hippo, see Carol Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1992). For Pseudo-Dionysius' theory of beauty, see Eric D. Perl, "Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite," (2007). Chapter 3, 35-52. See Christian Schäfer, "Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite: An Introduction to the Structure and the Content of the Treatise on the Divine Names," (2006). 119. About Bonaventura da Bagnoregio, Jan Maclean notes that Bonaventura "provides a justification for the contemplation of women, in claiming that through their beauty it is possible to communicate with God," an argument, he notes, reminiscent of Platonism, but rare in scholastic writings. Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980). 16-17.

⁷³³ Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Saint Augustine*. Introduction. It is important to note that this section does not dismiss the fact that the notion of Beauty as emanation of Divine Beauty was widely used in Medieval literature, often linked to the success of Pseudo Dionysius's works and their impact on many philosophers of the thime, among wich we find also Aquinas. See O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*.

thought.⁷³⁴ Marsilio Ficino's theory of beauty and love is a clear example of this trend. In Ficino, Beauty – the splendor and ray of Divine Goodness – tends to diffuse and reverberate itself through the cosmos,⁷³⁵ enlightening and instilling God's grace.⁷³⁶ In this process, earthly beauty (linked to its mythological metaphor, *Venus Pandemia*) affects the human soul and creates love and desire for its spiritual, nobler counterpart (*Venus Urania*).⁷³⁷ In Ficino, just like in Plato, love is an innate desire for the beautiful, ignited by sensible perception only to ascend to the divine, ideal origin of Beauty. Divine beauty, therefore, works in a circle: it emanates from God, propagates in the cosmos, presents itself to humans and returns to God as love and desire for the Divine.⁷³⁸

Thanks to the success of Ficino's Christian perspective on Plato and the late ancient Neoplatonists, together with the vast distribution of his works as well as his translations of Plato and Hermes Trismegistus, many 15th and 16th century humanists decided to embrace Neoplatonism as a tool for philosophical and theological enquiry, and developed new theories on beauty and goodness.⁷³⁹ Later Renaissance thinkers expanded on this concept, admitting that

⁷³⁴ On this subject, it is important to remember that, except the *Timaeus*, almost none of Plato's own works were available until the fifteenth century. Platonism, in fact, was often transmitted through the philosophy of Augustine, as well as through various Neoplatonic treatises that made their way into the Latin philosophical canon. (Among these the most notable were the *Liber de causis*, derived from Proclus, and the writings of pseudo-Dionysius). See Robert Pasnau, "The Latin Aristotle," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aristotle*, ed. Christopher John Shields (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). pp. 665-689. 665.

⁷³⁵ See Ficino's letter to Pellegrino degli Agli in Marsilio Ficino et al., *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino* (1985). 44: "[...] we do indeed perceive the reflection of divine beauty with our eyes and mark the resonance of divine harmony with our ears."

⁷³⁶ See Ficino, Marsilio and Paul Oskar Kristeller. *Opera Omnia*. d'Erasmus, 1962. 1324: "Ut pulchrum [sc. deus] illuminat gratiamque infundit."

⁷³⁷ See Ficino and Jayne, *Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on Plato's Symposium: The Text and a Translation, with an Introduction*. 54: "[...] Venus is twofold. One is certainly that intelligence which we have located in the Angelic Mind. The other is the power of procreation attributed to the World Soul [...]. The former Venus first embraces the splendor of divinity (Uranus) in herself; then she transfers it to the second Venus. The latter Venus transfers sparks of that splendor into the Matter of the World"

⁷³⁸ Jorg Lauster, "Marsilio Ficino as a Christian Thinker," in *Marsilio Ficino His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, ed. Michael J. B. Allen, Valery Rees, and Martin Davies (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2002). 45 - 69.

⁷³⁹ It is also important to note that after Ficino Neoplatonism – which had been part of Christian thinking since before Augustine – underwent a process of vernacularization/divulgarization which increased its readers and its philosophical 'practitioners.' See Christopher Celenza, "The Revival of Platonic Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. James Hankins (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

celestial beauty and love could be found in physical and sensual desire.⁷⁴⁰ Philosophers like Leone Ebreo (Judah Leòn Abravanel, ca. 1465 – 1530) saw sex between man and woman as a natural derivation of celestial love, tracing parallels between ejaculation and verbal expression.⁷⁴¹ Tullia d’Aragona (1510 – 1556) argued that corporeal, sexual union is necessary to achieve the fusion of two bodies and two souls, which in her opinion incarnated the higher stage of love.⁷⁴² By glimpsing into divine nobility and beauty, sex became compatible with virtue and, thus, art. As a matter of fact, the theme of sacred and profane love had a significant presence in 15th – 16th century Italian visual art, the most striking example of which is most probably Titian’s 1515 painting, *Sacred and Profane Love*.⁷⁴³

Together with the world of figurative arts, this conception of love inspired by Ficino’s translation of Plato’s dialogues has a profound impact on poetry in Latin as well as in the vernacular. On the one hand, Ficino’s rediscovery of Plato and his peculiar take on the dialogue *Symposium* is directly linked with Michele Marullus’ *Hymni Naturales* (1497), Besides reviving – as it has been abundantly discussed in the second chapter – the late ancient tradition of hymn and hymn singing as a philosophical practice provided with spiritual effects, in his hymn to Venus Marullus refers to Venus as “*Sancta genetrix Amorum*,”⁷⁴⁴ thus incorporating the twofold conception of love documented in contemporary paintings and sculpture. On the other hand, this Platonizing conception of love instilled new life in the growing production of love poetry modeled on Petrarch’s *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*, which from the early experiments of Lorenzo de Medici and – outside of Florence - Benedetto Gareth, would culminate in the full-fledged platonic love poetry penned by Pietro Bembo and his countless Italian and European epigones.⁷⁴⁵

⁷⁴⁰ See Elena Rossoni, *Il bianco e dolce cigno: metafore d'amore nell'arte italiana del XVI secolo* (Nuoro [Italy]: Ilisso, 2002).

⁷⁴¹ James Turner, *One Flesh: Paradisal Marriage and Sexual Relations in the Age of Milton* (Oxford [Oxfordshire]: New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1987). 68; Maria Ruvoldt, *The Italian Renaissance Imagery of Inspiration: Metaphors of Sex, Sleep, and Dreams* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). 74, 200, n.24.

⁷⁴² Turner, “Profane Love: The Challenge of Sexuality.” 179.

⁷⁴³ For a thee Giles Robertson, “Honour, Love and Truth, an Alternative Reading of Titian's Sacred and Profane Love,” *Renaissance Studies Renaissance Studies* 2, no. 2 (1988).

⁷⁴⁴ Michele Marullo Tarcaniota and Donatella Coppini, *Inni Naturali* (Firenze: Le Lettere, 1995). Verses 6 and 45-52.

⁷⁴⁵ Principal source for this list was Comboni, “Eros e Anteros nella poesia italiana del Rinascimento: appunti per una ricerca.” On the theme of love in Renaissance Italian literature, see Donald Beecher and Massimo Ciavolella, *Eros and Anteros: The Medical Traditions of Love in the Renaissance* (Ottawa, Canada: Dovehouse Eds., 1992). Amedeo Quondam, “Sull'orlo della bella fontana: tipologie del discorso erotico nel primo Cinquecento,” *Tiziano /*

Although the symbol of the twofold Venus inspired many artists and poets, the concept ignited also the outrage of a set of humanists who questioned Ficino's Neoplatonic use of Venus, pagan goddess of sensuality, as the symbol of heavenly beauty. Gianfrancesco Pico and the later Girolamo Benivieni (1453 – 1542) were certainly two of the main protagonists in this counter-trend. Both fervent followers of Girolamo Savonarola, Pico and Benivieni derived their philosophical thought from the Neoplatonist experience of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, thus coming in contact with his vision of the twofold Venus. Such a notion is a key concept in Benivieni's thought, as it followed him throughout his life and survived his conversion to Savonarola's uncompromising form of Christian devotion, although irremediably changed. From the acceptance of earthly Venus as a necessary step in the process of spiritual ascension toward God, after his encounter with Savonarola, Benivieni refused worldly beauty in praise of its spiritual counterpart, seen in a Christological light. In his later outlook, heavenly Venus would assume the features of Jesus Christ, God incarnate, and, as such, both tangible and intangible beauty and love. In his vision, "Christ embodies the extraordinary union between earthly Venus and heavenly Venus, which leads man to God, apex of human happiness."⁷⁴⁶

6. Gianfrancesco Pico's Attack on Ficino's Twofold Venus

(*catalogo a cura di Maria Grazia Bernardini*). (1995). 65 – 81. On Paride Ceresara (1466 – 1532), Mantuan humanist active in Isabella d'Este's court, see Andrea Comboni, *Paride Ceresara, mantovano* (Firenze: Olschki, 1989). 263-80. On Benedetto Gareth – or Chariteo – see Giovanni Parenti, *Benet Garret detto il Cariteo: profilo di un poeta* ([Firenze]: L.S. Olschki, 1993). See also Marco Santagata, *La lirica aragonese: studi sulla poesia napoletana del secondo Quattrocento* (Padova: Antenore, 1979). 296-341. On Francesco Beccuti, see Francesco BECCUTI, detto il Coppetta, "Mutini, Claudio," in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* (1970). On Antonio Fileremo Fregoso, see G. Dilemmi, "Di un poeta «milanese» fra Quattro E Cinquecento: Antonio Fileremo Fregoso, in *Studi Di filologia e di letteratura italiana offerti a Carlo Dionisotti*, ed. Carlo Dionisotti (Milano-Napoli: R. Ricciardi, 1973).

⁷⁴⁶ During the writing of my thesis, I had the honor and the pleasure of reading Sergio di Benedetto's stub from his article "From Earthly to Heavenly Venus: on the Evolution of the Concept of Beauty in Girolamo Benivieni." I am truly grateful to Sergio, as his insight greatly inspired this chapter. See Sergio Di Benedetto, "From Earthly Venus to Heavenly Venus: On the Evolution of the Concept of Beauty in Girolamo Benivieni," (University of Lugano, 2015). 3.

During the bonfire of vanities of February 27, 1498, Savonarola publicly exhorted the citizens of Florence to “flee from Egypt,” that is to flee the temptation of mixing their beliefs and customs with those of the pagans. Thus, in his solemn homily, he stated:

The people of Israel [...] lived among the Egyptians, such that they became half Egyptian in speech, in customs, and in almost everything, and yet God decided to free them. It so happened at that time that the lukewarm were mixed with the good, and the good could no longer be distinguished from the bad [...]. Is it not so? I remember that when I was in the world I had this thought, and I used to say, “What kind of life is this?” The ranks of the good could not be distinguished from those of the bad. I would wonder and say, “Are we Christians or pagans?” I saw many who had the names of Jove, Juno, and Venus in their mouths together with Christ’s. I was stupefied. I would look at the prelates and not know how to tell whether they were lords or priests. For this reason, we were in the deepest darkness, and yet God has at this time sent light to the world and has taken us out of Egypt, that is, out of darkness, because “Egypt” is interpreted “darkness.” Whence our psalm says: *In exitu Israel de Aegypto*. That is, we have come out from the darkness of Egypt.⁷⁴⁷

What Savonarola tried to address and incite in this sermon is the fear that a form of religious and cultural hybridism was taking place in all levels of Catholic society, revamping the devotion for the ancient gods. Savonarola’s fear, although instrumental in his battle against the Vatican, was supported by many factors. The newfound philosophical interest in Neoplatonic philosophy and the conversion of pagan deities into metaphors, planets, or intermediaries of the celestial world, in fact, managed not only to seduce the humanist elite, but it also received the acceptance and praise of a substantial part of the clergy.⁷⁴⁸ Savonarola saw a major danger in this practice. He feared for the intellect of those who tampered with Neoplatonism, seeing their minds as caged in the ‘jail of the ancients,’ and he despised those preachers and humanists who would use the court

⁷⁴⁷ Savonarola et al., “Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola Religion and Politics, 1490-1498.” *Bonfire of Vanities II*: 27 February 1498. 321.

⁷⁴⁸ See Chapter 1.

or the pulpit to share their classical and Neoplatonic learnings – which he termed as the ‘most pernicious plague.’⁷⁴⁹

The acquaintance of the Holy See with Renaissance Neoplatonism and the theological rehabilitation of Venus are certainly two of the main reasons that brought Gianfrancesco Pico to write a poem against twofold Venus and Amor as metaphors of divine beauty and love. I believe, though, that Gianfrancesco Pico was driven against the mainstream Ficinian interpretation of Platonic love not only for some deep philosophical and theological concerns, but also for personal reasons. One must not forget that Ficino had been one of the first intellectuals to publicly rejoice for the death of Girolamo Savonarola. In his *Apologia contra Savonarolam*, Ficino justifies the adhesion of Florence to the Savonarolan Republic by demonizing the figure of the Dominican priest up to the point of declaring him the Antichrist.⁷⁵⁰ Speaking of the malevolent influence of Savonarola and his Piagnoni, Ficino states: “Why, then, should it seem marvelous that the Florentines [...] have been clandestinely besieged and seduced by a strong horde of demons under an angelic mask? Do we not believe that the Antichrist will miraculously seduce many persons preeminent in both prudence and probity?”⁷⁵¹ Ficino, who mildly accepted the advent of Savonarola in Florence and tried to become part of the new Florentine Republic, was now mockingly calling the Dominican priest “Savonarola”,⁷⁵² “prince of hypocrites,” ever

⁷⁴⁹ Assonitis, “Fra Girolamo Savonarola and the Aesthetics of Pollution in Fifteenth-Century Rome.” 145.

⁷⁵⁰ On this subject, André Chastel points out that Ficino was not the only one who saw the Antichrist in the Figure of Savonarola. Luca Signorelli’s Antichrist fresco in Orvieto seems to be modeled on the events of Savonarola’s life. See André Chastel, “L’apocalypse en 1500: la fresque de l’antéchrist à la Chapelle Saint-Brice d’Orvieto,” *Bibliothèque d’humanisme et Renaissance* 14, no. 1 (1952). See also Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979). 279.

⁷⁵¹ Marsilio Ficino, *Apologia contra Savonarolam* in Savonarola et al., “Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola Religion and Politics, 1490-1498.” 355.

⁷⁵² Bernard McGinn characterizes this as “Ficino’s own word play—saevus Nero (savage Nero),” referring to a figure in contemporary apocalyptic writings. See McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages*. 346, n. 22. See also Lorenzo Polizzotto, *The Elect Nation: The Savonarolan Movement in Florence, 1494-1545* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1994). 100. For details on the Renaissance use of the figure of Nero, see Romeo De Maio, *Riforme E Miti Nella Chiesa Del Cinquecento* (Napoli: Guida, 1973). 57.

sapping the vital energies of the Florentines with “Luciferean pride”.⁷⁵³ Accusing the Dominican priest of being possessed by demons, Ficino denounced his deceitful use of unholy prophecy to “dupe or compel the populace by means of some of his predictions” against the truth of astrologers and Platonic philosophers, of which groups Ficino was a leading and eminent member.⁷⁵⁴

Quoting Ficino:

[...] From conflicting and unfortunate influences and confluences of the stars, just as from certain signs, the Astrologers conjectured, as did the Platonists, that Savonarola [...] 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, committed to and too much believing in him.⁷⁵⁵

Ficino continues his open letter to the Roman clergy by attacking the “dire legion of demons attending Savonarola,” that is the Piagnoni and the other sympathizers of the Savonarolan movement. “God has arisen and has dispersed His enemies in Antichrist” – states Ficino, paraphrasing the Psalms – “all who hate God have fled from before His face; as smoke dissipates, they have dissipated, as wax flows away from fire, so have these false and proud sinners run away to perdition from before the face of God.”⁷⁵⁶ Ficino’s systematic attack, therefore, was not only aimed at the *damnatio memoriae* of the Dominican Friar, but to the condemnation of all his most zealous followers. Among them, one unavoidably counts

⁷⁵³ Savonarola et al., “Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola Religion and Politics, 1490-1498.” 355-56.

⁷⁵⁴ On this subject, see Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence; Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970). 87-91.

⁷⁵⁵ Savonarola et al., “Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola Religion and Politics, 1490-1498.” 355.

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid. 358. The psalm in question is Psalm 67:1-2.

Gianfrancesco Pico, who remained faithful to the teachings of Savonarola until the end of his days and often provided a safe haven for his fellows Piagnoni during his rule on Mirandola and Concordia.⁷⁵⁷

Following Ficino's harsh attack against and mockery of the followers of Savonarola, Gianfrancesco Pico began to show a certain hostility toward Ficinian Neoplatonism. Already in 1505, Pico unleashed a strong criticism against Ficino and the Florentine Platonists. His *De rerum praenotione*, in fact, contains a number of attacks against the main philosophical sources of the Ficinian theology.⁷⁵⁸ Never directing his blame too overtly against his contemporaries, Pico's attack remained systematic. Beginning with Proclus, the Mirandolan philosopher disproved Alkindi, Roger Bacon, Peter of Abano and the *Picatrix*.⁷⁵⁹ One of the characters attacked with particular vehemence is most certainly Orpheus – an author that deeply influenced Ficino⁷⁶⁰ – here accused of practicing black magic and instituting the cult of the demons once known as the Olympian gods, and blamed for inventing the sin of pederasty.⁷⁶¹ According to Walker, this special dislike of Orpheus may be due to Pico's knowledge of the important part he

⁷⁵⁷ See Chapter 1.

⁷⁵⁸ Daniel P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella* (University Park (PA): Pennsylvania state University Press, 2000). 147

⁷⁵⁹ Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Opera Omnia*, ed. Luigi Firpo, vol. II, Monumenta Politica Philosophica Humanistica Rariora (Turin: La Bottega d'Erasmus, 1972). 658 – 662. (*De rerum praenotione* VII, vvii). Lucia Pappalardo thoroughly explained the relationship between Gianfrancesco Pico and Al Kindi. see Pappalardo, *Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola: Fede, Immaginazione E Scetticismo*. 209-37. See also Pico della Mirandola and Pappalardo, *La Strega (Strix) Di Gianfranco Pico*. 136-37.

⁷⁶⁰ Allen has recently argued that later in life Ficino parted ways with this Orpheus to embrace a more Christian conception of divine *vates*. See Allen, *Synoptic Art: Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation*. 122: “however much Ficino had toyed at the onset of his career as a philosopher, and *a fortiori* as a musician, with the idea of sweeping the chords of his seven-stringed lyre as another Orpheus, even with reviving the Orphic dimension to Christianity [...] in his later years, after his immersion in the works of Plato and Plotinus, he turned elsewhere for the supreme exemplar of the enraptured sage [...]. This sage had to be, not the hymnodist Orpheus, however venerable his role as a gentile theologian, but the philosopher-lover of the divine city of truth and goodness within, the Socrates who had undergone [...] a Christ-like passion.” This change of heart, however, does not seem to affect Gianfrancesco Pico's opinion of him.

⁷⁶¹ Pico della Mirandola, *Opera Omnia*, II. 471-72 (*De rerum praenotione*, IV, ix); See also D. P. Walker, “Orpheus the Theologian and Renaissance Platonists,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 16, no. 1/2 (1953). 114.

played in Ficino's theories on natural magic.⁷⁶² Another attack on Ficino happens, as previously noted by Walker, in a chapter dedicated to Apollonius of Thyana (c. 15 – c. 100 AD),⁷⁶³ a Greek Neopythagorean philosopher from the town of Tyana who, due to the cult of his figure in late antiquity, has often been compared with Jesus of Nazareth by Christians in the 4th century and by other writers in early modern times.⁷⁶⁴ The same Apollonius of Tyana that Ficino quoted in his attack on Savonarola as a trustworthy source,⁷⁶⁵ is here accused of necromancy. The same goes for “a certain man, otherwise learned and of the highest authority among Platonists,”⁷⁶⁶ who shared with Apollonius the dangerous superstition of magic talismans.⁷⁶⁷ The attack against Neoplatonic philosophers is a recurrent theme of the *De rerum praenotione*. From the first chapter of the book, where Pico questions the Platonic nature of the soul, up to book seven.⁷⁶⁸

If we consider how central Pico's poems were in the promotion of his moral and political agendas, it is all the more evident how the Neoplatonic conception of a twofold Venus/Cupid went against his own system of belief: a system where spiritual love and beauty are positive virtues in opposition with non-spiritual vanity and lust. One must not forget, in fact, that the composition of the *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis* went hand in hand with the writing of four

⁷⁶² Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*. 147. Paola Zambelli goes even further than Walker, suggesting that Pico is veiling accusing Ficino of polytheism and pederasty. See Paola Zambelli, *L'ambigua Natura Della Magia: Filosofi, Streghe, Riti Nel Rinascimento* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1991). 199. See also John Warden, “Orpheus and Ficino,” in *Orpheus, the Metamorphoses of a Myth*, ed. John Warden (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1982).

⁷⁶³ Pico della Mirandola, *Opera Omnia*, II. 668-9. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*. 148.

⁷⁶⁴ *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*. 147. He is mentioned in Eusebius' Gospel Preparation, bk. IV, chap. 13. Philostratus' Life of Apollonius, bk. For more information on Apollonius of Tyana, see Philostratus and Charles Parmelee Eells, *Life and Times of Apollonius of Tyana* (Stanford University: The University, 1923).

⁷⁶⁵ Savonarola et al., “Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola Religion and Politics, 1490-1498.” 356: “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.”

⁷⁶⁶ Pico della Mirandola, *Opera Omnia*, II. 668: “[...] docto alioqui viro, & inter Platonicos eximia auctoritatis...”

⁷⁶⁷ Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*. 147-9.

⁷⁶⁸ Pico della Mirandola, *Opera Omnia*, II. 402. (*De rerum praenotione* I, XIII).

books on divine love, a work that would have been published in 1516 under the name *De amore divino* and dedicated to Pope Leo X.⁷⁶⁹ In this treatise, as we will see, Pico conducts a systematic attack against the ancient pagan conceptions of love, while confirming that the only true love is the love of God. The main objective behind Pico's *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis*, therefore, was not simply to criticize the presence of pagan statues in the Pope's *Cortile del Belvedere*, but also to warn the Christian hierarchies against the heretical snares of Neoplatonic philosophy and encourage a Savonarolan form of sacred love:

If you admire in contemplation the species of things from Nature's / lofty throne, they may say you were touched by Celestial Venus' / frenzy, and that taken by love you were seized / to the highest vault on the wings of the Ethereal one, / so that from up there you might observe the changeable forms / and the lower shapes of things in their pure light.⁷⁷⁰

This part of the poem – often interpreted as a partial recognition of the Neoplatonic Venus Urania – must be interpreted, I argue, as an ironic debasement of such theory. The verse above, in fact, reflects the theories contained in the third book of Pico's *De amore divino* perfectly, in which the author criticizes the Neoplatonic philosophers of his time for misunderstanding the Platonic ideas and wrongfully incorporating them to Christian doctrine, resulting in an unjustified exaltation of the concept of platonic love. For Pico, the platonic philosophers of

⁷⁶⁹ See Pico della Mirandola, Baptista, and Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Mirandulae Dn. De Expellendis Venere & Cupidine Carmen Heroicu[M]; Eiusdem Hymnus De Diuo Laurentio. Baptistae Mantuani Elegia in Amorem; Eiusdem in Venerem Heroicu[M]. In Cupidinem Nocium Carmen Luciani*. Letter of Gianfrancesco Pico to Konrad Peutinger: “hac in mano habemus de diuino amore libros quatuor...” [“I have in hand four books on divine love”]. See also Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Io. Francisci Pici Mira[N]Dulae D[Omi]Ni [Et] Co[N]Cordiaae Comitae D'amore Diuino Libri Quattuor: Ad Diuum Leonem Pont. Max* (Rome: Per Iacobum Mazochium, 1516).

⁷⁷⁰ *De Venere*, 65 – 77: “Si primum fontemque boni summumque tonantem / Ardes ingenti conatu ingentibus alis / (Quas tibi nec caera nec filo Daedalus olim / Aptarit firmo sed glutine Mater amoris / Alma fides casti) flammatus feruidus axes / Egrederet et pietas tibi nomina fecerit ardens / Atque amor atque charis plausu celebrata frequenti. / Si rerum species iam contemplator ab alta / Naturae specula mireris, tactus ab oestro / caelesti Veneris diceris, captus amore / Aetheriae et superam pennis sublatus in oram, / ut fluxas rerum formas, rerumque figuras / degeneres illinc despectes lumine puro.”

antiquity had never considered material things as part of the divine mind, but as entities residing in a high, glimmering mirror – *specula* – where they can be witnessed in their ever-changing and transitory nature. These ideas, says Pico, were nothing but shadows of true ideas; shadows that he recognizes in the concept of *semina rerum* itself.⁷⁷¹

Another specific theme targeted in *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis* is the Platonic concept of frenzy, which – as it is well known – became a central tenet in Ficino’s interpretation of Plato’s dialogues and their Late Ancient interpreters. The target is once again Ficino’s philosophy, which saw amatorial passion as one of the four forms of divine *furor*.

As Ficino explains in his *De amore*:

Wherefore, as [the soul] descends through four stages, it must also ascend through four stages. But the divine frenzy is that which elevates it to the higher spheres, as its definition indicates. There are, then, four kinds of divine frenzies. First is the poetic, next the hieratic, third the prophetic, fourth the amatory passion.⁷⁷²

By incorporating the prophetic and hieratic frenzies into the poetic, Ficino intended to incorporate the divine inspiration of the *prisci theologi*, like himself, and the *prisci poetae* of antiquity.⁷⁷³ This Ficinian union between passion and inspiration, however, gives way to

⁷⁷¹ Moreschini, *Rinascimento Cristiano: Innovazioni E Riforma Religiosa Nell'italia Del Quindicesimo E Sedicesimo Secolo*. 50.

⁷⁷² Ficino, Marsilio. *De Amore*, 7:14 in Raphael Falco, “Marsilio Ficino and Vatic Myth,” *MLN* 122, no. 1 (2007). 113: “Quapropter sicut per quatuor descendit gradus, per quatuor ascendat necesse est. Furor autem divinus est qui ad supera tollit, ut in eius definitione consistit. Quatuor ergo divini furoris sunt species. Primus quidem poeticus furor, alter mysterialis, tertius vaticinium, amatorius affectus est quartus”

⁷⁷³ Allen, *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino: A Study of His Phaedrus Commentary, Its Sources and Genesis*. 50. See also D. P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology; Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1972). 23: “Ficino, who developed the doctrine of the *furores* so that the greatest poets were thought to be possessed not only by the poetic *furor*, but also by the religious (Bacchic), prophetic and amorous ones, gives Orpheus as an example of this.” On Ficino’s merging of *prisci theologi* and *prisci poetae*, see also Falco, “Marsilio Ficino and Vatic Myth.” 113: “The line between *prisci theologi* and *prisci poetae* had been blurred since late antiquity, if not since Hesiod, so that Ficino’s incorporation of the two is not an innovation so much as an articulation, via Plato, of the reasons for which poetry must be seen as the initial step in theology, the *sine qua non* of the re-ascent to heaven.”

Gianfrancesco Pico to denounce any kind of *furor* as the enslavement of inspiration to carnal passion. From Cyprus' "idalios ignes" to Venus' "dionaeos furores" the author creates a clear link between frenzy and lust. In the verses above, Pico does not only compare Christianity with Neoplatonism, but attacks once again the Renaissance Platonists with harsh irony, refuting the nobility of any type of frenzy inspired by the so-called Venus Urania, and explaining that such spiritual fire is lit only by vanity, greed and lust: the signs of Carnal Venus.

If taken by a loved sight you happen to feel / arrows lighting a fire into your bones, / this is the flame of Sensual Venus, and the winged-child's / blow carried through the air by an arrow of gold. / For after that *discordia concors* brightens / the look of a body and is fastened to a pleasant structure, / then she immediately breathes onto the eyes and with rapid course / penetrates into the silent recesses of the affected heart.⁷⁷⁴

As a matter of fact, all the myths of love presented by Pico throughout the poem function as examples of the nefarious consequences of *furor* in the life of humans. No pagan deity, poet or hero, can resist the arrows of the twofold Cupid. Although Pico's evocation of these myths seems to follow the usual *topos* of *amor vincit omnia*, his moral purpose is that of overturning the entire concept. What Pico is truly after is the death of the Neoplatonic allegory and the physical theology built around it: the end of a system that proposes physical infatuation and divine love as aspects of a unique, universal moral value.⁷⁷⁵ Venus and Cupid, as will see in the next paragraphs, will take a very different role in Gianfrancesco's symbolic narrative on love. One must not forget that, in Gianfrancesco Pico's system of thought, angels and demons, or

⁷⁷⁴ Pico della Mirandola, *Illustrissimi Ac Doctissimi Principis Jo. Francisci Pici Mirandulae... De Venere & Cupidine Expellendis Carmen; Item Eiusdem Laurentius & Geminianus Hymni*. vv. 73-80: "[...] Facie si captus amata / Spicula persentis succendere in ossibus ignem, / Sensilis haec Veneris flamma est, puerique uolantis / vulnus ab aurata missum per inane sagitta. / Namque ubi membrorum vultus **discordia concors** / fulserit et grata fuerit compage revincta, / Ipsa oculos afflat subito celerique meatu / Labitur affecti tacita ad penetralia cordis:"

⁷⁷⁵ Tateo, "I Due Pico E La Tematica D'amore Nel Cinquecento." 317.

ancient gods, were not only symbols or poetic inventions, but also – and more importantly – ontological realities.⁷⁷⁶ For Gianfrancesco Pico, the devils of Christianity as the Platonic *daimona* – which Neoplatonic ontology puts as intermediaries between humans and gods – are revealed as evidence of cosmological, ontological, and epistemological principles of his faith. All this would be later confirmed, in Gianfrancesco Pico’s involvement in the witch-hunt that took place in his lands.⁷⁷⁷ It is no coincidence, therefore, that in Pico’s *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis* the myths of love between gods and men resound of the same empirical gravity that Renaissance inquisitors gave to the copulation between witches and devils. Venus and Cupid’s *furor*, therefore, becomes proof of the pagan gods’ demonic origin,⁷⁷⁸ and further testimony of the ancients’ penchant for witchcraft.

7. Spurca Venus, or the Demonization of the Neoplatonic Gods

As we have seen before, Pico’s personal crusade against the pagan gods took place in an historic moment when a great part of Italian culture had already accepted the ambiguity and duplicity of the iconological and symbolic value of pagan images and symbols.⁷⁷⁹ According to Gianfrancesco Pico, moreover, this exposure was especially dangerous for young minds. In his earlier work *De imaginatione*, in fact, Pico explains that young people had yet to develop a more rational type of imagination, lacking as they were of the mental ability to truly appreciate faith.⁷⁸⁰ In his later *Dialogus de adoratione*, moreover, Pico insists on the power of images as

⁷⁷⁶ Walter Stephens, “De Dignitate Strigis: La Copula Mondi Nel Pensiero Dei Due Pico E Di Torquato Tasso,” *ibid.* 325.

⁷⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 330-1.

⁷⁷⁸ See Francesco Tateo, “I Due Pico E La Tematica D'amore Nel Cinquecento,” *ibid.* 317.

⁷⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸⁰ Pico della Mirandola and Caplan, *On the Imagination*. For a concise reconstruction of Pico’s concept of phantasia in his *De imaginatione*, see Pico della Mirandola and Pappalardo, *La Strega (Strix) Di Gianfranco Pico*. 115-36.

keys to trigger a mental and spiritual path towards the divine.⁷⁸¹ The overexposure to the misinterpreted imagery of pagan antiquity, like in Julius II's *Cortile del Belvedere*, could thus bring about a process of degeneration of the human imagination, from reason to brutish animality, something that the author carefully described in the letter accompanying the 1513 Rome edition of the *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis*, which was discussed in the opening pages of this dissertation.⁷⁸²

Yet, the author does not use his hymns to bring forth a genre of poetry devoid of pagan imagery and gods. On the contrary, he often indulges in the description of such deities and their adventures. This may sound like a contradiction at first, but it is not. According to Pico's treatise *De imaginatione*, the best way to guide young men towards the glory of Christianity is, in fact, the use of powerful images like those of angels and demons. This redirection of people's fantasy towards a Christian paradigm is therefore an instrument to keep unrestrained imagination at bay.⁷⁸³ By converting the ancient gods into his personal vision of Christianity, Pico attempts to convert the readers themselves to his own form of *pietas*. In order to accomplish this process of conversion, it was thus necessary to make the Olympian gods ugly. According to Pico, the key to addressing the issue of pagan gods in contemporary culture was not to question their ontological and epistemological existence, but rather to witness their mangled, deformed nature in order to show their true weakness in light of the triumph of Christianity. Pagan gods, therefore, still had a

⁷⁸¹ Moreschini, *Rinascimento Cristiano: Innovazioni E Riforma Religiosa Nell'italia Del Quindicesimo E Sedicesimo Secolo*. 69.

⁷⁸² Pico della Mirandola, *Illustrissimi Ac Doctissimi Principis Jo. Francisci Pici Mirandulae... De Venere & Cupidine Expellendis Carmen; Item Eiusdem Laurentius & Geminianus Hymni*. Letter to Lilius Giraldi: "Haec itaque inter animalia Venereo Cupidineoque nemori assueta cum me positum existimarem. De ipsa venere et cupidine expellendis carmina istaec faciebam / expellendis inquam non sane extra lucum: qui enim a me patrari id posset operis? Sed ab animis ferarum."

⁷⁸³ Pico della Mirandola and Caplan, *On the Imagination*. 88-9.

certain utility if used to stir people away from heresy and towards the path of what Pico perceived as the true religion.

The incipit of the *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis* clearly demonstrates how, for Pico, pagan symbols can be beneficial if represented as warped, ludicrous identities incapable of withstanding any confrontation with Christianity. Here, the poet invokes the Virgin Mary – *casta parens*⁷⁸⁴ – so she may cast away the twofold Venus and “those winged brothers [the two Cupids] whom mad antiquity forged/ as foolish gods,”⁷⁸⁵ and indulges in describing the seedy nature of the birth of the two gods:

They say Amor was born during the ancient wedding of Penia / and Porus, from a mother who was barely born, /while the gods, at a crowded table, were partaking in a symposium in the starry palace and green garden of Jupiter; / while the mind of the celestials was inebriated, filled with sweet nectar / and sweet ambrosia, all of a sudden, she appears to them – / the most marvelous idea of things to come.⁷⁸⁶

In this section of the poem, Pico takes pleasure in mocking the Neoplatonic concept of *Venus Urania*, defining her ironically as “the most marvelous Idea of things to come,” while being imagined by a mob of drunken gods united in symposium.⁷⁸⁷ Cupid is not spared from criticism, being generated right after an unholy union between Penia (poverty) and Poros (need), by “a

⁷⁸⁴ Pico della Mirandola, *Illustrissimi Ac Doctissimi Principis Jo. Francisci Pici Mirandulae... De Venere & Cupidine Expellendis Carmen; Item Eiusdem Laurentius & Geminianus Hymni*. vv. 3: “casta parens”

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid. 1-8: “Idalios ignes caecique Cupidinis arma / Atque Dionaeos procul ablegare furores / Fert animus. Da, casta parens, Iessaea propago, / Da, virgo, aeternum virgo, quae sola furentum / Nequitiam sacro praestas compescere partu, / Da, praecor, et Veneres et quos malesana uetustas / Aligeros finxit dementia numina fratres / Exturbare, nouo longe et dispellere cantu.” [The Idalean flames blind Cupid’s weapons, / and Dione’s frenzies – these do the soul seek / to banish. Grant me, chaste mother, offspring of Jesse, / virgin, eternally virgin, you who alone, with the sacred birth, / restrained the sacrilege of fools; / now grant me, I beg you, to chase twofold Venus away / and those winged brothers whom mad antiquity forged / as foolish gods; grant me to cast them out with this new song.]

⁷⁸⁶ Ibid. 9-15: Fertur in antiquis Peniaeque Porique hymanaeis / Natus Amor, nata uix de genitrice, frequenti / Dum mensa inter se celebrant conuiuia Diui / Stellato in solio, uiridique Diespitris horto, / Dum mens ebria Caelitibus, dum nectare dulcis / Et dulci Ambrosia saturis pulcherrima rerum / Quas gigni sit, fas iam tum obuersatur imago.

⁷⁸⁷ See also Tateo, “I Due Pico E La Tematica D'amore Nel Cinquecento.” 320.

mother barely born.”⁷⁸⁸ This entire section of the poem is a re-reading of Plato’s description of the birth of Eros found in the *Symposium*, which had recently been translated and provided with a commentary by Marsilio Ficino.⁷⁸⁹ Plato’s text describes the event as it follows:

When Aphrodite was born, all the gods held a feast. One of those present was Poros (Resource), whose mother was Metis (Cleverness). When the feast was over, Penia (Poverty) came begging, as happens on these occasions, and she stood by the door. Poros got drunk on the nectar – in those days wine did not exist – and having wandered into the garden of Zeus was overcome with drink and went to sleep. Then Penia, because she herself had no resource, thought of a scheme to have a child by Poros, and accordingly she lay down beside him and became pregnant with a son, Love.⁷⁹⁰

Pico’s mockery, therefore, is not only directed toward the Olympian deities, but to the source of the myth itself. The author’s reading of Diotima’s metaphor of the birth of Eros, in fact, aims to highlight what many philosophers of his time tried to avoid acknowledging: the fact that Venus’ birthday depicted by Plato was in fact an unholy orgy of false deities drinking and copulating, and that Amor was the product of sexual violence. Pico’s degradation of Amor hits, of course, the idea of love as desire of perfection, a concept his uncle fostered before his conversion to the Savonarolan cause,⁷⁹¹ and the Ficinian interpretation of Platonic love. Concepts that – according to Pico – are unequivocally trying to revive the cult of the ancient multitude of Venuses and Cupids evoked by the ancients under the disguise of metaphors and delightful stories:

⁷⁸⁸ Pico della Mirandola, *Illustrissimi Ac Doctissimi Principis Jo. Francisci Pici Mirandulae... De Venere & Cupidine Expellendis Carmen; Item Eiusdem Laurentius & Geminianus Hymni*. vv. 11-15: “Dum mensa inter se celebrant conuiuia Diui / Stellato in solio, uiridique Diespitrīs horto, / Dum mens ebria Caelitibus, dum nectare dulcis / Et dulci Ambrosia saturis pulcherrima rerum / Quas gigni sit, fas iam tum obuersatur imago.” [While the gods, at a crowded table, were partaking in a symposium / in the starry palace and green garden of Jupiter; / while the mind of the celestials was inebriated, filled with sweet nectar / and sweet ambrosia, all of a sudden she appears to them –/ the most marvelous Idea ever made.]

⁷⁸⁹ See Ficino and Jayne, *Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on Plato's Symposium: The Text and a Translation, with an Introduction*.

⁷⁹⁰ Plato, M. C. Howatson, and Frisbee C. C. Sheffield, *Plato, the Symposium* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). 39.

⁷⁹¹ See Pico della Mirandola and Jayne, *Commentary on a Canzone of Benivieni*.

The ancient poets, misled by the riddles of the false / gods, also sang of Venuses of other kinds: / for fun they began to ascribe different loves / to them, and filled their poems with all kinds of prodigies. / And so countless flocks of winged children / began to fly out of Cyprus: with blazing torches, naked bodies, / bows and a multicolored quiver strapped on their back / they fly over lands, seas, winds, stars and the sky.⁷⁹²

Pico's reinterpretation of Plato's *Symposium* is only one of the many examples of utilitarian debasement of the pagan gods found in Pico's poems. The *Hymnus Christi*, second *carmen* of the earlier tryptic known as *Hymni heroici tres* (1507) discussed in the last chapter, as we have seen contains an even lengthier case of demonization of pre-Christian deities than the ones scattered in the *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis*. Here, in a 145 verse-long epic description, Pico enumerates the countless cults that foolish antiquity created before the birth of Jesus Christ, and he emphasizes how their gods and shrines became mute and helpless after the Savior's arrival. In Pico's poem, the advent of the son of God is what dissolved the celestial influence of Hyperion, and his descent on the Nile is what annihilated the Egyptian gods and destroyed their temples. His death and resurrection, moreover, are the cause of the pagan divinities' eternal silence and their banishment into the infernal lands.⁷⁹³ Similarly, in the third hymn of the tryptic dedicated to the Virgin Mary, Pico describes, in great length, the fall of the Olympian goddesses by the hands of Jesus, Mary and the angels.⁷⁹⁴

The case of the demonization of Venus, a topic shared in both the *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis* and the *Hymni heroici tres*, can help us understand how central this debasement of

⁷⁹² 19-26: "Verum alias etiam Veneres ambage retenti / Falsorum diuum prisci cecinere poetae, / Quis uarios et ludo submittere amores / Coepere et uariis implere poemata monstis. / Hinc Cypro exiliunt puerorum multa uolantum / Agmina, quae rutilis facibus, quae corpore nudo / Quaeque arcu et uaria tergo pulsante pharetra / Circumeant terras, maria, aera, aethera, caelum."

⁷⁹³ Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani... Hymni Heroici Tres Ad Sa[N]ctissimam Trinitatem, Ad Christum & Ad Virginem Mariam: Una Cu[M] Commentariis Luculentiss. Ad Io. Thomam Filiu[M]* (Milan: Apud Alexandrum Minutianum, 1507). II, vv. 44 – 189.

⁷⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, III.

pagan deities was to Pico's poetry. A first attempt of this process can be traced to almost 10 years prior to his well-known hymn against Venus. Already in 1503, while writing his *Staurostichon, heroicum carmen de mysteriis Dominicae crucis nuper in Germaniam delapsis* – a heroic poem against astrology written in 1502-1503, and dedicated to the emperor Maximilian I – Pico developed his idea of Venus in utter contrast to any form of philosophical concord between paganism and Christianity. In his *Staurostichon*, in fact, Pico transforms the Pagan goddess of beauty into a demonic instigator of lust, depravity and vanity: a figure that Pico, whose theories always rested on a strong knowledge of the Bible, directly associates with the Whore of Babylon (vv. 301 – 334).⁷⁹⁵ According to Pico, this infernal version of the deity, named *Spurca Venus*, was nothing less than the “mighty queen of evil,” awakened by his contemporaries' love for luxury and depravity.⁷⁹⁶ Pico's idea of “Foul Venus, which is savored by too languid men / And feeds on ignoble spirits, and torments with atrocious jealousy,”⁷⁹⁷ recurs multiple times in his *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis*, creating a deep sense of philosophical continuity between the two poems. “[...] if you were to desire commerce with fertile beds,” writes Pico, “here dirty Venus comes about, pleasure mixed with pain / and sweetness assists her, but soon after bitterness comes, / and even surpasses her.”⁷⁹⁸

As I have mentioned before, at the beginning of his *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis*, Pico decides to implore the help of the Virgin Mary to cast away the influence of the two demons:

⁷⁹⁵ *Staurostichon*, vv. 301 – 334.

⁷⁹⁶ *Staurostichon*, vv. 314-319.

⁷⁹⁷ *Staurostichon*, vv. 321-322.

⁷⁹⁸ Pico della Mirandola, *Illustrissimi Ac Doctissimi Principis Jo. Francisci Pici Mirandulae... De Venere & Cupidine Expellendis Carmen; Item Eiusdem Laurentius & Geminianus Hymni*. vv 86-89: “At si foecundi cupias commertia lecti / spurca Venus prodit permixta dolore uoluptas / Dulcedo adsistit sed mox succedit amaror / praeceditque etiam [...]”

The Idalean flames, blind Cupid's weapons, / and Dione's frenzies – these does the soul seek / to banish. Grant me, chaste mother, offspring of Jesse, / virgin, eternally virgin, you who alone, with the sacred birth, / restrained the sacrilege of fools; / now grant me, I beg you, to chase twofold Venus away / and those winged brothers whom mad antiquity forged / as foolish gods; grant me to cast them out with this new song.⁷⁹⁹

The choice of the Virgin Mary to fight against Venus and Cupid is not casual. Since Pico's philosophical symbolism cast Venus and Cupid as representative of worldly lust and desire, the attentive choice of words operated by Pico here allows us to understand the symbolic validity of the mother of Christ. In this case, she is linked with the idea of chastity, spiritual love, and maternal affection. In these first eight verses, Mary is defined *casta parens*, and in verse four she is repeatedly called *virgo* in order to stress her eternal virginity as a superior form of virtue. In Pico's philosophy, therefore, Venus finds her antagonist in a Christian revision of Venus Urania: Virgin Mary.

Just like the concept of *Spurca Venus*, the dichotomy between Venus and Mary is not new. A first attempted dichotomy between two female entities as carriers of divine and mundane values can be found in one of Savonarola's poems, 'De ruina ecclesiae' (1475). In the poem, the Church is depicted as the earthly spouse of the Virgin Mary, a "pious mother" abandoned by her people, and stripped down of her sober and spiritual vestments. This woman brings Savonarola to witness the entrance of a "haughty woman" into the gardens of Rome. Their dialogue ends on a dark and suggestive note, full of millenarian beauty:

– My lady, – said I, then – if you don't mind, / My soul would gladly weep along with you. / What power is this that takes your kingdom from you? / What haughty person so disturbs your peace? / She answered with a sigh – One false, / and haughty prostitute,

⁷⁹⁹ Ibid. 1-8: "Idalios ignes caecique Cupidinis arma / Atque Dionaeos procul ablegare furores / Fert animus. Da, casta parens, Iessaea propago, / Da, virgo, aeternum virgo, quae sola furentum / Nequitiam sacro praestas compescere partu, / Da, praecor, et Veneres et quos malesana uetustas / Aligeros finxit dementia numina fratres / Exturbare, nouo longe et dispellere cantu."

Babylon. – / And I: – By God, Lady, / If one could only break those mighty wings – And she: - A mortal tongue / Can not, nor may, nor could it raise a weapon. / Weep and be silent, this seems the best to me.⁸⁰⁰

It seems difficult not to recognize, in Savonarola's poem, a first attempt to describe the dichotomy that would have characterized his millenarian discourse against the Church. A discourse that would have heavily influenced Pico's symbolic duality between Venus and Mary. As we have seen, to Pico the figure of Venus and the Whore of Babylon are so close as to the point of often being considered the same identity. The direct relationship between the Church and Virgin Mary may have been lost, as in Pico's imagery Rome is already lost to the cause of Babylon. Yet, the salvific power of the Holy Virgin is often reiterated and celebrated, especially in opposition to *Spurca Venus*. As a matter of fact, the relationship can be better exemplified by the third hymn of Pico's *Hymni Heroici Tres* (1505-1507),⁸⁰¹ where the author, depicting the Virgin as descending from the heavens dressed in beauty and humility, sings that Venus went mad with envy as soon as she saw Mary's own diamond girdle, symbol of her eternal purity. Furious, the demonic goddess of lust is said to have torn her clothes apart, disfiguring herself and clipping Cupid's wings in a fit of rage.⁸⁰² The golden girdle, according to Greek mythology, was the most powerful weapon of Venus' arsenal of seduction. The embroidered belt, created by her husband, the smith-god Hephaestus/Vulcan, made her irresistible to gods and mortals alike. The

⁸⁰⁰ Girolamo Savonarola, "On the ruin of the Church," transl. Konrad Eisenbichler in Girolamo Savonarola and Konrad Eisenbichler, *A Guide to Righteous Living and Other Works* (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2003). 68.

⁸⁰¹ For further information on the various editions of the hymni, see Charles B. Schmitt, "A Note on the First Edition of Gianfrancesco Pico's "Hymni Heroici Tres"," *The papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 65, no. 1 (1965).

⁸⁰² *Hymni Heroici Tres*, III, 150-160: "Una omnes zonam ex gemma quam chycis alumna / Protulit incrustant stabili cui fibula nexu / Ex adamante micat ferri cui nulla potestas / Malleus aut steropis nec victrix flamma corusci / Fulminis officeret zonave revelleret aurea / qua visa Venus ipsa ruens Amathuside terra / diffregit ceston pectus velavit et ingens / foemineum mundum scidit indignata cruento / ungue genas lacerans discepto crine comanti / atque sagittiferi furiata Cupidinis alas / vellit et indomitos arcus in frustra secavit."

act of giving Mary a “better” girdle is, I argue, a clear sign of victory of divine love against worldly lust.

As the two poems seem to suggest, therefore, Pico’s debasement of the Neoplatonic Venus did not affect the Neoplatonic nature and the twofold structure of his philosophical take on love. Venus Pandemia, in this case, is bound to the mere representation of basic, animalistic desires, while Venus Urania is substituted with a more virtuous and – more importantly - Christian symbol, that is the Virgin Mary. What really changes in Pico’s Neoplatonic vision of love, is not the duality of love and beauty, but rather the possibility of communication between them.

8. The Ladder of Suffering: Gianfrancesco Pico’s Remedia Amoris

As we have seen, while trying to banish the influence of Venus and Cupid from the mind of his readers, Pico implicitly accepted them as both symbols and ontological entities representing lust and unbridled desire. Pico’s approach toward pagan deities like Venus and Cupid is not new, as it applies the same system of thought found originally in specific sections of the Bible.⁸⁰³ Considering Pico’s absolute faith in the Scriptures, it is thus natural to ascertain that Pico considered the foreign gods as abominations, idols venerated by a forsaken generation, destined to certain doom.⁸⁰⁴

Yet, as the letter to Lilius Giraldi states, Gianfrancesco Pico’s purpose in writing his *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis* was not only that of denouncing the cult of pagan statues in the

⁸⁰³ See *Deuteronomy* 7:25-26: “The graven images of their gods shall ye burn with fire: thou shalt not desire the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it unto thee, lest thou be snared therein: for it is an abomination to the Lord thy God. Neither shalt thou bring an abomination into thine house, lest thou be a cursed thing like it: but thou shalt utterly detest it, and thou shalt utterly abhor it; for it is a cursed thing.” See also *Psalms* 81:9: “Let there be no strange god among you; Nor shall you worship any foreign god.”

⁸⁰⁴ See *Deuteronomy* 32: 15-30.

Vatican, but also that of teaching his readers how to purge the malevolent influence out of such entities. When describing Pico's poem, Ernst Gombrich defined it a pastiche of the conventional themes of Platonic love and of the *remedia amoris*.⁸⁰⁵ However, there is more to it than just a mockery of Platonic love. The young Pico rarely advanced a criticism without proposing and endorsing an alternative solution. In his *Staurostichon*, as the second chapter of this essay has explored, the author demonized astrology to guide the reader towards the only true form of knowledge he recognized: divine prophecy. In the later *Hymni heroici tres*, Pico tried to revile any attempt to revive what he perceived as "pagan" hymnography by showing his readers how hymns can be modeled to sacred themes like that of Jesus Christ, the Holy Trinity, and the Virgin Mary. Pico's attack on the twofold Venus and the Platonic ladder of desire, the philosophical concept behind the revival of the goddess of love, must therefore be considered as the first phase of something more important, that is the education of his readers to what real love is and how to protect themselves from the drives of desire.⁸⁰⁶

As we have seen in the previous sections of this chapter, Pico rejected the idea of Venus as a symbol of celestial beauty/love, and yet he made use of the goddess as a symbol of sexual (and secular) depravity, which often finds its opposite in the chaste beauty of the Virgin Mary. This antagonism between the pagan goddess of beauty and the mother of Christ suggests that Pico's philosophy of love was still based on the Platonist duality between mundane and divine

⁸⁰⁵ Gombrich, "Hypnerotomachiana." 123.

⁸⁰⁶ The concept of *scala amoris*, or ladder of desire, derives from Plato's *Symposium*. Here Socrates explains the priestess Diotima's path to immortality as the ascent of a staircase, in which one shifts from the love of a beautiful body to the love of many beautiful bodies, until one loves beautiful bodies in general. It is only then that one can witness the divine spark, the true beauty, in every person, arriving at last at the understanding of Beauty/Good itself, which can only be perceived with the mind (Plato Plato, Nehamas, and Woodruff, *Symposium*. 210a – 211c. See also *ibid.* 211c: "One goes always upwards for the sake of this Beauty, starting out from beautiful things and using them like rising stairs: from one body to two and from two to all beautiful bodies, then from beautiful bodies to beautiful customs, and from customs to learning beautiful things, and from these lessons he arrives in the end at this lesson, which is learning of this very Beauty, so that in end he comes to know just what it is to be beautiful.")

love/beauty. To support this argument, it is important to mention that Gianfrancesco Pico's knowledge of the subject matter was quite extensive for his times, and his interest on the idea of love drove him to write a long treatise known as *De amore divino*,⁸⁰⁷ published in 1516 in Rome by Mazzocchi, the same who printed the Roman edition of *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis*. This book is especially important in order to understand the theoretical framework behind the poem. This is because both works are deeply intertwined. *De amore divino* often quotes the poem, and *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis* employs the same philosophical and theological positions expressed in the treatise. Their symbiosis is so profound that, just like it happened for the *Staurostichon* and the treatise *De rerum praenotione*, they could almost be considered as one entity.

In the four books that compose this text, which reflects the first part of the poem, the lord of Mirandola deals with the many names and conceptions of love invented in ancient Rome and Greece as well as their origin (book I). He explains why the love towards God is the only source of happiness, why God is the true goodness and love, why pagan love and worship of their gods was imperfect, and why Christian love is superior to all (book II). Book III, reflecting the topics of the second part of *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis*, deals mainly with the dangers of material beauty, and how such desire enslaves lovers. Book IV focuses on the distinctions between true and false lovers. It shows how ancient authors were driven by the frenzies of lust, and illustrates how to experience love in a consecrated fashion. His positive references are, of course, to be found in Savonarola and the great Christian theologians before him. During the many chapters of his treatise, the young Pico often indulges in citing and quoting Church Fathers

⁸⁰⁷ Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Io. Francisci Pici Mirandulae Domini Et Concordiae Comitum D'amore Diuino Libri Quattuor: Ad Diuum Leonem Pont. Max* (Rome: Iacobus Mazochius, 1516).

such as Ambrose, Augustine of Hippo, Gregory the Great, Saint Bernard, and Thomas Aquinas as his main sources to the path of sacred love.⁸⁰⁸

It is in one of these sources, namely Augustine of Hippo, I argue, that we find the main inspiration to Gianfrancesco Pico's platonic dichotomy of love. Pico's duality of love, symbolized by Venus and the Virgin Mary, in fact, perfectly suits the relationship between *caritas* and *cupiditas* used by the theologian of Hippo. For Pico, Venus – combined to her son Cupid – can be seen as both a synonym of *voluptas* and *cupiditas*.⁸⁰⁹ In Augustine as in Pico, moreover, desire still mediates between subject and object, and it craves to annul the distance between them by transforming the subject into the lover and the object into the beloved, just like in Plato and Plotinus. In Augustine and Pico, however, material love does not connect with a higher form of beauty: it drags people down, and it anchors them to mortality. “What else is love, therefore, except a kind of life which binds or seeks to bind some two together, namely, the lover and the beloved? And this is so even in external and carnal love,” states Augustine in his treatise on the Holy Trinity.⁸¹⁰ Desire and love is thus, in Augustine, an innate impulse that needs to be guided toward the celestial rewards of afterlife, and not otherwise. This is because in binding ourselves to *cupiditas* or *caritas*, we decide whether we wish to belong to this world or to the world to come.

⁸⁰⁸ See, for example *ibid.* 105: “Et sane in omnibus par esse potest amor quo meremur coelum si toto uidelicet conatu res geratur amoris. Sic Hieronymus et Ambrosius qui pollebant irascibili / utem Gersonis uerbum / sic et Augustinus et Thomas quibus eximia uis intellectus et exercitium inerat / Deum ext tutto corde dilexis / se non negauerimus. Sicuti et Gregorius et Bernardus in quibus eodem authore potens uis concupiscibilis inerat ad amandum apta.”

⁸⁰⁹ Pico della Mirandola, *Illustrissimi Ac Doctissimi Principis Jo. Francisci Pici Mirandulae... De Venere & Cupidine Expellendis Carmen; Item Eiusdem Laurentius & Geminianus Hymni.* 71-76: “Si te sollicitant fasces, et purpura regum, / Ambitio est auri stimulat si caeca cupido, / Surgit auarities. Facie si captus amata / Spicula persentis succendere in ossibus ignem, / Sensilis haec Veneris flamma est [...]” [If the kings' bundles of rods and purple-dyed cloth/ seduce you, it is ambition; if thirst for gold haunts you, / greed. If taken by a loved sight you happen to feel /arrows lighting a fire into your bones, / this is the flame of Sensual Venus]

⁸¹⁰ Augustine and Stephen McKenna, “The Trinity,” (2002). VIII, 10.

Quoting Hannah Arendt, for Augustine:

The quest for worldliness changes man's nature. This quest transforms him into a worldly being. In *cupiditas*, man has cast the die that makes him perishable. In *caritas*, whose object is eternity, man transforms himself into an eternal, nonperishable being. Man as such, his essence, cannot be defined because he always desires to belong to something outside himself and changes accordingly. Hence, he is seen by Augustine in his isolation as separated from things as well as from persons. However, it is precisely this isolation he cannot bear. If he could be said to have an essential nature at all, it would be lack of self-sufficiency. Hence, he is driven to break out of his isolation by means of love—whether *cupiditas* turns him into a denizen of this world or *caritas* makes him live in the absolute future where he will be denizen of the world-to-come.⁸¹¹

Augustine often uses the word *inhaerere*, “clinging to,” in association to love. Love is thus something that we, as humans, cling to. In clinging to God – *inhaere Deo* – through *caritas* one chooses to devote her desire to the divine, a permanently inherent element of our being. By clinging to God and eternity, one becomes eternally happy. To Augustine, on the other hand, no real happiness can be obtained through the path of *cupiditas*, the love of this world. In *cupiditas*, in fact, humanity desires what is outside them, clinging to something that is beyond its control. Since one can never close the gap between what is outside and what is inside, they are enslaved by it.⁸¹²

Just as Augustine’s *cupiditas* enslaves humanity to the world, Pico’s *Spurca Venus* entices it with worldly pleasures binding people to a life of suffering and need.

This [the heart] she [Venus] attracts like a magnet does an iron bar / and what she attracts she sets on fire and in the heart she produces / a flame fuelled by gentle enticements and pleasing decorum. / But that decorum fades away in a short period of time, / and the evanescent flame dissolves into light smoke. / And if you were to desire commerce with

⁸¹¹ Hannah Arendt, Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott, and Judith Chelius Stark, *Love and Saint Augustine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). 18-19.

⁸¹² *Ibid.* 19-20.

fertile beds, / here dirty Venus comes about, pleasure mixed with pain / and sweetness assists her, but soon after bitterness comes, / and even surpasses her.⁸¹³

And he continues:

If you have too ardent a desire for pleasure / bitterness comes with it, and life's countless discomforts. / From the earliest beginning of things, Mother Nature / imposed this law upon the mortals and carved it / upon an eternal column made out of solid diamond: / without moderation, Venus always brings / many sorrows, countless infections, disease and death; / she brings about afflictions before the time of hunch-back senescence. / Still imagine that excess, amusement, new pleasures / and enticement grow for you with unrestrained lust. / What, then? What would be left for you? In one single moment disappears / everything you might have gained from half an hour / of gasping efforts, and quickly flies away behind your back.⁸¹⁴

For Gianfrancesco Pico, as for Augustine, the love for the world is what enslaves and anchors humanity to death. Pico's poem, in this case, gives an even more practical reason to shun worldly love: infections, venereal diseases, endless bodily pain. What could at first be considered as a mere choice of words, however, serves a much higher purpose.

As we have seen, Pico's introductory letters to the two editions of the poem show us that the author was set to fight against the loss of humanity of those who, marveling at the statues of the pagan gods, sinned of "lust of the eyes" (I John 2:16). Lust of the eyes craves to know and experience the things of the world for their own sake, without any reflection upon the self.

⁸¹³ Pico della Mirandola, *Illustrissimi Ac Doctissimi Principis Jo. Francisci Pici Mirandulae... De Venere & Cupidine Expellendis Carmen; Item Eiusdem Laurentius & Geminianus Hymni*. vv 73-89: "Idque trahit ueluti chalybem Magnesia cautes: / Et tractum incendit generatque in pectore flammam / Illecebris fotam placidis gratoque decore. / Temporis at paruo spatio decor ille recedit, / Disperit et flamma in tenues euanida fumos. / At si foecundi cupias commertia lecti / spurca Venus prodit permixta dolore uoluptas / Dulcedo adsistit sed mox succedit amaror / praeceditque etiam. [...]"

⁸¹⁴ Ibid. 93-105: "Nam si plus nimio cupis oblectarier inde / Surgit amarities et mille incomoda uitae. / Scilicet hanc legem primaeva ab origine rerum / Affixit natura parens mortalibus inque / Perpetua incidit solido ex adamante columna. / Ut semper multos Venus immoderata dolores / Afferat innumeras labes morbosque necemque / Et curuae ante diem pretendat damna senectae. / Sed finge illecebras, lusus, noua gaudia, mille / blandimenta tibi lasciuo ad crescere luxu. / Quid tibi? quid restat? Momento extinguit uno / Quidquid anhelanti conatu exhausseris horae / Dimidio et celeri refugit post terga volatu."

Seeking for sensual pleasure (*voluptas*), the eye seeks whatever is pleasing to its senses (the beautiful), as the melodious is pleasing to the ears, the soft to the touch, and the fragrant to the sense of smell. In this specific case, the eye of the beholders lingered upon the beauty and ‘*discordia concors*’ of the ancient idols kept in the Belvedere Garden, distracting them with foul bodily desires. However, to Augustine as well as to Pico, vision is distinguished from the other senses in that it knows of a temptation more dangerous than the mere attraction by the beautiful. The eyes are the only sense that also wishes to see what may be contrary to pleasure, “out of a desire to experience and to know.”⁸¹⁵ This craving for unholy, pagan beauty, is certainly linked, in Pico’s case, with the triggering of a dangerous form of imagination, and the desire for forbidden knowledge that this vision may generate, a knowledge that could bring the inexperienced to discover pagan Neoplatonism and devote themselves to idolatry. This is due to the fact that, according to Pico’s *De amore divino*, the demonic forces can deform one’s eyesight, and mistake something ugly (i.e. the ancient gods) as beautiful and desirable.⁸¹⁶

To Gianfrancesco Pico, therefore, the traditional Platonic *scala amoris*, the ladder of desire conceived to seek eternity through ideal and mundane beauty, still exists, but it is depicted as a downward spiral towards unhappiness, heresy, and damnation.⁸¹⁷ Yet, there is another ladder of desire, that is the quest for divine love through the misery of mortal existence. The desire to ‘cling to’ God, for Pico, can be trained, and both the eye and the mind have a great importance in this process. To Pico, in fact, love is not a physical affliction like Galeno and Avicenna thought, but rather a spiritual one.⁸¹⁸ Since the soul governs the senses through the imagination,⁸¹⁹ such

⁸¹⁵ Arendt, Scott, and Stark, *Love and Saint Augustine*. 24.

⁸¹⁶ Moreschini, *Rinascimento Cristiano: Innovazioni E Riforma Religiosa Nell'italia Del Quindicesimo E Sedicesimo Secolo*. 48.

⁸¹⁷ See Tateo, “I Due Pico E La Tematica D'amore Nel Cinquecento.” 318.

⁸¹⁸ Moreschini, *Rinascimento Cristiano: Innovazioni E Riforma Religiosa Nell'italia Del Quindicesimo E Sedicesimo Secolo*. 48.

⁸¹⁹ *Ibid.* 49.

affliction, therefore, requires a spiritual cure through the training of one's mind. "A mind of iron, untainted by the guilt of Venus" states the author "is a sword, young men: it turns the languid wing [of Eros] / into nothing; it breaks the bow and the flying arrows / and smothers the burning flame and the blaze of Erycina, / as they disperse into pure breeze."⁸²⁰ To Pico, therefore, there are ways to eliminate human thirst for mundane love without falling into sin. The nuptial bed and marriage with a humble wife is certainly the best option according to the author,⁸²¹ but there are ways in which even bachelors can keep their chastity and aspire to godly love:

"You have to look for a place under a different sky," states Pico, alluding to the high vaults of heaven: "you have to stay in another country, where the air is fresh, / so that the image of the beloved vanishes sooner from the soul."⁸²²

Don't ever set your eyes in the eyes [of your lover], for Amor / is gentle, one would think it stopped burning, / and instead it often burns secretly, and in disguise / it starts such a fire that not even Tenedos ever saw / in mighty Troy, not even the dweller of the Tiber /

⁸²⁰ Pico della Mirandola, *Illustrissimi Ac Doctissimi Principis Jo. Francisci Pici Mirandulae... De Venere & Cupidine Expellendis Carmen; Item Eiusdem Laurentius & Geminianus Hymni*. Vv. 233-237: "Ferrea mens nulli Veneris obnoxia culpa, / Ens adest Iuuenes quo mollis in aera penna / Dissecta [Dessecta] est: quo neruus agens uolucresque sagittae / Diffractae rutilaeque faces Erycinaque lampas / Extincta, in liquidas resolutaque protinus auras."

⁸²¹ Ibid. 204-223: "Si uobis natura suos iniecerit ignes, / Nec sit pertesum thalami, nodique iugalis. / Quaerite concessos diuina lege Hymenaeos. / Prima autem fiat de moribus, ultima fiat / Quaestio de forma, dotemque exquirite, qualem / Antiquo in Latio, ueteri uel in Hellade mille / Mille olim quaesita procis noua nupta parabat. / Quis non Euadnes citius caperetur amore / Ut [Et] casto illius digito fuluum inderet aurum, / Quam natae Augusti, quamuis gratissima forma? / Protesilae tuam quis non uelit ante maritam / Quam Leda genitam; quamuis pulcherrima, quamuis / Et ratibus mille et bello repetita decenni? / Aut quis non uilem mundi muliebris amictum, / et tenuem cophinum priscae de more Sabiniae / Optarit potius casta cum coniuge secum / ferre domum? tua quam baccata monilia quamque / Incluta Hydaspaecis aggesta cubilia gemmis / Antoni coniunx Aegyptique ultima regum / Obscenos tecum si fers Cleopatra furores?" [If Nature happens to set you ablaze with her flames, / don't disdain the nuptial bed and the conjugal blond, / look for Hymenaios allowed by the divine law. / Your first concern should be customs, beauty / the last, and consider a dowry like the one a new bride, / once she was demanded by thousands of suitors, used / to provide in ancient Latium or in ancient Hellade. / Who wouldn't be taken, to the point of placing on her finger / red gold, by the love of Evadne rather than of Augustus' / daughter, regardless of her most graceful beauty? / Protesilaus, who wouldn't rather want your wife than / the daughter of Leda, although she was stunning and pursued / by thousand of boats and ten years of war? / Who wouldn't rather bring home a simple womanly / vest and a thin basket as it was the custom of an / ancient Sabinian, together with a chaste wife / rather than, you, madly in love with necklaces, / famously covered of Hydaspean gems, / Anthony's wife and last of the kings of Egypt, / Cleopatra, if you bring with you obscene frenzies?]

⁸²² Ibid. vv 238-240: "Tum loca diuerso coelo quaerenda, salubris / Aeris in spatiis alia in regione manendum est, / Ex animo ut citius facies uanescat [abolescat] amata."

experienced, when fierce Nero set Rome ablaze. / The face should be turned away,
seductively whispered words / shunned: who these unfair blows leave untouched, / which
treacherous Amathusia thrusts to the intellect - /always free, and always in search for the
enticement of sensation?⁸²³

In the battle between *caritas* and *cupiditas*, avoiding the “sin of the eye” and training one’s
imagination are key in clinging to God, and avoiding being encumbered by worldly desires.
Imagination, which for Gianfrancesco Pico is a necessary, and yet an imperfect channel of
communication between the soul and the body, can either save or condemn people.⁸²⁴

Elaborating on Plato’s theory of reminiscence, Pico imbibes the idea of phantasy with the
Augustinian quest for the divine. Imagination, like the impulse for desire, cannot be stopped,
because man is not self-sufficient and therefore always imagines and desires something outside
himself. The question of desire and imagination can therefore be resolved only by the object of
one’s imagination/desire and not, as the Stoics thought, by the suppression of the impulse of
imagine/desire itself. Yet, imagination and desire can be trained to “resist the pleasures which
allure the senses” and be drawn to “things celestial.” According to Pico, in fact, “all the good,
universally, but also all the bad, can be derived from the imagination.”⁸²⁵

“He who strives to dominate phantasy” states the young Pico “persists in that dignity in
which he was created and placed, and by which he is continually urged to direct the eye of the
mind towards God, Father of all blessings.”⁸²⁶ Therefore, it becomes necessary to educate
people’s imagination to resist the temptations of the eye, and to turn one’s imagination towards
the only true source of blessing, namely the divine. “For it is right to avoid the nets of lustful

⁸²³ Ibid. vv 241-248: “Nunquam luminibus committite [*committite*] lumina, quando / Lenis amor, quem quis dudum
frigere putaret / Saepe arsit uultu conspecto, atque illice forma / Exciuit flammis quantasque sub Ilio alto / Non
Tenedos uidit, non incola Tyburis alti / Spectauit, sceuo est cum Roma incensa Nerone [*Neroni*]. / Vertenda est
facies, nec blando uerba susurro / Excipienda plagis quis non capiatur [*caperetur*] iniquis?”

⁸²⁴ Pico della Mirandola and Caplan, *On the Imagination*. 42-43.

⁸²⁵ Ibid. 43.

⁸²⁶ Ibid. 44-45.

love,” states Pico in his *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis*, “and convert intellect and senses somewhere else.”⁸²⁷ These fundamental pieces of information allow us to read the final section of the poem with new eyes. Pico, therefore, is not just celebrating chastity, but he is providing important teachings on how to resist the enticements of *voluptas* and *cupiditas*:

Consider that whatever here changes in time is fleeting / and that waste and vanity and transience and a mixture / of pain is the result. As much as every human, lust / is impure, intensifies the anxiety and filled with gasps of fear; / as much as Venus becomes cruel, and Cupid with her, / as much with always vain dreams she haunts the lover, / then the more avidly she drains, the more she burns him / and the heart is set ablaze with more burning flames. / Miserable form of torture: not even the people of Hell / ever saw it, not even one of the fierce sisters / from the infernal pit inflicts pain with it. / Indeed was Tantalus burning of thirst in the water / and he was forbidden to grasp the receding / water with his lips. But whenever he sinks deeper / into the wide whirlpool and opens his mouth wide / swallowing water, then a bitter thirst torments / the dried throat more painfully. / And neither does Venus herself / extract Acidalian drops from a chilly spring, but / she drinks from the hot water of Phlegethon, which always / carries on dark smokes, fires, heat and flames. / And may your soul and strong heart never forget / what huge disasters for the mortal race did he bring, / and what renowned kingdoms did blind Cupid destroy / whenever he was in control of human intellect.⁸²⁸

This cluster of metaphors is not only an example of Pico’s demonization of the pagan gods of Venus and Cupid, but it also serves as a set of counter-images capable on instilling healthy concepts in the mind of the reader. These infernal visions are Pico’s way to explain the endless

⁸²⁷ Pico della Mirandola, *Illustrissimi Ac Doctissimi Principis Jo. Francisci Pici Mirandulae... De Venere & Cupidine Expellendis Carmen; Item Eiusdem Laurentius & Geminianus Hymni*. 250-251: “Nam fugitare decet lasciui retia amoris, / Atque alio mentem atque alio conuertere sensus.”

⁸²⁸ Ibid. 253-276: “Spectandum instabile hoc quodcumque hic digitur [*degitur*] aeui / Delitium [*Delicium*] et vanum et fluxum mistumque dolore / succurrant. Quam nulla homini sincaera voluptas / Anxia sollicita et gemebundi plena timoris, / Quam fiet ipsa Venus dira et cum matre Cupido, / Quam uanis semper simulacris ludat amantem, / Quoque magis sitiens bibat, hoc magis aestuet atque / Hoc [*Tam*] magis ardescant viuis praecordia flammis. / Tormenti genus infelix: Acherontia turba / quod nunquam inspexit [*aspexit*], quo nullam affligere quemquam / Fama est inferna durarum a sede sororum. / Ipse siti in mediis ardebat Tantalus undis, / At nunquam refugas labris comprehendere lymphas / Olli posse datum. Sed cum se gurgite mersat / Altius hic uasto et caua guttura pandit hiatu / Humorem absorbens auidas sitis aspera fauces: / Tum magis excruc[i]at. Neque enim de fonte liquors / P[r]ompsit acidalios gelido Venus ipsa, sed hausit [*sumpsit*] / Ab calida Phlegethontis aqua quae semper opacos / Conuoluit fumos igneis [*ignes*], incendia, flammis. / Nec uobis animo exciderit nec corde tenaci / Quam multis olim exitium mortalibus ingens / Attulerit regna et deleuerit inclyta caecus / Humana in mente exercens sua scepra Cupido.”

pain caused by the slavery of the senses. As we have seen, debasing the gods of earthly desire is the first step towards the realignment of the inner eye with God. The next step, to Pico, is the mental reminder of life's brevity and the imminence of death. In an article on the *Hymni heroici tres*, Soranzo has suggested that Pico's poems might be read as spiritual exercises.⁸²⁹ The same can be said about the poem *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis*. Here, in fact, the author exhorts the reader to undergo a proper exercise of spiritual shift through the strengthening of one's imagination:

May misery be transformed into a lovely sight for your eyes: / then it will become the substitute of a healthy medicine / when it will wear the aged wrinkles of old age. / For certainly the illnesses and discomforts of a wretched life / increase up to the point when you see as putrid corpses / consumed by decay, what a moment before the rose together with / the white privet adorned, and captivated miserable lovers. / And so the value of my poem consists in reminding of terrible / death, who cuts down the joys of life with her terrible scythe.⁸³⁰

Just like his mentor Savonarola before him, Gianfrancesco Pico understood the great potential of the imagery of death and disease for instilling a perception of ruin and decay in his brethren.⁸³¹ More than once, Savonarola compared Italy and Rome to a sick, putrefying body.⁸³² The same medical and nosological metaphors that characterized the sermons of the friar of San Marco return in Pico's spiritual remedies. For the young Pico, therefore, the path to eternity could not

⁸²⁹ Soranzo, "Un'identità Religiosa Nel Primo Cinquecento." 66-72.

⁸³⁰ Pico della Mirandola, *Illustrissimi Ac Doctissimi Principis Jo. Francisci Pici Mirandulae... De Venere & Cupidine Expellendis Carmen; Item Eiusdem Laurentius & Geminianus Hymni*. 278-287: "Ante oculos etiam macies uersetur amicam / in faciem succo tum successura salubri / cum senium rugas secum portarit aniles. / Quod certe et morbi miseraeque incommoda vitae / Ingeminant foeda ut confecta cadauera tabe / Nunc spectes, albo quae iam rosa mista [*mixta*] ligustro / Punicea exornans miseris captabat amantes. / Hinc operae pretium est mortis meminisse tremendae / terribili excindit quae vitae gaudia falce. / Sic mors flagrantem compescet [*compescit*] frigida curas / tempore non certo et certo rapidissima cursu."

⁸³¹ See Assonitis, "Fra Girolamo Savonarola and the Aesthetics of Pollution in Fifteenth-Century Rome." 148: "[Savonarola's] attempts to somatize papal Rome and make manifest the pathology of its moral corruption served to build a solid foundation for his reforming and millenarian discourse."

⁸³² Ibid. 147.

be achieved with the pagan idea of *carpe diem*, the desire to live in the moment.⁸³³ True salvation must pass through practical application of the medieval Christian theory and practice of symbolic reflection on mortality known as *memento mori*.⁸³⁴ The desire to provoke in the reader a series of visions of death and decay of the body strongly reminds this important part of ascetic disciplines act to perfect the character by cultivating detachment and other virtues, as well as by turning the attention towards the immortality of the soul and the afterlife. The traditional iconography of the *memento mori*, in Pico's hands, transcends the need to be materially represented while it is carved inside the reader's own imagination. Just like in the Platonic ladder of desire, the vision of material beauty is destined to open the beholder's eye to internal and ethereal beauty. In Pico, the image of death, pain, and decay is bound to trigger the reader's desire to seek what does not wither or decay, that is, God. The original Platonic and Neoplatonic *scala amoris* is thus transformed into what we could define as a *scala doloris*, a ladder of suffering.

⁸³³ Tateo, "I Due Pico E La Tematica D'amore Nel Cinquecento." 319.

⁸³⁴ See University of Missouri Museum of Art and Archaeology, "Memento Mori," Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri, <https://web.archive.org/web/20100606051921/http://maa.missouri.edu/exhibitions/finalfarewell/mementointro.html>.: "*Memento Mori* is a Latin phrase, freely translated as "Remember that you are mortal," "Remember you will die," or "Remember your death." The idea of *memento mori* and its symbolism were rarely used in classical antiquity. Instead, the saying *carpe diem*, or "seize the day," was popular, reminding people to "eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we shall die." The expression *memento mori* developed with the growth of Christianity, which emphasized Heaven, Hell, and salvation of the soul in the afterlife. The phrase is associated with a genre of artistic creations that vary widely from one another. The imagery related to *memento mori*, however, shares the same purpose: to remind viewers of their own mortality. In the Christian context, *memento mori* serves a moralizing purpose, unlike the pagan idea of seizing the day. For Christians, thoughts of death remind them of the emptiness and transience of earthly pleasures, luxuries, and achievements, which will be insignificant in the afterlife. A Biblical injunction often associated with *memento mori* reads *in omnibus operibus tuis memorare novissima tua, et in aeternum non peccabis* (the Vulgate's Latin rendering of Ecclesiasticus 7:40), or "in all thy works be mindful of thy last end and thou wilt never sin." Recurrent iconographic symbols related to *memento mori* were first created during the Middle Ages. Perhaps the most striking (and recognizable to contemporary viewers) are the hourglass, the skull, the Grim Reaper with his scythe, and a decayed corpse pictured as a skeleton. Even though contemporary viewers may interpret the symbols differently than those of earlier centuries, the works in this section show that *memento mori* imagery has become ingrained into Western culture as a reminder of the ephemeral aspect of human life." See also Peter Murray, Linda Murray, Tom Devonshire Jones, "Memento Mori," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Christian Art & Architecture*, ed. Linda Murray Peter Murray, Tom Devonshire Jones (Oxford University Press).

Pico's own self-discipline towards God, moreover, is not limited to mental visions of pain and physical decline. In the third book of his *De amore divino*, in fact, the author states that, in order to dedicate oneself to the love of God, one must let go of the love of one's body.⁸³⁵ *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis* abides to this idea, and encourages his readers to follow the examples of the Saints, and self-inflict terrible agonies to purify their unclean thoughts:

Consider the example of those / who whipped dirty Venus with torment, / stone and often with a hardened bed, / and remember of him who, they say, defeated Venus' heats / throwing himself in the snow, uncovering the new seeds / of the devil's fraud. And he who avoiding blind Amor's / darts and those worries tied up with thorns deep inside / the hollow heart, the gifts of fierce Erycina, / lacerated his body on sharp thorns. / And may those come to mind who despised false Cupid's / bows, while they throw their bodies on the naked / ground, and bear the fasting of their ravenous stomach.⁸³⁶

Pico's ladder of suffering, therefore, combines visions of death, disease, and decay with physical acts of self-punishment including starvation, self-injury, and other instruments of discipline such as sleeping on the ground, or more simply on a hard bed. These acts of Christian devotion, this will of realigning one's inner eye with the divine described in Pico's *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis*, culminates in the third stage of his ladder of pain. In a passage that recalls the gruesome imagery deployed in the *Staurostichon*, *De Venere* culminates in graphic evocation of the blood and wounds of the crucified Christ:

⁸³⁵ Moreschini, *Rinascimento Cristiano: Innovazioni E Riforma Religiosa Nell'italia Del Quindicesimo E Sedicesimo Secolo*. 52.

⁸³⁶ Pico della Mirandola, *Illustrissimi Ac Doctissimi Principis Jo. Francisci Pici Mirandulae... De Venere & Cupidine Expellendis Carmen; Item Eiusdem Laurentius & Geminianus Hymni*. 291-302: "Exempla virorum / accedant Venerem immundam qui uerbere[verbere] torto / et silice et rigido domuerunt saepe cubili / Quique niuem insiliens Veneris superasse calores / Dicitur occurat, retogens noua semina fraudis / Infernae. Nec non qui caeci spicula amoris / Quique illas quondam sub inani pectore curas / Consertas spinis, Erycinae munera saeuae / Deludens se se in spinas destrusit acutas. / Et qui fallacis tempore Cupidinis arcus / obrepant menti: dum nuda corpora terrae / collidunt, avidique ferunt ieiunia uentris."

Love him [Christ] back as you look at his hair / filthy with dust, and that forehead crowned / with prickly thorns: with a nod it illuminates the entire Heaven, / with a nod it would have made the Devil in chain tremble. / Look at the body drenched in dark blood, / the wounded side, the stretched out arms and the hands / and feet transfixed by nails; look at the many wounds / with their gushing flow of sacred blood.⁸³⁷

These very same verses are quoted in book III of Pico's *De amore divino*. The reason for this is clear. In both works, the suffering and death of the son of God, is seen by the author as the highest example of true love, and is thus meant to banish the malevolent influence of Venus and Cupid. It reminds us that love must not be directed towards transitory things, but to the one who sacrificed his mortal body to bestow humanity with eternal happiness.⁸³⁸ It is because of his suffering that – according to Pico – the doors of heaven have been reopened, dispersing the cloud of madness and deceit that suffocated pre-Christian antiquity.⁸³⁹

9. Conclusion

This chapter has underlined the cultural background of *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis* – a poem by which Gianfrancesco Pico intended to attack the revival of pagan aestheticism brought about by Ficino's rediscovery of Platonic love. More specifically, it has been argued that the poem systematically debased the two Olympian gods of desire with the goal of

⁸³⁷ De Venere *ibid.*, 310-317: "Hunc redama aspiciens [*adspiciens*] foedatos puluere crines / Atque coronatam dumis pungentibus illam, / Fronte[m] illam, nutu totum quae illustrat Olympum, / Quaeque catenatum nutu tremefecerit Orcum. / Hunc redama aspiciens [*adspiciens*] foedatos puluere crines / Atque coronatam dumis pungentibus illam, / Fronte[m] illam, nutu totum quae illustrat Olympum, / Quaeque catenatum nutu tremefecerit Orcum. / Aspice [*Adspice*] purpureo madefactum sanguine corpus, / Disiectumque latus, distentaque brachia, clavis / Transfixasque manus, plantasque; sacrique cruoris / Aspice [*Adspice*] multiplices undanti flumine riuos.

⁸³⁸ Moreschini, *Rinascimento Cristiano: Innovazioni E Riforma Religiosa Nell'italia Del Quindicesimo E Sedicesimo Secolo*. 51.

⁸³⁹ Pico della Mirandola, *Illustrissimi Ac Doctissimi Principis Jo. Francisci Pici Mirandulae... De Venere & Cupidine Expellendis Carmen; Item Eiusdem Laurentius & Geminianus Hymni*. 318-321: "Scilicet haec rerum omnipotens, qui temperat orbem, / Matris Acidaliae flammas, puerumque perosus / Pertulit, eriperet tete ut de faucibus Orci, / Ut secum aeternae sequereris praemia [*gaudia*] palmae," [Certainly the omnipotent, who brings peace to the world, / in spite of the Acidalian mother's flames and her son, /suffered all this to rescue you from the fangs of Orcus, / so that you would pursue the rewards of eternal glory:]

questioning the Neoplatonic conception of love/beauty that philosophers like Ficino and Giovanni Pico had contributed to revive. In the second part of the chapter, we have seen how Venus and Amor survive in Gianfrancesco Pico's philosophy of love as symbols of worldly beauty and desire, and I have highlighted Pico's own reinterpretation of Plato's *scala amoris* through the witnessing of humanity's fragility and suffering, Mary's chastity, and Christ's bloody sacrifice.

The Italian early modern period was a unique age for Venus. Perceived either as a celestial metaphor of the relationship between material and spiritual beauty, or as the demonic incarnation of evil, the ancient goddess inspired an interesting Renaissance *querelle*. This theological debate about the Olympian goddess was not only centered around her symbolic validity, but more importantly on whether, and how, her functions could be assimilated in a Christian perspective. In this chapter, we have seen how the difference between Ficino and Gianfrancesco Pico is actually a clash between two different religious paradigms: an inclusivist system articulated in the complementary forms of *pia philosophia*, *philosophia perennis* and *Prisca theologia* on one side, and an exclusivist approach in continuity with the preaching of Girolamo Savonarola and the Church Fathers on the other.

The case of *Spurca Venus* is therefore instrumental in understanding how Gianfrancesco Pico employed pagan gods as dark mirrors of the symbols of Christian revelation. In this chapter, I have traced a line of continuity between the depiction of Venus in the three poetic works we analyzed so far: *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis*, *Staurostichon*, and the *Hymni heroici tres*. The simultaneous presence of Venus and Mary found in these poems, in fact, suggests that Pico's argument against the Neoplatonic rediscovery of pagan gods might have been Neoplatonic in its core, as the Holy Virgin is taken to symbolize an ideal form of spiritual beauty and love in

contrast with an ancient goddess chosen to embody vanity and lust. Therefore, although monstrous, Pico's Venus does still abide to the same Platonic tradition the author sought to attack in his *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis*. On this subject, we could safely say that Pico needed the pagan gods as philosophical metaphors almost as much as any other artist, philosopher and poet of the time. The fundamental difference between his and other poetic productions were the values attached to such symbols. While Pico banished the pagan divinities from the position, granted by many Neoplatonists, of celestial and/or planetary intermediaries of God's will, he gave them the inverted part of foul messengers of the netherworld. From ideas of virtues to those of vices, from Platonic to Augustinian *daimona*, the ancient gods remain meaningful actors in Gianfrancesco Pico metanarrative of Antiquity, perceived as a battle between good and evil.⁸⁴⁰ Armed with this exclusivist view of antiquity, Gianfrancesco Pico managed to create a belief system where paganism and Christendom are seen as in continuous competition and conflict, but also dialogue.

⁸⁴⁰ On Gianfrancesco Pico as a Manichean, see Graziella Federici Vescovini, "Gianfrancesco Pico, La Vanità Dell'astrologia E La Stregoneria," in *Giovanni E Gianfrancesco Pico: L'opera E La Fortuna Di Due Studenti Ferraresi*, ed. Patrizia Castelli (Firenze: Olschki, 1998). 215.

“With terrors round, can reason hold /her throne, / Despise the known, nor tremble at the /
unknown? / Survey both worlds, intrepid and / entire, / in spite of witches, devils, dreams /
and fire?”“

Alexander Pope, *The Second Epistle of the Second Book of Horace*

Conclusion: The Demons of Reason

“The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters” states Francisco Goya (1746 – 1828) in the homonymous etching dated 1799.⁸⁴¹ In the image, an artist, asleep at his drawing table, is beleaguered by creatures associated, in Spanish folk tradition, with mystery and evil. The title of the print, inscribed on the front of the desk, is often read as a proclamation of Goya’s adherence to the values of the Enlightenment – without Reason, evil and corruption prevail. Nothing new here. We are dealing with one of Goya’s most famous works, a work that the academic world seems quite fond of, if one must count the cover pages dedicated to it and the titles of book and journals that refer to its title.⁸⁴² The reason why I wanted to introduce Goya’s etching, however, is a different one. Truly important to my discourse is what the artist wrote in the caption that accompanies the print: “Imagination abandoned by reason produces impossible monsters; united with her, she is the mother of the arts and source of their wonders.” Those who know the

⁸⁴¹ On the subject of Goya’s *Capricho* and Renaissance definitions of imagination, see John F. Moffitt, “Goya’s “Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters”: Another Look at the Renaissance and Romantic Contexts of “La Fantasia”,” *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 24, no. 1 (2004). 36-43. On Goya’s *Caprichos* as a whole, see Andrew Schulz and Francisco Goya, *Goya’s Caprichos: Aesthetics, Perception, and the Body* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁸⁴² See, for example, the cover of Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy. Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). See also Daniel Nettle, *Strong Imagination: Madness, Creativity, and Human Nature* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). For book titles referring to Goya’s etching, see Martha Craven Nussbaum and Juha Sihvola, “The Sleep of Reason: Erotic Experience and Sexual Ethics in Ancient Greece and Rome,” (2002).; Frances S. Connelly, *The Sleep of Reason: Primitivism in Modern European Art and Aesthetics, 1725-1907* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995).; Derek Jarrett, *The Sleep of Reason: Fantasy and Reality from the Victorian Age to the First World War* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988). The list goes on.

philosophical work of Gianfrancesco Pico would immediately note a resemblance between the sentence of the *pintor filósofo* and the ideas of *fantasia* and *imaginatio* developed by the lord of Mirandola.⁸⁴³ For both the son of the Enlightenment and the son of the Savonarolan movement, unrestrained imagination can bring to a state of error, while its appropriate uses through the means of rationality, could uplift the subject towards a higher purpose.

Yet, very few people could imagine Gianfrancesco Pico as a pioneer of the Enlightenment as “Renaissance men” like Leonardo are in the Burchardian narrative of the 19th century. It would be easy for us to judge Gianfrancesco Pico, echoing a hard-to-kill prejudice toward figures like that of his mentor Savonarola, as a monster produced by lack of reason, by an overzealous mind corrupted by religious fundamentalism - a return of the dark ages in a period of light and innovation. If, however, one can assert that Gianfrancesco Pico was certainly not a precursor of modernity, no one can deny that he does represent a specific facet of his own times. Let us consider his humanist upbringing, his twisted passion for antiquity, his profound religiosity and desire to rationality despite a deep need to abandon himself to faith and faith alone: all these contradictions bear the marks of the Italian Renaissance, an age of political strife and instability, inspiration and oppression, religious inclusivisms and exclusivisms. Even the monsters and demons that haunt his poetry and philosophical and theological production, are sons of the Renaissance as much as the ancient gods of Politian’s *Stanze per la Giostra*. They are not the product of the “sleep of reason” but rather reason’s unusual offspring. Their nature is deeply studied, justified, rationalized. Their story is retrieved from ancient sources, and interpreted through the latest studies on demonology. Just like many witch hunters of his day,

⁸⁴³ See Chapter 4. See also Pappalardo, *Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola: Fede, Immaginazione E Scetticismo*. Chapter 2.

Pico's obsession with demons laid bare to a distinctive logic in his arguments and actions, presenting itself as a theory in search of a proper history.

The goal of this thesis was, in a nutshell, to grapple with Pico's metanarrative of antiquity by looking at a selection of his works produced between 1503 and 1513, with a special focus on the author's warnings against the dangers of a classical culture. To do so, we framed Pico in his historical context, showing how his continuous attack on ancient knowledge and culture was meant to respond to a series of lively Renaissance debates, and is thus representative of a specific sector of the humanist elite of the time. *Staurostichon* was created to rebuke court astrology; the *Hymni heroici tres* were conceived to provide an alternative to the theurgical hymns in fashion between the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th century; *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis* was meant to denounce pagan aesthetics and its philosophical premises. Behind such works lay the precise intention of using the pagan gods of antiquity to denounce the error of those who lived without the light of Christian faith, and the impending dangers that a return to this error would entail for the author's contemporaries.

In his seminal "Des espaces autres," Michael Foucault (1926 – 1984) introduces a fascinating concept better known as heterotopia:

First there are the utopias. Utopias are sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces. There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places – places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality.

Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias.⁸⁴⁴

In Pico's poetic production, the pagan past becomes a sort of Foucaultian heterotopia, a mirror to the Christian identity that is carved in Gianfrancesco Pico's faith.⁸⁴⁵ Twisted, disfigured, debased, Pico's history of antiquity is essential to define the virtues of Christianity. It is the necessary alterity that gives substance to an unstable identity. Pico's heterotopian antiquity acts as a very flexible tool to denounce the practices he saw as un-Christian, and to foster other practices as truly Christian. Despite its surprising flexibility, Pico's construction of antiquity as a dark mirror of his times is not devoid of rigor. Created to compete in a world of complex and informed narratives of the past, Pico's account has solid bibliographical bases, and it takes into consideration an outstanding number of ancient sources. His vision of antiquity is guided by a logical rendering of the Sacred Scriptures, and by the interpretation of ancient and late ancient sources through an apologetic perspective. The age of demons depicted by Pico is not a chaotic pastiche of unidentified sources. On the contrary, it is a narration that echoes Paul of Tarsus, Tertullian, and Augustine, and treats pagan sources under such a lens. Who can deny that the pagans were demon worshipers if the Fathers of the Church are repositories of such Truth? Who can deny that practices like astrology and theurgical hymns are abominations when they are denounced by the Sacred Scriptures? In the eye of someone who puts absolute faith in Scriptural truth, Pico's perspective on pre-Christian knowledge and culture certainly does not lack coherence.

⁸⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," in *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité* (1984). 3-4.

⁸⁴⁵ See *ibid.*

Pico's need for a rigorous debunking of ancient history, mythology and philosophical thought, as we have seen, was also a veiled excuse to focus on his life obsession, which was the same antiquity he wanted to banish from his own world. His thorough research, his attention to detail, his attempt to construct a wicked, demonic antiquity was a way to exorcise his desire to set sail to those mythological lands, to fall under Circe's spell, to become an animal of some sort and live free from the rigid constraints he imposed upon himself since youth. The exorcism of antiquity that he operates in his major works is deeply echoed in the poetry I analyzed. What is truly precious about these poems, however, is the struggle that we encounter, the enormous efforts not to fall into the hands of pagan fascination and to chase away from the reader – and from the author himself, I would argue – the desire for antiquity. Yet, antiquity lives in Gianfrancesco Pico's work. Antiquity thrives, triumphant in its deformity, it towers over Christianity's attack, feigning security and victory to hide fear and paranoia. The author's spiritual need for Christ's blood and sacrifice cannot truly stop him from envisioning Venus polluting the world with her eroticism, nor can it detain him from dreaming about pagan orgies, heathen sacrifices, and ancient monsters besieging the City of God. Pico's antiquity is banished to the netherworld, but from the netherworld it haunts the author and his need of a strong, repellent, alterity to justify his shaking ideals.

As already mentioned in Chapter 1, the field of studies on Gianfrancesco Pico is still quite unexplored, and it would welcome the attention of more numerous studies. Even the matter of Pico's poetry is still open to question. This dissertation, inevitably, had to narrow the scope of its research to a mere decade (1503-1513), while Pico's poetical production spans from the late 15th century (in manuscript form) to the end of his life. The posthumous *Hymni heroici decem*, moreover, could be a key element to see how Pico's obsession with antiquity developed in his

last years, and how it entrelaces with hagiography, another important aspect of Pico's narrative of the past. In Chapter 4 I dealt with Pico's rebuke of 'paganizing' art and how such reproach is linked to Pico's *De amore divino*. Yet, there is still a lot to say about this theme, especially if one considers the correspondence with Bembo published as the *Epistulae de imitatione*, and the late, unpublished work called *Dialogus de adoratione*, which has been recently brought to the attention of the public thanks to the work of Alessia Contarino.⁸⁴⁶ Experts in religious studies should consider focusing their attention on Pico's theology and his relationship with Augustine, while philosophers could enquire not only on Pico's skepticism, but also on his difficult relationship with Plato and the late ancient neoplatonists. Moreover, a reliable translation of treatises like *De rerum praenotione*, *De amore divino*, and the famous *Examen venitatis doctrinae gentium* would be a priceless contribution to the contemporary research on early modern Europe. Precisely because so much at odds with the buildings, paintings, sculptures and poems normally chosen to illustrate the *Zeitgeist* of Italian Renaissance culture, Gianfrancesco's nightmarish perception of Antiquity as well as his warnings against its revival constitute a fascinating, albeit certainly lesser known, facet of a period that was deeply marked by religious pluralism and spiritual experimentation.

⁸⁴⁶ Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola and Alessia Contarino, *Dialogus De Adoratione*, Studi Pichiani (Firenze: Leo Olschki Editore, 2017).

Appendix I

Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Heroicum carmen de mysteriis Dominicae crucis, nuper in Germaniam delapsis, ad Maximilianum Augustum Romanorum regem*, in *Opera Omnia II*.

Basilea: per Henricum Petri. 1557. 354.

Introductory Letter from Gianfrancesco to Emperor Maximilian I.⁸⁴⁷

Maximiliano Caesari Augusto inclyto, Joan. Franciscus Picus felicitatem.

Occasionem dedisti mihi Caesar Clementissime, ut ea studia, quibus olim oblectabar, nunc quodam quasi postliminio repeterem: ab eis enim tum negotiis armorum diverteram, tum graviorum otiiis literarum distensus nuncium remiseram. Monstrasti, dum essem apud te in Germania, Cruces, Clavos, Lanceas, et alia pleraque, coelesti quadam nec visibili pluvia corporibus delineate, et quae hac de re tibi etiam literis significare fuerand, qua es facilitate, dignatus es it Germanica in Latinam linguam interpretari: Vidi et ipse quamquam a tua Majiestate discessi in Italiam rediturus, multa, quae non modo fidem rei iam vulgatae adstruerent, sed maiorem multo demirationem incuterent. et universam pene Germaniam ad coelestia prodigia religionis ergo commoverent. Quo factum, ut rem tam celebrem, tam Dignam posteritatis memoria, literarum monumentis, heroicisque potissimum versibus in praesentia mandare destinaverim. Nil eas veritus calumnias, quas Philosophastri funderent: Ignari altissimos

⁸⁴⁷ This translation has been realized with the help and guidance of Professor Matteo Soranzo, as part of the SHRCC-funded project “Self-Transformation in Early Modern Europe project” (McGill University, Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures). Special thanks for David Douglas, who edited the text.

literarum locos, a prima antiquitate, metro concelebrari solitos, nec apud Platonem et Aristotelem satis diversati: quorum ab altero Epigrammata, ab altero etiam poemata excussa sunt, ut ipsius artis Poeticae praecepta reticeam. Ipsi autem Theologi nec hymnos ecclesiae dissimulent, nec nescient Nazianzenum, Hieronymum, Sedulium, Paulinum, et alios carmina cecinisse: Nec eos praeterierit Mosen primum divinas laudes carmine hexametro decantasse, et hebraeum calamum nonnullis divinorum libris versuum mensuras impressisse, quas equidem non solum licere, verum et expedire quoquo modo nostra etiam tempestate putaverim: modo fabulosa ne sit, nec obscoena materia, modo gentilium Deorum memores ne simus, praeterquam forte, dum eos explodimus, dum damnamus. Sume igitur libenti animo Caesar nostrum hanc historiam altius repetitam, et carmine concinnatam. Cuius lectione (si erit ocium) addi animo stimulos optarim, ut Christi memoriam in Occidente minus reverenter quandoque habitam. In Oriente vero principium desidia iam pene abolitam, renovandam pro viribus et illustrandam suscipias, et impii mahometis cultum penitus obliteres. Et quoniam militiae tuae me iam pridem, nec sine honore et egregia quadam auctoritate, ascripsisti: istiusmodi quidem comparandae victoriae debemus enses, partem autem et publicandae stilum pollicemur. Vale.

--

Giovanni Francesco Pico to the glorious Maximilian, Caesar Augustus

You have given me, most merciful Caesar, occasion that I should pursue again those studies by which I was once amused, now as if with a certain leave of absence; for I was both distracted from them by the business of war, and renounced them for the weightier pastimes of literature. You showed me, while I was with you in Germany, cruciform staves and lances and many things besides, traced upon bodies with a certain heavenly, yet not visible, rain; and, as you possess the

facility, you deigned to translate into the Latin tongue from the German those things which were also signified to you in letters about this matter. I myself, although I left your Majesty to return to Italy, saw many things, which not only added conviction to this by now commonly known affair, but also inspired a much greater wonderment, and therefore stirred up almost all of Germany to the celestial portents of religion. Wherefore it happened that I decided for the present to commit so famous a matter, so worthy of the memory of posterity, to the monuments of letters, and to heroic verses especially. I have feared nothing of those calumnies, which the Philosophasters poured forth, who knew not that the highest places in literature have been wont to be honoured in verse from the earliest antiquity, and who were not well enough versed in Plato and Aristotle, of whom epigrams were excused by the one, and poems by the other; so that I might keep quiet about the precepts of this Poetic art. Indeed, the Theologians themselves neither hide away the hymns of the Church, nor are they ignorant that Gregory of Nazianzus, Jerome, Sedulius, Paulinus, and others sang songs. Nor will it escape them that Moses first declaimed the divine praises in hexameter song, and that the Hebraic reed imprinted a few books of the divines with the measures of verse; which indeed I have thought it fit not only to allow, but even in some way to help along in our own time, so long as the material is not absurd or obscene, and so long as we are not heedful of the Gods of the pagans, except perhaps when we drive them out, when we condemn them. Therefore, Caesar, take up with an open mind this our story, deeply researched and arranged in a song. By the reading of it (if time will allow), I would hope, encouragements will be added to the soul, so that you undertake, to the best of your abilities, the renovation and illustration of the memory of Christ, at one time held less reverently in the West, but in the East now nearly abolished by the idleness of the rulers, and so that you obliterate the cult of the impious Mahomet. And since you have long since enrolled me in your soldiery, not

without honour and a certain exceptional authority, indeed do I owe to you the sword of preparing victory of this kind; however, I promise the pen of publishing it, once brought to issue.

Vale.

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Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Heroicum carmen de mysteriis Dominicae crucis, nuper in Germaniam delapsis, ad Maximilianum Augustum Romanorum regem, in Opera Omnia II.*

Basilea: per Henricum Petri. 1557. 354-366.⁸⁴⁸

Germanae nuper delapsa insignia terrae
Principis aetherei canerem, ter maxime Caesar,
Si me praecellens rerum mirandaque moles
Exiguo sineret residem de pectore uocem
5 Promere. Sed uincet pietas, audacia uincet,
Abscedat Bromius, spumoso Cypria ponto
Dispereat, procul hinc absit Thymbraeus Apollo;
fabula Pieridum, procul hinc, procul este prophani.
Namque salutiferi canimus miracula regis,
10 Vaesano figmenta Deum qui dispulit orbe.
Christe faue coeptis, tuque o sanctissima uirgo
Empyreï regina poli, genitrixque tonantis,
Dirige fluctuagam uentosa per aequora cymbam.
Postquam flammifero praepes descendit ab axe
15 summa Dei soboles, summi sapientia patris,
Vt male contractas a primo semine labes
Purpurea elueret sacrati sanguinis unda,
Mortales clauso profugos ut ferret Olympo,
Sacra prophanato diffudit lumine mundo,

⁸⁴⁸ This translation has been realized with the help and guidance of Professor Matteo Soranzo, as part of the SHRCC-funded project “Self-Transformation in Early Modern Europe project.”

The banners of the King of Heaven recently fallen on the German land

I would sing, o thrice powerful Caesar, if only the wondrous
and extraordinary weight of the subject would allow me
to bring forth what is left of my voice from my weak chest.

Yet piety will triumph, courage will triumph, 5

may Bromius give way, the goddess of Cyprus languish
on the foamy sea, and Apollo Tymbraeus be away from here;
away the fable of the Pierides! Away from here, o profane ones!

For indeed I sing the miracles of the salvific King,
who casted away the lies of the gods from the raving world. 10

O Christ, favor my endeavor, and also you, most saint Virgin,
Queen of the Empyrean heaven, mother of the Thunderer,
guide through the stormy waters this wandering ship.

After from the fiery heavens descended the mighty
offspring of God, wisdom of the mighty father, so that 15

he could wash away the disease contracted by the first man
by means of the dark-red wave of the sacred blood,
so that he could lead mortals exiled from besieged Olympus,
with his light he diffused sacred things in the unholy world,

20 Tartareas pellens hominum de corde tenebras.

Inque uices uarias, diuersa in tempora, signis

Quae captum superant humanae mentis, adegit

Suaue serenata in praecordia uulnus amoris.

Illapsus primum praecelsae uirginis aluo,

25 Quae mox concepit nullo de semine prolem,

Viliaque enixa est nono ad praesepia mense.

Iam uix octauam lucem conspexerat infans,

Iam uix assumptae prima incunabula carnis

Attigerat, cultros pellis cum caesa cruentos

30 Sensit, et hostiles aufugit principis iras

Herodis, supero matrem puerumque tueri

Afflatu iussus Ioseph, Nilotica tecta

Perrexit: monitusque iterum ad Iudaea reuerti

Herode extincto, Galilaeis adstitit aruis.

35 Subditus interea peragit mandata parentum:

Praecellitque senes puer, et Salomoniam templa

Ingressus monuit, legisque abstrusa reclusit.

Mox docuit Solymos praeclarae munia uitae

Praeconis tonitru, qui flumine mergier artus

40 Suasit, et indignum Christi qui lora relaxet

Se uocat, et nitidae soluat sandalia plantae.

Hinc uastae latebras Christus perrexit eremi,

casting the darkness of Tartarus away from the hearts of men. 20

And in various places, in different times, with signs
that overcome the understanding of the human mind,
he instilled the sweet wound of love in hearts now made peaceful.

First, he descended into the womb of the highest Virgin,
who soon conceived her son without the need of seed, 25
and brought him to light in a modest manger on the ninth month.

Hardly the infant had seen the light of his eighth day,
hardly he had touched the first mould of the given
flesh, when his wounded skin had knowledge of the cruelty
of blades, and escaped the hostile wrath of king Herod, 30
and Joseph, instructed from heaven to protect the mother
and the child, went on to the villages by the river
Nile, and warned once again to go back to Judea
after Herod was dead, he settled on the fields of Galilea.

Meanwhile he obediently transgressed the orders of his parents: 35
the child surpassed the old men, and walking into the Temple
of Solomon he taught and disclosed the secret meaning of the Law.

And soon he showed the duties of blessed life to the people of Jerusalem
by means of the thundering preacher, who persuaded to immerse
the body in the river, and calls himself unworthy to loosen 40
the strings and remove the sandals from Christ's sacred foot.

Hence Christ went to the vast desolations of the desert,

Multos passurus uiolenti Daemonis astus.
Nanque quater denos iam roscida luna rotatus
45 Egerat, et totidem magnum sol aureus orbem
Ambierat terrae, nedum ieiunia Christus
Soluerat esuriens, cum se tentator operta
Ingessit fraude, et lapides mitescere duros
Praeciperet blande stimulat, cui talia fatur:
50 <<Nonne sacri referunt libri? Traducere uitam
Non datur in dapibus, sed enim foelicius illud,
Quod fluxit sacro semel omnipotentis ab ore:
perpetuam praestat uentura in secula uitam>>.
Protinus hinc celsae uehit ad fastigia primae
spiritus, atque illi rursus: <<Si dia propago es,
te tuto poteris summo de culmine templi
Mittere: namque extant de te mandata ministris,
ne forte ad lapidem offendas>>. Cui talia reddit:
<<Legiferi scitum Mosis, Dominumque Deumque
60 Ne tentes>>. Paucis pauefactus uocibus hisce
Obriguit, ueluti cum saeuo moenia bello
Impiger obsedit multo conamine miles,
actutum et chalybis percussus tempora glande,
machina terrifico quam fulminat aenea bombo,
65 sternitur, atque illi torpescunt frigore membra.

destined to undergo the countless tricks of the cruel Demon.
For indeed the dew-soaked Moon had already run its course
for forty times, and the Sun had equally made its way around 45
the Earth's globe, and still Christ, starving, had not broken
his fast, when the Tempter forced himself in with a cunning
scheme, and swiftly challenged him to order the hard rocks
to become soft. And this he talks in return:
<<Isn't this what the Sacred Books teach? Not in 50
food alone life should be spent, but it is much happier
what once procedeth from the mouth of God:
it gives eternal life for the centuries to come>>.
The evil spirit then immediately took him on the top
of a prominent height, and again to him: <<If really 55
you are divine progeny, from the pinnacle of the temple
you could jump safely: for to the angels charges over you
were given, lest perhaps you dash against a stone>>. To whom
he replied: <<It is the commandment of lawgiver Moses: you shall not
tempt your Lord and God>>. Made fearful by these few words 60
he stiffened, just as when during a savage battle the restless
soldier lays siege against the walls with all his strength,
and all of a sudden, hit on the head by an iron cannonball,
which the bronze machinery thrusts with frightening blast,
is stunned, his limbs made numb with cold. 65

Crudeles iterum uersutus colligit iras,
ac tristi obuersat fallendi pectore curas.
Nubiferi ductum praecelso in culmine montis
Collocat, et molli quondam regnata Dario
70 monstrat sceptras, Pharon, Lybies porrecta sub axem
regna, Tagum fuluam populis qui uoluit harenam,
et quicquid latis rerum tractabat habenis
Roma potens, spondetque illi, si poplite flexo
Procumbat. Contraque refert diuina propago:
75 <<Perfide discedas, soli seruire tonanti
est opus>>. In tenues momento euanuit auras.
Post nucleum legis dirimens a cortice uulgo
Praebuit, aeternae reserans compendia uitae,
dogmataque expungens Scribarum, mentis auarae
semina, pontificum luxus, fastosaque secli
Gaudia perstringens. Pharisaeae noxia turbae
Carpit fulcra, dolos reteggit, praenuncia mortis
spargit uerba suae. Non indignatus ab umbris
Infernis animas excire ad munia uitae,
85 Reddere cognatis nutu, quae functa sepulchris
Corpora, quae tristem dudum exhalare mephitim,
Disiectae placuit rursus connectere formae.
Inuidia extemplo conflatur maxima, nanque

The Cunning Enemy once again gathers his fury
 and considers other means of deception in his gloomy heart.
 He places him on the top of a cloud-shrouded mountain,
 and he shows the domains once ruled by the languid
 Darius, Pharos, the lands stretching under the sky 70
 of Lybia, Tagus that rolls golden sands for the people,
 and all that mighty Rome handled with its wide
 reins, and promises them to him, if only he lays down
 on his knees. And the divine progeny answers back:
 <<Be gone, you fraud, only the Thunderer it is worth 75
 serving>>. He immediately vanished into thin air.
 After that the heart of the Law, extracting it from its shell,
 he showed to the people, unfolding the joys of life eternal,
 correcting the doctrines of Scribes, sources of a greedy
 soul, denouncing the excesses of the priests and the sensual 80
 delights of the world. He shook down the unjust basis
 of the Phariseans, uncovered frauds, diffused ominous
 words about his own death. Without scorning to conjure back
 to the joys of life souls from the infernal darkness,
 and to give back with a nod to their family bodies 85
 which had already experienced the tomb, which had recently exhaled
 their sad last breath, he was happy to reunite them to their lost form.
 But soon the utmost Envy is started, for vice is waging a war

Virtuti uitium bellat, diuina prophanis
90 Confligunt, pugnat tumido clementia fastu.
Supplicium petitur iusto de sanguine, poenae
Poscuntur, saeuae condunt spectacula plebi
Membra salutiferi transfixo stipite regis.
Funditur innocuus toto de corpore sanguis,
95 Vbertim celebris mixto fluit unda cruore:
Qua scelus antiquum primaque ab origine mundi
Eluitur, patriae primaeva piacula noxae.
Scilicet humani generis percussus amore
Crudeles clauos, risus, atque aspera flagra,
100 Sputa, alapas, barbae uulsus, diramque coronam
Sentibus horrentem subiit, mortemque fugare
Morte Crucis uoluit. Quae te clementia Christe
Ingratos nimium mortales, ferrea corda,
ut morte eriperes, mortem perferre coegit?
105 Ne rogo, ne summi collati muneris unquam
Inferni obrepant uaesana obliuia somni?
Dicite foelices animae, quae lucida templa
Incolitis, quoties renouarit mystica lethi
Signa sui, postquam sedes ferrugine nigras
110 Inuisit, pulsisque aeterna luce tenebris
Atque catenato resolutis patribus hoste

against virtue, holy matters clash with profane ones,
moderation fights with swelling pride. 90

Punishment is requested for the just blood, tortures
are demanded, as a spectacle for the cruel mob
they nail the body of the salvific King on the Cross.

Innocent blood is drawn out from the body,
water mixed with blood copiously flows. 95

By this the ancient crime is washed away from the world's
first race, the Original Sin of the noxious progeny.

For indeed taken by love for the human kind
he underwent painful nails, derision, harsh whips,
spits, slaps, tearing of the beard, and a dreadful 100

crown bristling with thorns, and wanted to chase away death
by death on the Cross. O Christ, what kind of clemency
forced you to suffer death, to rescue from death
the most ungrateful mortals, their hardened hearts?

So that never again, after the bonfire of most precious wealth, 105

the oblivious ravings of the evil sleep could creep back?

O blessed souls, who inhabit the celestial temples, tell me
how many times Christ would have renewed the secret signs of his own
death, after he travelled into the rust-colored lands of darkness,

and, chased darkness away with the eternal light, 110

having freed the Fathers from the Enemy in chains,

Sublimis superas Christus remeavit ad arces.
Principio auratis confixit corda sagittis:
Corda uirum sacri coetus, quae uiuida uirtus
115 Ardentis linguae in speciem penetrarat, et alium
Spirabant calefacta nimis praecordia Christum,
quem puro quondam sumebat turba fidelis
Pectore, sacratae celebrans conuiuia coenae.
Scilicet immites hinc debellare Tyrannos
120 exarmata ualent flammanti pectora lingua;
hinc ueteres fugitare Dei, trepidare Senatus.
Mirari attoniti Sophiae de plebe magistri,
Mirari et uulgi coepit, cum cresceret ardor
Insolitus, numerumque magis quo saeuior ira
redderet innumerum tormentis percita caedes.
Recludunt Stephano coelum stridentia saxa,
Vrentem moriens temnit Laurentius ignem;
innumerae rigidam constanti pectore mortem
imbelles obeunt (res non audita) puellae;
130 pollutas pueri laeti obtruncantur ad aras:
Inter mille neces fidei rutilantior ignis
Fulsit, Callaicis ueluti in fornacibus aurum.
Tum praeses Syriis feruens Egnatius agris
Christigenas pascebat oues, Romanus abegit

he solemnly made his way back to the highest abode.

In the beginning, with arrows of gold, he pierced through the hearts,

the hearts of men from the sacred assembly, which the lively virtue

had transfixed in the form of the Fiery Word, as their breasts, 115

made exceedingly hot, breathed the spirit of life-giving Christ,

whom the loyal followers accepted in their pure souls

when celebrating the ritual of the Sacred Supper.

Thus, the hearts armed with the Fiery Word manage to

easily defeat the most merciless tyrants; 120

thus the old gods ran away, the Senate trembled.

Awe-struck, the Tribunes of the Plebs marveled at the Wisdom,

and the populace also begun to marvel, because the unknown

ardor grew, and a constant deployment of torture made countless

a number becoming higher as the wrath grew more savage. 125

Thrown stones open to Stephen the way to heaven,

as he died, Lawrence scorned the burning fire:

countless harmless girls – a thing never heard before –

go to meet a cruel death with unwavering heart;

boys are happy to be beheaded on unholy altars: 130

amidst a thousand deaths the fire of Faith glowed

brighter, just like gold in the foundries of Galicia.

While a bishop Ignatius zealously herded the Christian

flock on the field of Syria: a Roman soldier captured

135 Miles, crudeli ducturus funera circo.
Sacra uiri nimium formidant membra leones
Tangere, ab innocuo cohibentes ora cruore.
Quem rigidi immitis Traiani exhauserat ensis.
Protinus euulso (nam dirus pectore lictor
140 Traxerat) inscriptum cordi spectatur IESV
Nomen honoratum, quod tristia Tartara longe
Formidant, superae conspecta insignia dextrae.
Tempore iam ex illo, multum cum uiuidus ardor
Feruere, inuidit daemon transcendere coelos
145 Stelligeros hominem, quibus ille expulsus Auerni
Horrendas subiit multa caligine sedes,
Hinc satagit Christi ut marcescant pectora luxu,
Crassetur uilis tumidusque nomismatis ardor,
Despectent humiles uano ut turgentia fastu
150 Stemmata: sed uicit Christus superoque calore
Dispulit elatas Erebi de nocte tenebras
Hoste triumphato, ruit ille in tartara praeceps.
Sed magis infernus coluber cum sibila pressit,
Fallendi insidias uiroso in corde uolutat:
155 Cum uelut a rabida, quam dira impellit edendi
Ingluuias, pastor commissa armenta leaena
Custodit, magis illa furit, licet improba fraudes

him, intending to bring him to death in the gruesome arena. 135

Lions are too afraid to touch the sacred body of the man,
holding back their maw from the innocent blood,
which merciless Trajan's cruel sword had drained.

Once extracted (for a cruel attendant had taken it out
from the chest), carved on the heart one sees the honored 140
name of Jesus, which is the terror of gloomy Tartarus,
the visible banner of the right hand of the Father.

From that moment, since the living zeal was burning
vehemently, the Devil resented that a human being could cross
the starry heavens, banned from which he went under 145

the caves of Avernus, frightening for their thick fogs,
hence he strives so that Christian souls shall rot in lust,
so that a vile and crass thirst for money shall grow,
so that the humble shall despise vestments swollen with vain
arrogance. But Christ prevailed and with heavenly warmth 150

chased away from the night the wide shadows of Erebus,
the enemy defeated, he rolled down into Tartarus.

Yet when the infernal snake more forcefully hiss,
in its toxic heart it weighs over new devious plots.

In the same way, when a shepherd protects the wollen sheep 155
in his custody from a rabid one, which an insatiable frenzy
to eat torments, that one rages even more, although it conceals

Dissimulet, renouatque latens in pectore bellum.
Secius haud coluber simulata pace uenenum
160 Offundit. Sed quis summi omnipotentes alumnos
Fraudibus eripiat? placuit concire fideles
Saepius, atque magis quo frixit inertia mundi.
Propterea Assysius nimio calefactus amore
Rettulit effossis flammantia stigmata membris
165 Franciscus, pauper terris, ditissimus aula
Principis aetherii, perrari signifer aequi.
Alter ab Emphyreis defluxit sedibus almae
Virtutis custos, fidei seruator Iberos.
Vtrinque innumerae uaria sub ueste cateruae
170 Conscendere polos fremuit perterritus Orcus:
Nec non et Siculus flammam emisit, et ille
Conspicuus signis Picenae gloria gentis
Olim foeminei sexus; et Tuscus, et Umbri
Monstrare fidem, et gestata insignia, nec non
175 Sulphurea Nar albus aqua, priscumque Reate.
Quid referam sanctos monitus, praeconia crebra
Sacrorum uatum non exaudita prophanis?
Sed quae inuisa malis nuper demiserit, audi,
Dum sol obliquum bisseis partibus orbem
180 Supra quindecies centum numerasset ab ortu

its tricks, and secretly renews the aggressiveness in its heart;
 not differently the snake, pretending peace, spreads
 its poison. But who would rescue the creatures of God almighty 160
 from these frauds? It seemed fair to provoke the faithful
 more insistently, and the idleness of the world grew even worse.
 Therefore Francesco of Assisi, enflamed by excessive love
 received the fiery stigmata on his worn out body,
 poor on earth, most affluent in the palace of the ethereal 165
 prince, bearing the mark of the most rare equality.
 Another custodian descended from the Empyrean seats
 of life-giving virtue, a defender of faith from Iberia.
 Frightened Orcus roared for ascending into heaven
 under the various cloaks of both those countless families: 170
 and the Sicilian sent out flames, and that eminent with signs,
 glory of the people of Piceno and once of the female
 sex; and the Tuscan and the Umbrian also showed
 faith, and the banners on display, and even the river Nar
 white with sulphur water, the Reate of the ancients. 175
 Why would I retell the sacred omens, the numerous
 warnings of sacred prophets left unheard by the profanes?
 Listen, instead, what signs, detested by sinners, he has recently
 sent forth. As soon as the Sun upon the oblique band with twelve parts
 had just counted fifteen times one hundred from the birth 180

Virginei partus, primae trieteridis annum
Postremum uoluens, labuntur mystica caelo.
Res comperta mihi: uos aspirate canenti.
Est regio Europae gelido subiecta Trioni:
185 Bellaces habitant populi, quos Romula pubes
Vix domuit, toto quamuis dominarier orbe
Coeperit, et Latium iam formidaret Araxes
Armenius Tybrim, Pharium et pepulisset Anubim
Itala proiectos aluit, quae bellua fratres.
190 Illinc missa uadis ingentia robora uoluit,
atque sub aereis praelabatur alpibus Aenus.
Aenus Caesareis ardentia ligna Caminis
Ducturus, uasto populus dum Sbocius antro
Effossum uarios argentum promit in usus.
195 Hac Rhenus liquidi deuoluit fluminis undam:
Gallica Germanis qui separat arua colonis,
Romani toties expertus militis arma,
Ingentes paruo Tybri supponere lymphas
Pertulit, et Latiam uectare per aequora puppim,
200 Oceani bifido percellens uortice fluctus.
Hinc et Danubius non magnas deuehit undas,
Montibus Arbonae uix fusus, plurima nondum
Flumina surripuit, nondumque binomius, ingens

of the Virgin's child, revolving the last of the first three
years, mysterious objects started falling down from heaven.

O mystery to me well known, may you inspire my song!

There is a region of Europe underneath frozen Trion:

there live warlike people, whom Romulus's offspring 185

barely tamed, although it had started to dominate over

the whole world, and the Araxes river of Armenia already dreaded

the Tiber of Latium, and the Italic beast, who nursed the abandoned

children had chased away Anubis of Pharos.

From there the River Inn rolls its might down the valleys 190

and flows underneath the towering Alps:

Inn destined to carry wood to burn in the Emperor's

furnaces, while in a large cave the people of Sas bring out

silver extracted for different kind of tasks.

There the river Rhenus rolls down waves of its clear water, 195

which divides the lands of Gaul from the German settlers,

each time it experienced the strength of the Roman soldier,

accepted to supply its water to the small Tiber

and carry on its surface the boat from Latium

surpassing with its twofold current the Ocean's waves. 200

From there also Danuvius carries waves not big,

barely melted on the mountains of Arbona, not yet it

steals from multiple affluents, not yet it has two names,

Alluit Elysios, Ariosque et Paeonis oram,
205 Et Lygios: tandem rapto tumefactus aquarum
Euxinum ingreditur bis terno gurgite pontum,
Extremumque caput limosa perdit in ulua.
Hic demissa recens populi mysteria, mirum
Attoniti inspectant homines, ac inania passim
210 Inscribunt puro delapsa insignia coelo
Sanguinolenta crucis: clari memoranda triumphii
Effigies late spectatur spongia flagra
Visuntur, tunica inconsutilis intima, clauis
Cernuntur multo madefacti sanguine, telum
215 quod sacram saeuo discreuerat impete costam
Pingitur, excubitor crista spectabilis ales,
Tergeminique micant tali, quos incluta Christi
Iecerat innocui sortitus tegmina miles.
Non ignota cano, Caesar monstrauit, et ipsi
220 Vidimus, innumeros prompsit Germania testes,
Qua Rhenus tenui Raetis ex alpibus orsu
Funditur, et maior suppositis influit aruis,
Compertum, uiditque lacus qui molle pererrans
Muros piscosae subiectos perluit urbis,
225 Quos Constantini proles Oriente subacto
Occiduas repetens stellanti murice terras

it widely flows past the Elysians, the Arii and the shore of Peonia,
 and the Lygii; and finally, engrossed by stealing the Euxinian 205
 waters it merges into the sea with a threefold course,
 and loses its last extremity on the swampy grass.
 Here, the mysterious signs descended, people and men
 look at the recent marvel, and everywhere trace onto the emptiness
 of the spotless heavens the befallen bleeding banners 210
 of the cross: the memorable shape of the famous triumph
 is observed everywhere, burning sponges are seen,
 the secret Seamless Vest, and nails are seen drenched
 in copious blood, and that lance is also pictured,
 which pierced the sacred side with a ruthless blow, 215
 and the watchman remarkable for the winged crest
 and the three dices shine, which the fortunate soldiers
 had casted over the sacred garments of innocent Christ.
 Not unknown facts I sing, Cesar himself showed them, and I myself
 did see: Germany brought forth countless witnesses 220
 where the River Rhenus, flowing down from the Alps of Retia
 with a slow course, eventually runs engrossed through the plains,
 in clear sight, and a lake is seen, which placidly rambling
 washes off the nearby walls of a city rich with fish,
 which the son of Constantine, after conquering the East, 225
 as he demanded back the Western lands with the starry purple cloth,

Condidit, et proprio signavit nomine, cuius
Principis (ut perhibent) demissus sanguine Picus,
Picus arenosae genitus prope flumina Siclae.
230 Audiit et tumidi iam ditior accola Rheni:
Quique lacu missus leni sub murmurat unda,
Mox alium praefertque lacum, quo denique fusus
Inde humilis tumidusque uoraxque euoluitur, inde
Plenus et exiguus, rectus, sinuosus in orbem
235 Labitur, hinc sumptis Basileam diuidit urbem
Fontibus, ac uasto defertur gurgite, et alti
Vorticibus magnis contingit tecta Brisachi,
Aduersam caesa quae nectunt abiete ripam.
Noricus inspexit, torti audiuere sycambri:
240 Audiit et Mario domitus per uulnera Cymber.
Senserunt amnes, senserunt aequora longe:
Aequora torpenti glacie concreta sub axe
Arctoo. propius conspexit Danubii fons,
Spectarunt fortes ipsis sub moenibus Vlmae
245 Assueti contis fontes bellare Sueui,
et Phorcin Latiae donatus lumine linguae,
cui sacrum triplici celebratum dogmate nomen.
Inspectant populi, quorum confinia Caesar
Vastauit late uictor, cum fusa Bohemus

founded, and signed with the very name of the prince from whose
blood, they recount, Picus himself descended,
that Picus born by the sandy banks of the sandy river Secchia.

And the nearby dweller of raging Rhenus hears it: 230

each emissary of the lake that murmurs under its soft wave
soon after encounters another lake, where finally merged
eventually flows modestly, engrossed and then ravenous,
full and small, straight, and meandering flows on the earth,

hence divides the city of Basel taking up its springs 235

and is carried by a wide whirlpool, and reaches out to the houses
of Alt-Breisach with high raging waves, which wrap onto
the opposing shores with chopped down timber.

Noricus saw it, the defeated Sycambrians heard of it

and the Cymbrus defeated by Mario with wounds. 240

The brooks sensed it, the seas sensed it from afar:

seas frozen by solid ice underneath the stars

of Arcton. More closely the spring of Danuvius saw it,

the mighty fonts by the very walls of Ulm saw it,

accustomed to the wars of the Count of Svevia, 245

and Pforzheim gifted with the honor of Latin language,

to whom is sacred the name celebrated in the three traditions.

They see that the people whose borders Cesar, victorious,

widely destroyed, when the Bohemian was gathering

250 Agmina colligeret, nuper dum proelia miscet

Confractis uires latura rebellibus. Illinc

Vangiones cernunt: latebrosa silentia siluae

Herciniae norunt: nouit perterritus Osus,

Osus Aranisco dubium deductus, an illo

255 Hic genus antiquum referat, sub iudice lis est.

Vindelicus, Rhetus miratur, et aspera caede

Romani tremuit quondam prouincia Vari,

nec tam praecipiti formidine territus hausit

armorum sonitum quondam Germanus arator,

260 Nec sic expauit, subitis cum motibus alpes

Intremuere: minus bellacis tempore Othonis

Pertimuit, claro primum cum mystica coelo

Defluxere. Iuuat lachrymas effundere, multae

Implorant ueniam scelerum cum patribus urbes

265 Aeni concutitur pons, illius accola nudis

Incedit pedibus celebrans amburbia: tantum

Relligio potuit, Minio color, et color atro

Nonnunquam similis, sacris mantilibus ipsi

Sanguineis rutilans maculis insigne triumpho

270 Vidimus, Actaeo confusum pene liquore.

Puniceo interdum fulgor certauerat ostro:

Interdum fusci nigrantem nube coloris,

an army, while not long ago he was stirring up battle meant to 250
bring strength to the broken rebels. And from there
the Vangiones see it; the shadowy silences of the Hercinian
forest know it; the terrified Osus knew that – the doubt on
whether the Osus stemmed from the Aranisco, or rather
the latter traced his origin back to it, it is still under debate. 255
The Vindelicus, the Rhetian is awestruck, and for the tragic
defeat once trembled the province of the Roman Varius,
still not with equal dread the German farmer was shaken
on the day he perceived the sound of the coming armies;
not this much he became frightened, when the Alps trembled 260
with a sudden quake; even less at the time of warlike Otto
he feared, when for the first time secret signs came down
from the clear sky. It is now good to shed tears, many cities
ask for forgiveness of sins together with their bishops,
the bridge of river Inn is demolished, its citizen walks on 265
barefoot celebrating a procession: so much could religion do.
The color of crimson, and the color never even similar
to darkness, I myself saw, glowing with red spots of blood
on the sacred vests, the emblem of the triumph,
slightly tempered with the nectar of Actaeus. 270
Sometimes the brightness struggled with Phoenician red;
Now and then I saw a cross blackening in a cloud of darkness,

Permixtamque crucem rubro spectauimus olim.
Nec morum discrimen erat: sacer atque prophanus
275 Iam conspersa sibi gestabant mystica, patres
Conscripti et pueri, conscriptus sexus uterque,
Et templa et uestes, a summa Caesaris aula
Ad tenues uicos, ad dura mapalia ruris,
Cernere erat liquido deductum ex aethere signum,
280 Purpurea exceptum tunica quod ferre senator
Formidat, laeui et matrona perhorruit armo:
Quod stupuit trito positum centone colonus,
Pauperis ad lychnum nati dum canabe pero
Consuitur, teneras lacerent ne tristia plantas
285 Constipata gelu, consertaque uepribus arua.
Miraturque sagi tenuato stamine miles
Insculptum mortis uitalia sede trophaeum.
Miraturque simulque pauet, qui uasa sacerdos
Obnubit, celeri supra tectoria lapsu
290 Aduentare cruces, et lintea pingere pallet
Spectator, densusque redit formidine sanguis
Ad fontem e riuis, titubantque in pectore fibrae.
Nec non ueloces ageret cum turbida lymphae
Praecipitata molas summo de uertice montis,
295 Atque excepta rotis tereret frumenta, minister

once mixed up with a shade of bright red.

And there was not difference of ways: the priest and the layman

carried on themselves the mystical signs, 275

senators and children, officials of both sexes.

And on churches and vests, from the Emperor's highest palace

down to the humble villages, to the rough huts of the countryside,

one could see the sign brought down from the spotless sky:

it is taken away from the crimson vest what the senator dreads 280

the mother is frightened to see on their left shoulder;

what the farmer is stunned to see placed on his worn-out quilt,

as the poor son's thick boot is stitched up in the hut at the light

of a lantern, so that the gloomy fields hard with frost

and covered in thorns won't cut the tender feet. 285

The soldier is stunned that on the worn-out fabric of the clock

is inscribed the trophy of life over death.

Stunned and scared at once is the priest, who is covering

the altar and pales, that with a quick movement crosses fall down

over the covers, the bystander pales at the painting of the linen-clothes, 290

and for the fear the thick blood returns from the veins

to their source, while every fiber trembles in the heart.

While the muddy water went moving the quick millstones

flowing down from the highest top of a mountain,

and grinding the plucked grains with wheels, a miller, 295

Qui lassata, uago stridore et pondere sacci,
Pollineque inspersus, placido dare membra sopori
Decernit, rubro sub tectis spargitur imbre:
Olli per pectus, per crus, per colla, per aluum
300 Sydereae extemplo pingunt insignia guttae.
Quam uarii strepitus, quam dissona dogmata, quanti
Pro sensu capitum uario mussare susurri?
Crediderim dominum, celsae qui praesidet arci,
Olim longa sui potantem obliuia mundum
305 Vidisse, et signis uoluisse salubribus almae
Saepius (utque alias) excire ad limina lucis:
Quandoquidem sontes inferno sustulit antro
Tartareus princeps furias, scelerumque cateruas
Immisit Stigii reserantes abdita fontis,
310 Cuius mortifero dudum tenebrosus hiatu
Aera tabificum fumus praetexuit, inde
Angusta occulitur coelestis semita uitae,
Inde crucis miseros uesana obliuia tentant.
Hinc Regina Mali forte indignata sinistris
315 In caedes et bella ruit sitibunda cruoris,
Praecurritque rotas scisso Discordia crine,
Successus belli si forte arriserit; illinc
Ambitio erumpit rebus tumefacta secundis.

covered in flower, who wanted to give rest to his body
exhausted by the roving noise and the weight of the sack,
in his own house is covered in the red rain;
On his chest, legs, neck and belly, all of a sudden,
heavenly drops depict the sacred banners. 300

How different these stories! How diverging their sense!
How numerous the rumors concerning the good sense of the witnesses!
I myself would have believed that the Lord, who rules on the heavenly vault,
once saw the world swallowing the long-lasting oblivion
of him, and with signs bringing health to the soul more often he wanted 305
to rouse it (as in another time) toward the regions of light.

And so in the infernal pit the prince of Tartarus raised up
the filthy Furies, and sent out down hundreds of sinners
opening up the deepest abodes of the Stygian swamp,
from whose deadly entrance not long ago a dark fog 310
shrouded the poisonous air; and so he concealed
the narrow path of the heavenly life, and so a raving oblivion
of the cross is now tempting us miserable mortals.

Here the Queen of Evil, shamed by disgrace, now happens
to rush onto battles and wars thirsty for blood, 315
and Discordia runs before the chariot with torn hair,
if ever the outcome of war were good; there Ambition
bursts engrossed by favorable events.

Tumque infernus amor lucri, tum lurida gliscit
320 Ingluuiis, studioque omnes excerpta per artus
Spurca Venus, lassis nimium quae uiribus hausta
Et parit ignauos animos, et torquet atroci
Inuidia, et partos disperdit prodiga census.
Sic septemplicibus crassatur perdita uinclis
325 Bellua multorum capitum, quibus impete soeuo
Deiectam legimus quondam Babylona superbam:
Quam nec crudeli populasset milite Cyrus,
Nec centum crebro nutassent ariete portae,
Nec genesis falso lusisset dogmate mendax
330 Stellarum uariis intentus cursibus augur;
Ni prius hostiles hausisset perfida mores,
Quos noster, pudet heu, iam dudum accersiit orbis,
Quosque recens Babylon haustos cumulatius ambit.
Sed nec tam tumidam uictrix te Graecia, quondam
335 Reddiderant coesi Marathonis in aequore Persae;
non delusa Rhodo, tergo non fulta Platonis,
non Demostheneae raptata uolumine linguae,
neue Stagereo motu peruecta tonantis
ad solium, tanto pereuntis ludicra famae
340 aut studio aut plausu quondam deposcis inani,
Quam nunc imbelles laudum mentita trophaea

Then the infernal love of gold swells, then filthy
gluttony, and a dirty Venus eagerly smeared through every 320
limb, who is drawn out by strengths too languid
and makes souls useless, and twists them with dreadful
envy, and wastefully abandons rightful children.
Likewise with seven chains was tied up the degenerate
beast with many heads, by which with fierce assault 325
we read that was once destroyed the arrogant Babylon:
so that Cyrus would not devastate her with the fierce army,
so that the one hundred doors would not give way to the mighty ram,
so that with false doctrine the deceitful diviner, attentive
to the various course of the stars, would no more cast horoscopes; 330
unless she had already absorbed the nefarious customs,
which our own times, alas, have recently brought back to life
and which the new Babylon is now avidly embracing.
Not so arrogant, o victorious Greece, had made you
the Marathonians killed in waters of Persia; 335
not so deceived by Rhodi or lifted on Plato's shoulders,
not so carried away by the book of Demosthenes' speech,
nor brought up to the Thunderer's throne by the Stagirite's
rants, for you to pursue with empty interest and success
the short-lived rewards of a fleeting glory, 340
like the weak-minded people that are now displaying false trophies

Ostentant fastu, quam plebs ignara tumescit.
Molliciem subde et luxus, quos prisca Tarenti
Fama reformidat, quos nescit Apicius, odit
345 Atque Philoxenium guttur, quos reiicit ille
Qui sceptro indignus tractauit Serica pensa
Et Sybaris parcae spernens obsonia mensae.
Sed quid Achemeniis quaesitam Regibus olim
Immanem Venerem (pudet heu memorare) prophani
350 Nomine damnantur? Qui non admiserit, omnes
quotquot collegit uitiorum Roma cloacas?
Assyrium Tyberi cum iam admisisset Orontem,
Mox propriis opibus, propriis ruitura sub armis.
Iam dudum excipiunt, insultant Maurus et Afer
355 Aegyptus, Libye subsannat, Thracia ridet
nec fidei monitis auscultant. <<Vincimur>> aiunt:
Colluuias scelerum, uitiorum foetida nubes
Hinc illuc pridem migravit, perfida turba
In Christum laxant impune repagula, nobis
360 Non impune datum, si Christum lingua lacessat,
Virginis et nomen nobis non spernitur almae:
sed nec sacra Dei nobis, nec templa, nec arae
venduntur dominis - quo tandem cernimus usque
Insultare canes? purgemus noxia, rectum

of praise; like the ignorant mob that these days swells with pride.

Go on abandoning yourself to laziness and comforts that even the ancient

pride of Taranto scorns, which Apicius ignores, which Philoxenus'

mouth abhors, which rejects even that man, 345

who shamefully weaved silk with a royal staff

and Sybaris, who refuses the food of a modest table!

But why even pagans would condemn as monstrous the Venus

once pursued - it is shameful to remember – by the Achemenid

Kings? Who would not acknowledge that now Rome 350

is collecting every possible sewer of vices?

Having already poured the Assyrian Orontes into the Tiber,

soon she will succumb under her own wealth weapons.

And already the Moors and African are rejoicing, insulting us;

Egypt and Libya deride us, Thrace laughs. 355

They don't listen to the admonishments of faith - <<We shall triumph! - they say -

the filthy sewer of sins, fetid clouds of vices,

has already left from here to there >>; the evil crowd is opening

the gates against Christianity unpunished. For us

it does not go unpunished if words insult Christ, 360

for us the sacred name of the Virgin is not to be despised,

for us the sacred grounds, the churches and the altars

of God are not sold – until when we are looking at dogs barking

insults? Let's purge the guilt, let's straighten

365 firmemus: nostris opus est indicere bellum
Moribus inprimis, mox bella inferre prophanis
Scilicet in cassum patiemur mystica caelo
Delabi, aut ueteres tantum effudisse cruoris
Sacratae fidei proceres? aut denique Christi
370 Nil nobis prodesse necem patiemur amaram?
Subiectos populos compescas, inclyte Caesar,
A uitiiis: neque enim tantas regnator Olympi
Virtutes et opes tibi contulit, ut tibi tantum
Prodescent, celsae rarissima munera dextrae.
375 Dona recognoscas fortis coelestia Caesar.
Sopitam turbis sacrato pollice barbam
Vellere ne pigeat, tua sunt haec munia, Caesar:
Stringere constantis fidei pro legibus ensem,
Insculptaque cruce infidos Maomethis alumnos
380 Pellere. Quae tibi sunt iam tradita, desine Caesar
Alter ut insumat, te contemnite. Ministri
Christo non desunt Reges; nec tempora desunt,
Vt mores abigat Satana impellente nefastos,
Et crucis imperium longe lateque propaget.
385 Tu dudum lectus, nunc inuitatus, ad altos
Dirige (ne pigeat) foelicia carbasa portus.
Non deerunt equites, non instrumenta, fideles

the wrong: it is up to us to call for war first of all against
the Moors, then wage war against the nonbelievers. 365

Or are we going to let the mysterious signs rain down
from heaven in vain, or allow that the ancient heroes
of the sacred faith shed so much blood in vain? Or are we going
to accept that Christ's painful death was nothing for us? 370

Restrain your subjects, o famous Cesar, from vice:

For indeed the king of Olympus never gave you so many
virtues and wealth exclusively for your good – the chosen
gifts of your mighty right hand.

Strong Cesar, may you discern gifts that are from heaven. 375

Don't hesitate to touch with your sacred thumb the beard the mob
has once tortured - these relics are your own, o Cesar.

Hold the sword for protecting the laws of constant faith,
chase out with the engraved cross the faithless followers
of Mohammed. What has already been given to you, o Cesar, 380

don't let someone else take it in spite of you. Christ does
not lack loyal kings; neither does he lack the time
to drive out the the impious customs brought about by Satan,
and expand the empire of the Cross far and wide.

Elected not a long time ago, and now invited, direct 385

your prosperous fleet, don't hesitate, to far away harbours.

There won't be shortage of knights, nor weapons, the pious

Adsunt Italiae populi, lectissima pubes.
Viribus indomitis instructas ecce phalanges,
390 Tormenta, et celeres praestat Germania currus,
et neruos belli fauor ingens coelitus, idem
Quo fretus iam pene puer certamine Gallos
Contundis Latio, nec dum diademate frontem
Contectus, multosque domas. Gens effera nuper
395 Rettulit Arctos inflicto uulnere in axes:
Iam metuuntque Gethae, metuit quoque Maurus, ut olim
Fugerat Eoas indignabundus in ortus.
Aemoniis equitum cuneus distinctus ab oris,
Dum Carolus bello iam Parthenopaea subiret
400 Moenia, magnanimis qui mox succumberet orsis
cuius nec gaesis Byzantia turba sarissas
duxisset contra, refluus quoque Bosphorus udas
Veliuolam classem Thracum excapisset in ulnas.
Ter seruum Memphis iure indignata tyrannum
405 Cessisset Pharium uelamina torta tiaram.
Nunc aquila expetitur, rutilum quae insigne triumphum
Per Tanaim, Nilum, calidae per rura Syenes
Perque Arabum campos, ambustaque solibus arua
Vectet ad aurorae populos, ad ditia regna.
410 Sed uereor, Caesar, ueteri ne quassa timore

People of Italy are with you, a most refined youth.
 Here are phalanxes made up of fearless men,
 Machines: Germania provides fast chariots 390
 and warlike strength that mighty help from heaven,
 by whose help you, almost a child, are now crushing
 the French in Latium, and not yet wearing the crown,
 you subdue many other. Not long ago a savage tribe
 brought back to the Arctic regions the wound you inflicted 395
 and now the Getae tremble, and the Moor stands in fear,
 as he had once shamfeully fled toward the rising Eoo.
 On the Aemonian coasts a maniple of knights was seen
 while Charles at war was passing the walls of Naples -
 Charles, who would soon succumb in the daring enterprise, 400
 with whose javelins the Byzantine army would have never
 waged war against the Sarassins, whose fast sailing fleet back-flowing
 Bosphorus would have never grasped in the wet embrace of Turkey;
 for the third time Memphis, rightfully scorning the weak tyrant,
 would have worn the turban as the Pharian crown. 405
 Now the Eagle is demanded, which would bring the red emblem of triumph
 along the Tanais, the Nile, on the fields of warm Aswan
 and the lands of the Arabs, and regions burnt by sun
 to the people of East, to the kingdoms of wealth.
 But I fear, o Ceasar, that startled by the ancient fear 410

Occiduum turbet subitis incursibus orbem
Hostica gens fidei; ueluti cum percita uoce
euigilant, nudo meditantur praelia dente
Turba canum, surdis si forte irritibus hostem
415 Nil arcent, nec baubatus effundere uanos
Contulit, insultum expediunt, quo territus hostis
Horreat, inque illum possit formido referri.
Rumpe moras, praestan uideat Gangeticus armis
Caesaris excindi Persas, non spernere Hydaspem
420 Aut Hispanim pontes, patrios nec uisere saltus,
Donec odoratos alacer conscenderit Indos.

this people enemy of true faith might trouble the West
with sudden incursions; just like when they are awakened
by a loud voice, a pack of dogs prepare to fight with bared teeth
if perchance they cannot drive the enemy off

with deaf growls, and it does not continue to make useless 415

howls, they get ready to attack, by which the frightened enemy
may dread, and may be pushed back by fear.

Break any delay: may the beautiful Ganges see the Persians

destroyed by the arms of Cesar, do not despise the Hydaspes

or the bridges of Hypanis, and do not look back at the fatherland 420

until you will bravely reach the fragrant lands of India.

Appendix II

Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis carmen*. Rome: Iacobus Mazochius, 1513.

Accompanying Letter from Gianfrancesco to Lilio Gregorio Giraldi.⁸⁴⁹

Nostin, Lili, Venerem atque Cupidinem vanae illius Deos vetustatis? Eos Iulius secundus Pont. Max. accersivit e romanis ruinis, ante paululum erutos, collocavitque in nemore citriorum illo odoratissimo constrato silice, cuius in meditullio Caerulei quoque Thybridis est imago colossea. Omni autem ex parte antiquae Imagines / suis quaeque atulis super impositae. Hinc pergamei Laocoontis exculptum, uti est a Vergilio proditum, simulacrum. Inde pharetrati visitur species Apollinis / qualis apud Homerum expressa est, sed et quodam in ancuro spectrum demorsae ab aspide Cleopatrae, cuius quasi de mammis destillat fons vetustoru instar aqueductumm / excipitur antiquo in quo[d] relata sunt Traiani Principis facinora quaequam, marmoreo sepulchro. Ad hunc ego lucum saepe cum diverterem / non philosophandi gratia, ut olim sub umbra platani propter Ilisum ad aquae murmur coloratos lapillos inter strepentis, minus autem adorandi aut mactandi pecudes ergo, ut vani culores ritus consuevere, / sed causa negotiorum et vel pacem vel arma tractandi, / quibus tandem in patriam ditionem iterum exul / iterum redux fierem: Non visum est mihi ex re fore, inutili ut otio torperem, / quando ita subito, quod malebam non prestaretur, nec severioris philosophiae studia quoque non intermissa exactio excolere dabatur. Excudere igitur vel exordiri aliquod placuit opus, aut homine dignum, aut supra brutum. Nem

⁸⁴⁹ This translation has been realized with the help and guidance of Professor Matteo Soranzo, as part of the SHRCC-funded project “Self-Transformation in Early Modern Europe project” (McGill University, Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures). Special thanks to David Douglas and his edits.

bruta esse iis in locis non parum multa dicuntur ac bellvas cum notas tum ignotas per hosce colles expatiantur, Ianiculum aliquas, aliquanto plures colles, caeteros, at Vaticanum et plurimas alere et ingenteis, / quarum id insitutum, / ut nisi flante Zephyro mansuescant. Cunque habentur veluti cicures ipsis esse omnino ferociores. Quod genus bruti nec Aristoteli nec Aeliano nec Cnidio Ctesiae copertum. Novisse id aliqua ex parte Magnum Albertum, sed non prodidisse nondum eius satis explorata natura. Nec enim ferae illius tempestatis tam nozi tamque efferate debebant vitam. Haec itaque inter animalia Venereo Cupidineoque nemori assueta cum me positum existimarem. De ipsa Venere et Cupidine expellendis carmina istec faciebam /: expellendis inquam non sane extra lucum – qui enim a me patrari id posset operis – sed ab animis ferarum. Nam si Pythagoraeis fabulis non abroganda fides esset, dicerentur fuisse aliquando homines eiusmodi bellvae, inque illos iq̄sos selecta Lucii rosa posse restitui. Nec te admiratio nedum stupor reneat tot in bellvas homines trasformatos, quando iis in oris non unica solum est Circe / ternaque Siren / sed sirenum solisque filiarum Myriaden numerares bene plane integram. Fertur et genus aliud bruti omnino truculentius /; Indicae per se fert rictum formicae, cuius veria est et affectata petulantia / variisque pollet veneficiis. Originem id (si rite recordor) duxisse veteribus placuit ab Elateia prole /; inter Lapithas postea versata. Talibus igitur avertendis veneficiis herba illa flore albicans / radiceque nigricans, num satis putas faceret? Num et strictus ensis Ulysssei? An magis opus trisulco fulmine? Metue forte / dum leges haec Lili Pico tuo inter illius modi monstra diutius versato / cum alia fortasse / tum illud quoque quod cognomini olim Regi fabulae ferunt accidisse dum Titanido premeretur insidiis. / At bono esto animo. / Alexipharmacum nobis adest / molypotentius, et Ithacensi terribilius /, ut est apud Homerum, / Phasgano. / Et si aerae patulae sint ad quas his in locis obturandas satis non esset quantum caerae / aut promit Hymettos, aut cogit Hybla, auditu etiam visus nocentior, omnia

tamen eo ipso minimen antidoto /, lignum id est ex recto transversoque coagmentatum. Adde quod inter tot bellvas est aliquando locus hominibus. Nec dessunt qui huc etiam commeent viri Roma bene morata oppido perquam digni. Sed sati siam superque lusimus. / Ad carmina redeo pro expellendis affectibus iis /, quos illa Veneris atque Cupidinis simula pre se ferunt/. Utcumque composita ea ad te missa volui, ut aut miniata caerula / aut censoria virgula iudicium depromas tuum Neque tamen diffiteor inventurum te locum unum aut alterum reconditae historiae / indigereque ea quam olim tribus nostris hymnis prestitimus interpretationis luce Tibi tamen tam oculato quid aut reconditum aut obscurum? Vale. Romae pridiae Kl. Aug. Anno salutis. MDXII.

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Didn't you know, Lilius, Venus and Cupid, the gods of the vain antiquity? Julius II, Pontifex Maximus, has unearthed them from Roman ruins, where they were recently found and has placed them in that most fragrant citrus grove, paved with flint stone, in the center of which there is also a colossal statue of the blue Tiber. Everywhere, however, ancient statues are placed, each on its own shrine. On one side there is the statue of Laocoon the Trojan, carved as he is described by Vergil. On the other one sees the figure of Apollo with his quiver as he is pictured by Homer. But in a corner you also see the spectre of Cleopatra bitten by the snake: as if from her breasts, a fountain flows in the manner of the ancient aqueducts and falls into an ancient marble sarcophagus, upon which the deeds of Emperor Trajan are carved.

Through this sacred grove I went wandering, not for the sake of philosophy, as (they did) back in the days under the shade of a plane tree by the murmuring waters of Ilissus trickling through coloured pebbles; even less so for sacrificing cattle, as the followers of the vain cult used to do; but rather for serious matters, and for negotiating either a final truce or a war, by means of which I could finally be reappointed to my homeland's government, once again an exile, once again a

survivor. It did not seem right to doze in idleness in that pointless wait, since what I desired the most was not immediately available and the pursuit of more serious philosophy, although not banned, was not exactly encouraged. And thus I decided to compose and draft a work, either worthy of human being or at least above a beast.

For indeed they say that in these places there are countless brutes and that animals known spread out on these hills, some on the Gianicolo, more on the other hills, and that the Vatican hosts the most numerous and big. And that this was established precisely for this reason, so that they could be appeased if Zephyrus is not blowing, for it is commonly held that animals in captivity are definitely more vicious than when they are in the wild. And that this brutish race was not discussed by Aristotle, Aelianus Meccius and Ctesias the Cnidian. Albertus Magnus knew one from another country, but he did not reveal it, and its nature is as yet not sufficiently explored. For the beasts of his time were not as harmful and fierce.

And so while I consider that I am placed amongst these very animals accustomed to the grove of Venus and Cupid, I wrote these verses on how to chase out Venus herself and Cupid. Chasing them out, I say, certainly not from the grove - how such a thing could be accomplished by me? – but from the souls of the wild beasts. For if faith were not to be taken away from Pythagoras' fables, it was told that one day there were men of this sort of ferocity, and that they could be returned to themselves only by the rose of Lucius. And don't be taken by amazement and surprise at so many men transformed into animals, for indeed in these lands there is not only one Circe or a threefold Siren, but you could quite easily count an entire myriad of Sirens and daughters of the Sun. It is also told of another race of beast even more ferocious: it bears in front the mouth of the Indian ant, its impudence is deliberate and various, and it is powerful in various sorceries. If I recall correctly, it pleased the ancients to trace its origin from the people of Elateia, eventually merged amidst the

Lapithans.

For preventing such sorceries do you think that would be enough that herb, whitish on the flower and blackening on the root? Or holding Ulysses' sword? Or rather the action of a thrice pronged thunder? Perhaps, while you read this, o Lilius, you are afraid that to your Pico, thrown for too long among monsters of this kind, are happening now other things and then exactly what the myth say that one day occurred to the king with the same last name when his power was challenged by the Titan's plots. Yet be in good spirit: I have an antidote stronger than the herb *moly*, and more terrible than the sword of the Ithacan hero, as he is in Homer. Even if your ears were opening up to the creatures of this place so that not all the wax that the Hymettus mountain brings out and the town of Hybla produces would be enough to plug them, sight is more dangerous than hearing. I protect myself against all that with only one same antidote: a piece of wood, that is, joined with a perpendicular bar. Also consider that amidst so many beasts there is sometimes a place for men. And there is no lack of men who come here to the city that are most worthy of well-mannered Rome. But enough we bantered and above measure.

I get back to the songs for expelling these passions, which those idols of Venus and Cupid bring about in whatever state I decided to send them to you, so that you might express your judgment either with a red marking or a critical notation. I cannot deny, however, that you will find one or two passages of obscure meaning and in need of the light of the commentary that I once appended to my three hymns. Yet what is obscure or hidden from you, who are so observant?

Vale. At Rome, the 31st of July, in the year of salvation, 1512.

Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis carmen*. Strasbourg: Ioannes Schottus, 1513.

Introductory Letter from Gianfrancesco to Konrad Peutinger.⁸⁵⁰

Ioannes Franciscus Picus Mirandulae dominus et cetera Cuonrado Peutingero iureconsulto, viro docto et amico. S.

Offendi hic Romae uxoris tuae fratrem, cui ut nihil non ad te darem / commune feci opusculum de Venere et Cupidine expellendis. Quod magnis animi in perturbationibus positi / ad levandam molestiarum molem cecinimus. Tantum abest, ut amoeno in secessu / aestiva umbra cantum excitarit, aut animum curis vacuum / lauri et citriorum nemora odorata demulcerint.

Argumentum praebet carmini / antiquum Veneris et Cupidinis simulacrum, uti in epistola ad Liliam non paucis retuli. Sed sane eo in simulacro simul et artificii ingenium licebat suspicere et simul admirari vanae superstitionis tenebras veraw luce religionis ita fugatas, / ut nec ipsorum Deorum imagines nisi trinceae / fractae / et poene prorsus evanidae spectarentur. Eijpsi dedi et hymnum in Laurentium martyrem non eorum instar trium, quos longiore subsellio et edidimus / et commentatiis exposuimus. Namque hoc loco non Homerum et Callimachum quo ad versuum attinet numerum / sumus imitate, sed Orpheum potius / et Proclum / et filium quoddam Vergilianum secuti, quo Herculeas laudes elegantissime poeta contexuit. Hoc tamen intererit, quod si artis periculum fiat poshabendos nos illis, de quibus sumus locuti, / non recusabimus. Si autem materiae rerumque ipsarum fiat expansio, longe habebimur ab aequo estimatore superiore.

⁸⁵⁰ This translation has been realized with the help and guidance of Professor Matteo Soranzo, as part of the SHRCC-funded project “Self-Transformation in Early Modern Europe project” (McGill University, Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures). Special thanks to David Douglas and his edits.

Nos enim vera et solida cecinimus, illi falsa penitus et inania. Mitterem, si per occupationes
liceret, / maioris et operae et diligentiae volumina. Nam post illa nostra et de praenotione rerum /
et de fide theoremata / et alia, quae sunt Argentoraei stamneis impressa notis, pleraque
composuimus / ac in manus habemus de divino amore libros quattuor et logicarum institutionum
libros quinque et de vanitate doctrinae gentium libros sex, qui quidem, uti opinor, / plurimum
sunt subituri sermonis. Reteximus enim universam philosophiam humano quaesitam, libra
appendimus. Quam ob rem multas in me conflandas esse calumnias non sum animi dubius. Sed
praestat mea quidem sententia a veritate contra vanitatem stare contumeliis pressum / quam a
vanitate contra veritatem laudibus onustum. Sunte et alia. Neque enim conficio nostratum
catalogum lucubationum, quibus si aliquid oculi dabitur et imponi extrema manus poterit et curari,
/ ut in Germaniam usque perferantur tui gratia. Quem et nomine litterarum / et veteris amicitiae
non diligi modo a nobis / sed amari scias: plus etiam quam tute ipse unquam arbitraberis. Vale.
Romae Idibus Novembris M.D.XII.

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I came upon your wife's brother here in Rome, for whom – so that I may give you at least
something - I made a trifle on the banishing of Venus and Cupid [*De Venere et Cupidine
expellendis*]. I wrote it to release the large mass of troubles of my soul, buried in great turmoil. It
is far from being the song that a summer shade would inspire in a beautiful, secluded place or
that sweet-scented trees of laurel and lemon would ever bring to a soul devoid of concerns. The
argument of the poem exposes the ancient statue of Venus and Cupid, as I repeated many times
[non paucis] in my letter to Lilius Giraldi. But in that statue it was certainly right to admire both
the cleverness of its artist and at the same time to regard with wonder the darkness of vain
superstition thus chased away from the light of true religion, since the images of the gods

themselves cannot be seen if not truncated, broken, and completely fading away. I also gave him [your wife's brother] a hymn in honor of Laurence martyr, dissimilar to those three poems that I provided with a longer seat and explained with commentaries. For indeed in that occasion, I did not imitate Homer and Callimachus, for what concerns the rhythm of the verses, but I rather followed Orpheus, Proclus, and a certain Virgilian style, with which the poet elegantly weaved together Herculean praises. This one, however, will be different, because if the danger of us underestimating those arts of which we speak arises, I will yield to it. If an enlargement of the topic and of these things may result, I will be considered far superior from an impartial estimator. For I sang true and dense things; them, [only] false and hollow things. I might send [you], if my public affairs may allow it, the books of a more important and diligent work. In fact, after those works of mine on foretelling ["De rerum praenotione"], the "Theoremata de fide" and others, which were published on the famous river of Strasbourg, I composed many others, and I have in hand four books on divine love ["De amore divino"], five books on logical education and six books on the foolishness of the Gentile doctrine ["Examen de vanitate doctrinae gentium"], which certainly, as I suppose, will be object many discussions. For I laid bare the universal philosophy studied by all humankind, and weighted it with a scale. In my heart I have no doubt that, because of this, many false accusations will be thrown against me. Yet, it is certainly better to be oppressed by insults for my opinion towards truth against falsehood, instead of being burdened by falsity with praises against truth. And there are many other things [Sunt et alia]. For I am indeed collecting a catalogue of my nocturnal studies, to which if some time will be given, and if a final touch will be able to be put upon, then in Germany it will always be carried through you, whom I do not only esteem in name of literature and old friendship, but I also hold very

dear. Besides, you might have seen and witnessed it in person several times. Farewell. Rome,
November 1512.

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Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis carmen*. Rome: Iacobus Mazochius, 1513.⁸⁵¹

Idalios ignes caecique Cupidinis arma

Atque Dionaeos procul ablegare furores

Fert animus. Da, casta parens, Iessaea propago,

Da, virgo, aeternum virgo, quae sola furentum

Nequitiam sacro praestas compescere partu, 5

Da, praecor, et Veneres et quos malesana uetustas

Aligeros finxit dementia numina fratres

Exturbare, nouo longe et dispellere cantu.

Fertur in antiquis Peniaeque Porique hymanaeis

Natus Amor, nata uix de genitrice, frequenti 10

Dum **mensa** inter se celebrant conuiuia **Diui**

Stellato in solio, uiridique Diespitris horto,

Dum **mens ebria** Caelitibus, dum nectare dulcis

Et dulci Ambrosia saturis pulcherrima rerum

Quas gigni sit, fas iam tum obuersatur imago. 15

Altera de pelago, pharetrati mater Amoris

Nascitur et Paphias olim sibi uendicat arces,

Aegyptumque altasque Erycino in uertice sedes.

Verum alias etiam Veneres ambage retenti

Falsorum diuum prisci cecinere poetae, 20

⁸⁵¹ This translation has been realized with the help and guidance of Professor Matteo Soranzo, and in collaboration with Lara Harwood-Ventura, as part of the SHRCC-funded project “Self-Transformation in Early Modern Europe project” (McGill University, Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures).

The Idalean flames, blind Cupid's weapons,
and Dione's frenzies – these does the soul seek
to cast out. Grant me, chaste mother, offspring of Jesse,
virgin, eternally virgin, you who alone, with the sacred birth,
5. restrained the sacrilege of fools;
now grant me, I beg you, to chase twofold Venus away
and those winged brothers whom mad antiquity forged
as foolish gods; grant me to cast them out with this new song.
They say Amor was born during the ancient wedding of Penia
10. and Porus, from a mother who was barely born.
While the gods, at a crowded table, were partaking in a symposium
in the starry palace and green garden of Jupiter;
while the mind of the celestials was inebriated, filled with sweet nectar
and sweet ambrosia, then all of a sudden she appears to them –
15. marvellous Idea of things destined to be made.
From the sea the second mother of quiver-bearing Amor
was born and immediately laid claim to the throne of Paphos,
Aegypt and the high abodes of lofty Erice.
Yet the ancient poets, misled by the riddles of the false
20. gods, also sang of Venuses of other kinds:

Quis uarios et ludo submittere amores
 Coepere et uariis implere poemata monstris.
 Hinc Cypro exiliunt puerorum multa uolantum
 Agmina, quae rutilis facibus, quae corpore nudo
 Quaeque arcu et uaria tergo pulsante pharetra 25
 Circumeant terras, maria, aera, aethera, caelum.
 Vt quemquam tetigere fuit sic perdita cursu
 Phoebus (ut perhibent) quondam Peneia Daphne.
 Sic Phoebe stimulat petere Endymionis amati
 Congressum et celeres firmare sub aethere bigas. 30
 Ausa quoque et uolucris sulcantem caerulea curru
 Neptunum uastis (mirum) inflammare sub undis,
 Atque Iouem sceptro insignem et diademate saeuum
 Et trifido armatum uictrix fulmine dextram
 Non uerita impetere et pectus temerare ueneno, 35
 Quo Tauri in faciem et Cycni uertatur et Auri.
 Scilicet in furias ignemque incurrere diuos
 Finxerunt quoniam pecudum uolucrumque natantumque
 Omne genus ruere in Venerem inspexere, hominesque
 Propterea et bella et caedes inferre cruentas. 40

for fun they began to ascribe different loves
to them, and filled their poems with all kinds of prodigies.
And so countless flocks of winged children
began to fly out of Cyprus: with blazing torches, naked bodies,
25. bows and a multicolored quiver strapped on their back
they fly over lands, seas, winds, stars and the sky.
Since whoever they hit becomes mad, so – as the story goes –
was Daphne of Peneus distraught by Phoebus' pursuit;
so did they force Phoebe to beseech the embrace of beloved
30. Endymion, thus stopping her fast horses under the celestial vault.
She even dared – what a portent - to set ablaze Neptune
on fire under the deep sea, he who crosses the blue on his winged chariot;
and even Jupiter, solemn for his scepter, fierce for his crown,
his right hand armed with the threefold triumphant lightning,
35. she did not hesitate to assault, filling his heart with poison
by which he turns into the shape of a bull, swan and gold.
They even imagined frenzied gods running into the fire
because they observed how every kind of animal,
bird, and fish fall in love, and for the same reason humans
40. inflict wars and violent battles, and when their heart

Atque Cupidineis labefactos corda uenenis
 Et nemora et saltus lustrare atque aequora saeua
 Illuni sub nocte cito sulcare natatu.
 Quando etiam infernas magno inflammatus amore
 Coniugis ereptae est ausus tentare latebras 45
 Threicius uates. Neptunique alta propago,
 Pirithoum Stygias fidum ut sequeretur ad umbras
 Lucida Taenarei subiit penetralia Ditis.
 Sed quid ego ambages uana aut commenta secutus?
 Ad summam species Venus est, mox inde Cupido 50
 Exoritur; quoniam spem cupit ipse potiri,
 Atque frui sperat spes est qua uiuit amator.
 Causa bonoque, bonique umbrae reddenda; quae in se
 Splendeat inque animo facili vestigia firmans
 Haereat actutum et stimuletur avara voluntas 55
 Et caeca illa quidem claro sed lumine mentis
 Ducta, boni extremam conatur tangere metam.
 Si primum fontemque boni summumque tonantem
 Ardes ingenti conatu ingentibus alis
 Quas tibi nec caera nec filo Daedalus olim 60

is shaken by Cupid's poison they wander through
forests and valleys, and with fast strokes swim through
stormy waters on a moonless night.

Because he was inflamed by great love

45. for his dead wife, dared to descend into the lands

of hell the Thracian poet. Neptune's noble progeny,

in pursuit of Piritoo through the shades of Styx,

also descended into the resplendent recesses of Tenerean Dis.

But why would I pursue riddles or vain fables?

50. In short, Venus is of one species, and then Cupid

is born; since he strives to possess hope and hopes

to possess, hope is the means by which a lover

lives. The cause must be traced back to goodness and its appearance,

which shines in itself and taking a solid grasp

55. it clings to the malleable soul, and immediately an avid will is spurred on

and blindly, yet guided by the intellect's clear light,

it strives to reach the last boundary of goodness.

If for the first time you are striving for the source of goodness

and lofty God with great effort and wide wings

60. - it was not Dedalus who once fitted these wings with wax

Aptarit firmo sed glutine Mater amoris
 Alma fides casti) flammatos feruidus axes
 Egredere et pietas tibi nomina fecerit ardens
 Atque amor atque charis plausu celebrata frequenti.
 Si rerum species iam contemplator ab alta 65
 Naturae specula mireris, tactus ab oestro
 caelesti Veneris diceris, captus amore
 Aetheriae et superam pennis sublatus in oram,
 ut fluxas rerum formas, rerumque figuras
 degeneres illinc despectes lumine puro. 70
 Si te sollicitant fascēs, et purpura regum,
 Ambitio est auri stimulat si caeca cupido,
 Surgit auarities. Facie si captus amata
 Spicula persentis succendere in ossibus ignem,
 Sensilis haec Veneris flamma est, puerique uolantis 75
 vulnus ab aurata missum per inane sagitta.
 Namque ubi membrorum vultus discordia concors
 fulserit et grata fuerit compage revincta,
 Ipsa oculos afflat subito celerique meatu
 Labitur affecti tacita ad penetralia cordis: 80

ropes, but the Mother of love, alma faith of the virtuous,
with her solid bond - then you fervently ascend
to the flaming heavens and ardent piety and love and charity
will make your name glorified with eternal applause.

65. If you admire in contemplation the species of things from Nature's
lofty throne, they may say you were touched by Celestial Venus'
frenzy, and that taken by love you were seized
to the highest vault on the wings of the Ethereal one,
so that from up there you might observe the changeable forms
70. and the lower shapes of things in their pure light.

If the kings' bundles of rods and purple-dyed cloth
seduce you, it is ambition; if thirst for gold haunts you,
greed. If taken by a loved sight you happen to feel
arrows lighting a fire into your bones,

75. this is the flame of Sensual Venus, and the winged-child's
blow carried through the air by an arrow of gold.

For after that discordia concors brightens
the look of a body and is fastened to a pleasant structure,
then she immediately breathes onto the eyes and with rapid course
80. penetrates into the silent recesses of the affected heart.

Idque trahit ueluti chalybem Magnesia cautes:
 Et tractum incendit generatque in pectore flammam
 Illecebris fotam placidis gratoque decore.
 Temporis at paruo spatio decor ille recedit,
 Disperit et flamma in tenues euanida fumos. 85
 At si foecundi cupias commertia lecti
 spurca Venus prodit permixta dolore uoluptas
 Dulcedo adsistit sed mox succedit amaror
 praeceditque etiam. Ni fax illa retenti
 Seminis urgeret, non surgeret ipsa libido. 90
 Hincque doles, placida ut naturae munia tractes.
 Sed parce ad sobolem necque enim meta ipsa uoluptas.
 Nam si plus nimio cupis oblectarier inde
 Surgit amarities et mille incomoda uitae.
 Scilicet hanc legem primaeva ab origine rerum 95
 Affixit natura parens mortalibus inque
 Perpetua incidit solido ex adamante columna.
 Ut semper multos Venus immoderata dolores
 Afferat innumeras labes morbosque necemque
 Et curuae ante diem pretendat damna senectae. 100

This she attracts like a magnet does an iron bar
and what she attracts she sets on fire and in the heart she produces
a flame fueled by gentle enticements and pleasing decorum.
But that decorum fades away in a short period of time,
85. and the evanescent flame dissolves into light smoke.
And if you were to desire commerce with fertile beds,
here dirty Venus comes about, pleasure mixed with pain
and sweetness assists her, but soon after bitterness comes,
and even surpasses her. If that stimulus of constricted semen
90. were not urgent, then desire itself would not even arise.
And hence you suffer from handling Natures' sweet gifts.
But pleasure is seldom the purpose toward procreation.
If you have too ardent a desire for pleasure
bitterness comes with it, and life's countless discomforts.
95. From the earliest beginning of things, Mother Nature
imposed this law upon the mortals and carved it
upon an eternal column made out of solid diamond:
without moderation, Venus always brings
many sorrows, countless infections, disease and death;
100. she brings about afflictions before the time of hunch-back senescence.

Sed finge illecebras, lusus, noua gaudia, mille
blandimenta tibi lasciuo adcrecere luxu.
Quid tibi? quid restat? Momento extinguit uno
Quidquid anhelanti conatu exhausseris horae
Dimidio et celeri refugit post terga volatu. 105
Tam cito per spatium duodeno tramite flexum
Herculis ad lucum celebris prope flumina Pisae
Nunquam abiit sonipes Elaeo in puluere uictor:
quam cito dilapsa est Veneris iucunda libido.
Nec repetita potest ulla retinerier arte: 110
praeterit, ut rapidus montano e uertice torrens.
effugit et Scythico Borea et uiolentior Euro.
Ac ueluti cribro si lympham inferre pararis
Quo magis infundas tanto magis effluet humor.
sic et aquam fractis fundoque carentibus urnis 115
Cocytii ad fluuium lassata inuergere dextra
Progeniem Danaei uates cecinere uetusti.
At quinam extiterit pharetrati fructus Amoris
cum tela in uacuum defixit plurima pectus
cumque ossa in cinerem face multa omnesque medullas 120

Still imagine that excess, amusement, new pleasures
and enticement grow for you with unrestrained lust.

What, then? What would be left for you? In one single moment disappears
everything you might have gained from half an hour

105. of gasping efforts, and quickly flies away behind your back.

Through the vaulted sphere on its twelfefold band
to famous Hercules' forest near the rivers of Pisa
the horse, winner in the contest of Elea, never flew as quickly
as Venus' joyful lust fades away.

110. When it's repeated, there is no way to preserve it:

it flows away, just like a rapid torrent from a mountain top
and Borea blows away, faster than the Euro from Scythia.

And as when you try to carry water in a sieve
the more liquid you pour in it, the more it flows out,

115. likewise the poets of old sang that the daughters of Danaos
in river Cocytus tiredly scooped water
from broken urns whose bottom was missing.

And so what would remain of the joys of quivered Amor
when into the hollow chest many arrows he has sunk

120. and, after having turned with mighty flames the bones

verterit, Argiuo periit cum Pergamos igni?
 Testis et Inachias quae multa est flamma per urbes
 Digressa et Lybicos etiam populata Penateis.
 Quid memorem infande iugulatum Agamemnona dextra
 Coniugis? exilium et perfugi Diomedis ad Arpos 125
 Ne iam coniugium et pulchram Calydonia uideret?
 Quid referam extinctam Boeotia ad arua furentum et
 Discerptam manibus nimio feruore puellam?
 Quid puerum manibus laniatum Acteona narrem?
 Heu nimium laceris referentem Acteona membris. 130
 Testis et Ioniis leuconia saltibus usa.
 Testis Stesichoro uati cantata Calyce.
 Testis est ipsa suos igneis quae ferre recusans
 Idaliam Ambracio restinxit lampada fluctu.
 Et qui seruilem doctus uersare tumultum 135
 Drimachus insano iugulum postponit amori.
 Iphis in exemplo est, Phyllis Rhodopeia, Dido
 et pergens ad busta Nini, Babylonia Thysbe
 Quaeque olim ad scopulos multorum ex ossibus albos
 Et cantu allecta et natiuo inducta furore 140

and the insides into ash, even Pergamo vanished in the Argolian fire?
Further proof is that this mighty fire spread through the cities of Greece
bringing devastation even to the Penates of Lybia.

Should I recall Agammenon, slaughtered at the hands
125. of his wife? Or fugitive Diomedes' exile in Arpos
not to see the marriage and pretty Calydonia?

Why should I retell of the girl killed on the fields of Beotia
and with wild frenzy dismembered at the hands of the fools?

Why would I tell of young Acteon slaughtered by paws?
130. Poor Acteon, still dragging himself on his wounded limbs.

A witness is Sappho, accustomed to the cliffs of Ionia,
and what the poet Stesichorus sang in his *Calyce*.

Another is she who, refusing to carry its flames,
tossed the Idalian lamp into the water of Ambracia.

135. And also Drimachus, who knew how to lead a revolt of slaves,
sacrificed his throat to an insane love.

Another example is Iphis, Phyllis from mount Rhodope, Dido
and Thysbe of Babylon, looking toward Ninus' tombs,
and, crashing on rocks white with the bones of many,
140. lured by songs, misled by an inborn frenzy, vile

appulit aetherei plebes ignara theatri.
 Et quae Circaeos Ithacensis turba furores
 Haurit et humanas facies exuta ferarum
 Induitur uultus, dominaeque ad iussa superbe
 Immundis stabulatur haris. Sic improba Gorgon 145
 In saxa, in marmor stupidos conuertit amantes.
 Sic transformatos habitus consuere uetusti
 Cultores sophiae, tenui mandare papyro.
 Seu qui Palladias arces tenuere biformi
 Cecrope regnatas seu qui tenuere Crotona 150
 Quos una instituit Smyrnae telluris alumnus
 Unde noua emersit mutandae fabula formae.
 Hinc Theodori atque hinc Graii Callisthenis ora
 Inque alios conuersa modos et in ora ferarum.
 Inde et Peligni celebrata inuenta poetae. 155
 Commentum et Siculi vatis quem carmina piscem
 Finxere et stirpem terrae radicibus actam
 Et volucrem pinnis vacuum per inane vagantem:
 Quamvis (quae cecinit) fuerit puer atque puella.
 Hinc Syrii in brutum facies mutata sophistae: 160

humankind, forgetful of the heavenly theater.

And the crew from Ithaca that consumed Circe's
poisons and, deprived of human traits, assumed beastly
features, and commanded by their arrogant queen

145. sleep in a lurid pigsty. Likewise the wicked Gorgon
transforms stupid lovers into stones and marble.

The stories of characters transformed in this way
the ancient suitors of wisdom consigned to thin papyrus.

Either it was those who held the Palladian walls with double-shaped
150. Cecrope or the others who held the city of Croton - at once the son
of Smyrne instructed them, and from this encounter
the new myth of metamorphosis was born.

Henceforth the features of Theodor and Callisthene the Greek
were turned into something else and into the shape of beasts.

155. Then the inventions of the poet of the Peligni became famous.

And also the myth of the Sicilian poet: his verses portrayed him
as a fish and a progeny born from the roots of the earth
and as a bird wandering on its wings through the empty void,
although (as he sang) he had been a boy and a girl.

160. From this Syrius the sophist's traits turned into the beast

In quod mox se se deceptus Pyxide uertit
Lucius antiquae renouans figmenta Crotonis.
Illuc Thallides et Pantho cretus et alta.
Quique Samo quondam missus Hermotime quique
Instabili Ortygia es genitus, doctissime, Pyrrhon 165
Migrasti et Phario soluens de littore Typhis
Ausonium ad portum te te olim vexerat, ipsum
Quem fore prodiderat Phoebea uoce sacerdos
Pythias atque illinc nomen traxere parentes.
Tu ni uesanis ambagibus omnia misces 170
Quid tibi? Visne aliud cum animum in diuersa inuoluis
Corpora? Quidnam aliud? Quam uim expressisse veneni
Idalii, quo tincta ferus sua tela Cupido
Excercens miseros in amatum uertit amantes?
Ergo agite, o Iuuenes, spurcum ablegate furorem ? 175
Quo brutum ex homine induitis, quo Pergama quondam
Arserunt, quo iactat amans incendia, flammis.
Sirenum a scopulis rapido discedite cursu [*curru*]
Vela date ac nunquam uobis terra illa petenda est
Circaeο praetensa sinu: nunquam antra [*arua*] Calypsus 180

into which Lucius, tricked into a coffin, turned
thus reviving the fables of ancient Croton.

And then Tallides and Panthus's son and the high abodes.

And you, Hermotime, sent one day into Samo, you,

165. who were born in Ortygia, you, most learned of men reincarnated into

Pyrro and, as he left from the shores of Phario, Tippi

one day brought you to the shores of Ausonia, you,

whom the prophet with Phoebian voice foretold that you

would have become Pythias, from whom your parents got their name.

170. What, if you are not mixing things up with reckless lies,

was your gain? What else do you want, whenever you

graft the soul onto a new body? What else? Was it extracting

the strength of the Idalean poison, with which fierce Cupid handles

poisonous arrows and turns miserable lovers into an object of love?

175. Therefore come on, youngsters, reject that lurid frenzy:

because of it, you turn into brutes, Pergamon once

burned, lovers spread fires, flames.

Turn away quickly from the rocks of the Sirens,

sail on and never direct the course to the land

180. stretching on Circe's shore; never walk into Calypos'

Intranda et nunquam Phorcynidos arua Medusae.
 Nunquam Ephyres portum (si mens non laeua) subite.
 effugite et cursu celeri Sybaritida terram.
 Vnum etiam uobis, iuuenes, praeque omnibus unum
 praedicam, uestrae uobis si cura pudoris [*salutis*], 185
 si casti vos tangit honos, si cura pudoris,
 Linquite fallacem Babylona, relinquite molles
 Illius illecebres [*illecebras*] permistaque mella ueneno.
 Huc etenim nimium nimiumque nocentia monstra
 Migrauere truces Scyllaeque et Gorgones, atque 190
 Harpyiae in mediis posuere sedilia templis.
 Nec non quae Atlantem olim, et quae Titana parentem
 Agnorunt, arteis nec didicere vetustas,
 Semiferaeque etiam caprearum rupe recentis
 Mutauere domos Babylonis, et aurea tecta 195
 atque super sacra sidunt Acheloides aede.
 Huc, quantum caerae Sicula depromitur Hybla, [*herba*]
 Huc, huc, Cecropius quicquid cogebat Hymettus,
 Moly ueni, ueniat districtus et ensis Ulysssei
 Constanti auertens magicos molimine cantus. 200

caves and the gardens of Medusa, daughter of Phorcus.

If the mind is sane, never go to the harbour of Ephires.

and with rapid course flee the Sybaritic land.

Only one thing, young fellows, let me preach

185. to you all, if you care of your decency, if the honour

of chastity moves you, if you care of your decency.

flee false Babylon, abandon its languid spells

and its sweetness mixed up with poison.

Exceedingly dangerous monsters

190. moved there, and ravenous Scyllae and Gorgons; there

the Harpies nested inside the churches.

And those who once acknowledged Atlas and Titan

as parent, did not forget their ancient tricks,

and even goat-like half beasts moved their homes

195. and golden domes on the hill of the new Babylon,

and now Sirens are sitting on top of a consecrated church.

Here, all the wax extracted from the bees of Hybla,

here, here, all that Cecropian Hymettus could make,

come here, Moly, and may Ulysses' unsheathed sword

200. come, which keeps magic songs away with steady strength

vanaque sopiti ludens praestigia [*insomnia*] sensus,
 Et potis Idaliam glacie interspergere flammam.
 Si uobis natura suos iniecerit ignes,
 Nec sit pertesum thalami, nodique iugalis,
 Quaerite concessos diuina lege Hymenaeos. 205
 Prima autem fiat de moribus, ultima fiat
 Quaestio de forma, dotemque exquirite, qualem
 Antiquo in Latio, ueteri uel in Hellade mille
 Mille olim quaesita procis noua nupta parabat.
 Quis non Euadnes citius caperetur amore 210
 Ut [*Et*] casto illius digito fuluum inderet aurum,
 Quam natae Augusti, quamuis gratissima forma?
 Protesilae tuam quis non uelit ante maritam
 Quam Leda genitam; quamuis pulcherrima, quamuis
 Et ratibus mille et bello repetita decenni? 215
 Aut quis non uilem mundi muliebris amictum,
 et tenuem cophinum priscae de more Sabinae
 Optarit potius casta cum coniuge secum
 ferre domum? tua quam baccata monilia quamque
 Inclyta Hydaspaeis aggesta cubilia gemmis 220

and teases out the vain illusions of drowsy sensation,
which is capable of sprinkling the Idalean flame with ice.

If Nature happens to set you ablaze with her flames,
don't have disgust for the nuptial bed and the conjugal bond,

205. look for Hymaneios allowed by the divine law.

Your first concern should be customs, beauty
the last, and consider a dowry like the one a new bride,
once she was demanded by thousands of suitors, used
to provide in ancient Latium or in ancient Hellade.

210. Who wouldn't be taken, to the point of placing on her finger
red gold, by the love of Evadne rather than of Augustus'
daughter, regardless of her most graceful beauty?

Protesilaus, who wouldn't rather want your wife than
the daughter of Leda, although she was stunning and pursued

215. by thousand of boats and ten years of war?

Who wouldn't rather bring home a simple womanly
vest and a thin basket as it was the custom of an
ancient Sabinian, together with a chaste wife,
rather than, you, madly in love with necklaces,

220. famously covered of Hydaspean gems,

Antoni coniunx Aegyptique ultima regum
 Obscenos tecum si fers Cleopatra furores?
 Caelibe si uultis uitam traducere lecto
 Continuo castis restinguite fontibus ignes
 Et venerem [*veneres*] gelido, venerem [*veneres*] submergite ponto. 225
 Qua patet ad Boream semper glacialis Hiberniae [*Hyberne*]
 Pervolitent mentem atque oculos, facibusque malignis
 Si instillare uelint tacitum in praecordia virus
 Aligeri fratres, puerorum turba uolantum,
 Vos subito ut leuibus difflauerit aera pennis, 230
 Turba nocens duro pennas praecidite ferro.
 Ferrea mens nulli Veneris obnoxia culpa,
 Ensis adest Iuuenes quo mollis in aera penna
 Dissecta [*Dessecta*] est: quo neruus agens uolucresque sagittae
 Diffractae rutilaeque faces Erycinaque lampas 235
 Extincta, in liquidas resolutaque protinus auras.
 Tum loca diuerso coelo quaerenda, salubris
 Aeris in spatiis alia in regione manendum est,
 Ex animo ut citius facies uanescat [*abolescat*] amata.
 Nunquam luminibus committite [*committere*] lumina, quando 240

Anthony's wife and last of the kings of Egypt,
Cleopatra, if you bring with you obscene frenzies?
If you are willing to spend your life as bachelors,
constantly extinguish the flames with chaste water
225. and drown Venus in freezing, Venus in the water!
where it lies open towards the North Wind of the always frozen Hibernia:
if they fly repeatedly over the mind and the eyes, and if they want
to pour a silent venom with evil flames into the heart,
the winged brothers, crowd of flying children,
230. as the vicious flock scatters in the air with smooth wings,
you must cut off the wings with hard iron at once.
A mind of iron, untainted by the guilt of Venus,
is a sword, young men: it turns the languid wing
into nothing; it breaks the bow and the flying arrows
235. and snuffs the burning flame and the blaze of Erycina,
as they disperse into pure breeze.
You have to look for a place under a different sky,
you have to stay in another country, where the air is fresh,
so that the image of the beloved vanishes sooner from the soul.
240. Don't ever set your eyes in the eyes, for Amor

Lenis amor, quem quis dudum frigere putaret
 Saepe arsit uultu conspecto, atque illice forma
 Exciuit flammam quantasque sub Ilio alto
 Non Tenedos uidit, non incola Tyburis alti
 Spectauit, sceuo est cum Roma incensa Nerone [*Neroni*]. 245
 Vertenda est facies, nec blando uerba susurro
 Excipienda plagis quis non capiatur [*caperetur*] iniquis?
 Quas menti semper uacuae, semperque petenti
 Illecebram sensus fallax Amathusia tendit?
 Nam fugitare decet lasciui retia amoris, 250
 Atque alio mentem atque alio conuertere sensus.
 Spectandum instabile hoc quodcumque hic digitur [*degitur*] aeu
 Delitium [*Delicium*] et vanum et fluxum mistumque dolore
 succurrant. Quam nulla homini sincaera voluptas
 Anxia sollicita et gemebundi plena timoris, 255
 Quam fiet ipsa Venus dira et cum matre Cupido,
 Quam uanis semper simulacris ludat amantem,
 Quoque magis sitiens bibat, hoc magis aestuet atque
 Hoc [*Tam*] magis ardescant uiuis praecordia flammis.
 Tormenti genus infelix: Acherontia turba 260

240. Don't ever set your eyes in the eyes, for Amor

is gentle, one would think it stopped burning,

and instead it often burns secretly, and in disguise

it starts such a fire that not even Tenedos ever saw

in mighty Troy, not even the dweller of the Tiber

245. experienced, when fierce Nero set Rome ablaze.

The face should be turned away, seductively whispered words

shunned: who these unfair blows leave untouched,

which treacherous Amathusia thrusts to the intellect -

always free, and always in search for the enticement of sensation?

250. For it's right to avoid the nets of lustful love

and convert intellect and senses somewhere else.

Consider that whatever here changes in time is fleeting

and that waste and vanity and transience and a mixture

of pain is the result. As much as every human lust

255. is impure, intense the anxiety and filled with gasps of fear;

as much as Venus becomes cruel, and Cupid with her,

as much with always vain dreams she haunts the lover,

then the more avidly she drains, the more she burns him

and the heart is set ablaze with more burning flames.

260. Miserable form of torture: not even the people of Hell

quod nunquam inspexit [*aspexit*], quo nullam affligere quemquam
 Fama est inferna durarum a sede sororum.
 Ipse siti in mediis ardebat Tantalus undis,
 At nunquam refugas labris comprehendere lymphas
 Olli posse datum. Sed cum se gurgite mersat 265
 Altius hic uasto et caua guttura pandit hiatu
 Humorem absorbens auidas sitis aspera fauces:
 Tum magis excruc[i]at. Neque enim de fonte liquores
 P[r]ompsit acidalios gelido Venus ipsa, sed hausit [*sumpsit*]
 Ab calida Phlegethontis aqua quae semper opacos 270
 Conuoluit fumos igneis [*ignes*], incendia, flammis.
 Nec uobis animo exciderit nec corde tenaci
 Quam multis olim exitium mortalibus ingens
 Attulerit regna et deleuerit inclyta caecus
 Humana in mente exercens sua sceptra Cupido. 275
 Ante oculos etiam macies uersetur amicam
 in faciem succo tum successura salubri
 cum senium rugas secum portarit aniles.
 Quod certe et morbi miseraeque incommoda vitae
 Ingeminant foeda ut confecta cadauera tabe 280

ever saw it, not even one of the fierce sisters
from the infernal pit inflict pain with it.

Indeed was Tantalus burning of thirst in the water
and he was forbidden to grasp the receding

265. water with his lips. But whenever he sinks deeper
into the wide whirlpool and opens his mouth wide
swallowing water, then a bitter thirst torments
the dried throat more painfully.

And neither does Venus herself

270. extract Acidalian drops from a chilly spring, but
she drinks from the hot water of Phlegeton, which always
carries on dark smokes, fires, heat and flames.

And may your soul and strong heart never forget

what huge disasters for the mortal race did he bring,

275. and what renowned kingdoms did blind Cupid destroy
whenever he was in control of human intellect.

May misery be transformed into a lovely sight for your eyes:

then it will become the substitute of a healthy medicine

when it will wear the aged wrinkles of old age.

280. For certainly the illnesses and discomforts of a wretched life

Nunc spectes, albo quae iam rosa mista [*mixta*] ligustro
 Punicea exornans miseros captabat amantes.
 Hinc operae pretium est mortis meminisse tremendae
 terribili excindit quae vitae gaudia falce.
 Sic mors flagrantes compescet [*compescit*] frigida curas 285
 tempore non certo et certo rapidissima cursu.
 Hinc subeant animi aeternae sub Tartara poenae,
 quis Venus et Veneris male dulcia furta secuti
 plectuntur: subeant aeternae gaudia palmae
 innumeris ditata bonis. Exempla virorum 290
 accedant Venerem immundam qui uerbere[*verbere*] torto
 et silice et rigido domuerunt saepe cubili
 Quique niuem insiliens Veneris superasse calores
 Dicitur occurat, retegens noua semina fraudis
 Infernae. Nec non qui caeci spicula amoris 295
 Quique illas quondam sub inani pectore curas
 Consertas spinis, Erycinae munera saeuae
 Deludens se se in spinas destrusit acutas.
 Et qui fallacis tempore Cupidinis arcus
 obrepant menti: dum nuda corpora terrae 300

increase up to the point when you see as putrid corpses
consumed by decay, what a moment before the rose together with
the white privet adorned, and captivated miserable lovers.

And so the value of my poem consists in reminding of terrible
285. death, who cuts down the joys of life with her terrible scythe.

Thus freezing Death will curb the burning passions,
swiftly, her timing unknown, well known her motion.

And so down into Tartarus may the soul's eternal torments descend,
by which those who fell for Venus and her bitter-sweet tricks
290. are punished; may the joys of everlasting success descend,

adorned with countless bounty. Consider the example of those
who tamed dirty Venus with the knotted discipline,
and the stone and often with a hardened bed,

and remember of him who, they say, defeated Venus' heats
295. throwing himself in the snow, uncovering the new seeds

of the devil's fraud. And he who avoiding blind Amor's
darts and those worries tied up with thorns deep inside
the hollow heart, the gifts of fierce Erycyna,

lacerated his body on sharp thorns.

300. And may those come to mind who despised false Cupid's

collidunt, avidique ferunt ieiunia uentris.
Vos etiam monitos Iuuenes iterumque iterumque
optarim obscenum casto ut pellatis amorem
pellitur ut clauo clauus. Nec ad alta Platonis
vos spectra aetheriae aut Veneris simulachra relego. 305
Quare age quicumque es tibi iam succurat amator
Humani generis soboles aeterna parentis
Aeterni: et Mariae soboles pulcherrima castae.
Hunc redama aspiciens [*adspiciens*] foedatos puluere crines
Atque coronatam dumis pungentibus illam, 310
Fronte[m] illam, nutu totum quae illustrat Olympum,
Quaeque catenatum nutu tremefecerit Orcum.
Aspice [*Adspice*] purpureo madefactum sanguine corpus,
Disiectumque latus, distentaque brachia, clauis
Transfixasque manus, plantasque; sacrique cruoris 315
Aspice [*Adspice*] multiplices undanti flumine riuos.
Scilicet haec rerum omnipotens, qui temperat orbem,
Matris Acidaliae flammis, puerumque perosus
Pertulit, eriperet tete ut de faucibus Orci,
Ut secum aeternae sequereris praemia [*gaudia*] palmae, 320
Quae castus praebabit amor, sine fine futurus
Foelix, aeternoque arsurus munere foelix.

bows, while they throw their bodies on the naked
ground, and bear the fasting of their ravenous stomach.
And you too, advised youth, let me urge you again and again
to push out an obscene love with a chaste one,
305. so that a nail might drive out the other. And I am not sending
you toward Plato's lofty ghosts or the statues of Celestial Venus.
Therefore, come on, whoever you are, may the lover of humankind,
eternal son of the eternal father, most beautiful son of chaste
Mary, come to your rescue. Love him back as you look at his hair
310. filthy with dust and that that is crowned with singing thorns,
that forehead: with a nod it illuminates the entire Heaven,
with a nod it would have made the Devil in chain tremble.
Look at the body drenched in dark blood,
the wounded side, the stretched out arms and the hands
315. and feet transfixed by nails; look at the many wounds
with their gushing flow of sacred blood.
Certainly the omnipotent, who brings peace to the world,
in spite of the Acidalian mother's flames and her son,
suffered all this to rescue you from the fangs of Orcus,
320. so that you would pursue the rewards of eternal glory:
these will chaste love assign – happy forever after,
forever after enflamed with the eternal gift.

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