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GHEZZANI (Tommaso), « Consonances between Francesco Patrizi and Michel de Montaigne. Materials for an *aesthetic* comparison »

RÉSUMÉ – Cet article entend questionner la relation entre Montaigne et Patrizi. Pour cela, la prise en compte de l'aspect esthétique de leurs écrits est de la plus haute importance. D'un côté, de fortes similarités entre les théories linguistiques exprimées dans les Dialoghi della Retorica de Patrizi et certains passages des Essais pourrait révéler que l'oeuvre de Patrizi serait l'une des sources de Montaigne. D'un autre côté il est pertinent de mettre en avant des consonances théoriques plus générales.

MOTS-CLÉS – Patrizi, Montaigne, Langage, Poésie, Merveille

ABSTRACT – The aim of this study is to investigate the relation between Montaigne and Patrizi. Taking into account the aesthetic aspect of their written productions proves of the uttermost importance. On the one hand, strong similarities between language theories from Patrizi's Dialoghi della Retorica and some passages of the Essais, which could reveal Patrizi's work as a source for Montaigne, are traceable. On the other hand it is also relevant to observe some more general theoretical consonances.

KEYWORDS – Patrizi, Montaigne, Language, Poetry, Wonder

CONSONANCES BETWEEN FRANCESCO PATRIZI AND MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

Materials for an *aesthetic* comparison

INTRODUCTION

Francesco Patrizi da Cherso (1529-1597)[1] was an author active in the second half of the XVI[e] century, whose importance has only recently been recognized. He was nominally a *Platonist*, but widened the horizons of Renaissance Platonism to dialogue with the exponents of the most radical theories of the time, from the dialectical reformation to Telesio's naturalism. Patrizi's aim throughout his career was to reform philosophical culture on the basis of Platonism, with a universal scope: this revolution was not only directed to the most illuminated courts and avant-garde academies, but was also meant to reach universities and overthrow the dominating Aristotelian paradigm. During the same years Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592)[2], who unlike Patrizi needs no presentation, expressed a similar but more radical dissent towards that cultural hegemony: in the *Essais*, he criticized XVI century culture in a harsher way than Patrizi, whose Platonical viewpoint Montaigne

1 For a general analysis of Patrizi's life and works see Margherita Palumbo, *Patrizi, Francesco*, in L. G. Bianconi (ed.), *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (vol. 81), Roma, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia italiana, 2014; Elisabetta Scapparone, *Patrizi, Francesco*, in *Il Contributo italiano alla storia del Pensiero – Filosofia*, Roma, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 2012. See also Maria Muccillo, *La dissoluzione del paradigma aristotelico*, in C. Vasoli (ed.), *Le filosofie del Rinascimento*, Milano, B. Mondadori, 2002, and Fred Purnell, *Francesco Patrizi*, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, E. N. Zalta, 2017.

2 Among the vast number of studies on Montaigne, see, for its broad perspective and rich bibliography, Nicola Panichi, *Les liens à renouer. Scepticisme, possibilité, imagination politique chez Montaigne*, Paris, Champion, 2008; *Eadem*, *Montaigne*, Roma, Carocci, 2010 and *Eadem*, *Ecce homo. Studi su Montaigne*, Pisa, Edizioni della Normale, 2015.

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still considered too narrow. His intellectual mission was not to create a new *encyclopedia* of knowledge but to make modern people aware of the importance of a cautious use of rationality. In any case, it is not a surprise to find in their works some apparently similar complaints against the dominant philosophical culture. However, if we investigate the texts with more attention, we can observe more profound similarities than just a common deconstructive rhetoric; the two thinkers shared a particular attention to certain fundamental themes, sources, *images* and resolutions[3].

The first to notice a suspicious thematic similarity between Patrizi and Montaigne was Peter G. Platt, with regards to the theme of *wonder*, and he went so far as to describe the former as a possible source for the latter[4]. In his article on Patrizi, a note reports that "another intellectual relationship that bears considering is that of Patrizi and Montaigne", because the two could have met in Ferrara in 1580, during Montaigne's Italian journey, and even more importantly because "Montaigne's view of wonder as crucial to intellectual enquiry sounds Patrizian". Here Platt reports two passages from the *Essais*, which we will analyze later, and underlines how the word *admiration* is added to them in the editions after 1588, while the most important work by Patrizi on wonder, the *Deca Ammirabile*, is completed in 1587[5]. Ten years after Platt, Martin Schwarz quotes him but notes that it is not possible to ascertain the hypothesized meeting of 1580. He does not delve into the philosophical implications and so he does not explore Platt's line of inquiry, which indeed has not been investigated by anyone, as far as we know[6]. The aim of this study is to once more explore and partially revise this research topic, although it will undoubtedly be impossible to do so exhaustively here. Indeed, while it is plausible that in 1580 Montaigne met Patrizi, as Platt said, however it is

3 The edition of the *Essais* used will be Michel de Montaigne, *Saggi*, éd. critique par André Tournon, Milano, Bompiani, 2012 (in square brackets will be reported the pages from *Les Essais de Montaigne*, ed. by Pierre Villey (2 vol.), Paris, Puf, 1978).

4 See Peter G. Platt, "'Not before Known or Dreamt of': Francesco Patrizi and the Power of Wonder in Renaissance Poetics", *The Review of English Studies*, vol. 171, 1992, p. 387-394.

5 *Op. cit.*, p. 394 (note 32). The two passages are taken from *Des boiteux* and *De l'expérience*; see M. de Montaigne, *Des boiteux*, cit., p. 1916 [1030] and *Idem*, *De l'expérience*, cit., p. 1988 [1068].

6 Martin Schwarz, *Patrizi's world seen through the eyes of Montaigne*, in P. Castelli (ed.), *Francesco Patrizi. Filosofo platonico nel crepuscolo del Rinascimento*, Firenze, Olschki, 2002, p. 290.

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improbable that Patrizi had a direct influence on Montaigne's view of wonder, considering the timing with which the *Deca Ammirabile* was written. In fact, if on one hand some letters and declarations by Patrizi show that in 1580 his writing of *Della Poetica* (of which the *Deca Ammirabile* is the third part) had already begun, on the other he could have hardly finished the two long sections preceding it (the *Deca Istoriale* and the *Deca Disputata*) in just one year. So, it is equally improbable that he could have already started to reflect on the topics of the *Deca Ammirabile*[7]. The *Parere* in defense of Ludovico Ariosto against Tasso's models of epic poem, a work on poetic written in 1584, provides further evidence[8]. In this occasion the argumentations used by Patrizi were clear anticipations of the ones used in the first two parts of *Della Poetica*, edited in 1586, but there was no trace of a systematic theory about poetic wonder. Therefore, if it is not impossible that Montaigne met Patrizi during his Italian journey, it is improbable that in this hypothetic occasion Patrizi spoke to Montaigne about his theory of wonder. Moreover, it is improbable that Montaigne read the *Deca Ammirabile* in 1587 or in later years, because this part remained unpublished with the last four parts of *Della Poetica* (the *Deca Plastica*, the *Deca Dogmatica Universale*, the *Deca Sacra*, and the *Deca Seminsacra*) and, as far as we know, these manuscripts did not have any significant circulation. So, at the moment one could rule out a direct influence of the *Deca Ammirabile* on the *Essais*. However, there are still clear similarities between the two thinkers, who were both deeply against philosophical limitations, albeit with vastly different theoretical premises and conclusions. Furthermore, certain analogies between the two thinkers become almost *philologic* if we enlarge the range of their works to analyze, which keeps open the possibility to see Patrizi as a source for Montaigne, in particular referring to Patrizi's *Dialoghi della Retorica* (1562)[9]. Therefore, the aim of this work is to observe the two authors' theoretical consonances, which are especially evident in

7 For the complex drafting of *Della Poetica* see Lina Bolzoni, *L'universo dei poemi possibili. Studi su Francesco Patrizi da Cherso*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1980, p. 97-109. For a general view see Bernard Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance* (vol. 2), University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1961, p. 765-786.

8 See Francesco Patrizi, *Parere di Francesco Patrizi. Al signor Giovanni Bardi di Vernio*, in G. Rosini (ed.), *Opere di Torquato Tasso* (vol. 10), Pisa, Capurro, 1824.

9 See *Idem*, *Della Retorica. Dieci dialoghi di M. Francesco Patritio*, Venezia, F. Senese, 1562.

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their *aesthetic* reflections, at times even suggesting a direct influence by Patrizi on Montaigne[10]. We hope that starting from the textual materials here gathered it will be possible to even further investigate the possible relationship between the two thinkers.

THE MUSES AND VENUS: *LOVE POETRY* AND *INTEGRAL NATURE*

In the first place it is necessary to better trace the philosophical distance between the two authors in the field of aesthetic. In particular, according to Patrizi beauty was *objective*: it had an autonomous value and a transcendent origin and it was in part reachable by human beings. In this general sense his theoretical setting was rather classic, but it revealed important openings, especially with regards to the last point. Indeed, he traced different tiers in aesthetic fruition according to each one's different leanings. Furthermore, he deconstructed the traditional canons on the earthly manifestations of beauty both in nature and in poetry, surpassing Ficino's theory of musical consonances as key to earthly beauty. Poetry multiplied its forms and possibilities of expression through a complex system of topic combinatorics and physical beauty was likewise freed from equilibrated classic proportions to acquire ambiguous and ineffable forms. Therefore, if in a first moment mathematical ratios, here considered in a broader sense than is traditional, could have been useful to channel the source of earthly beauty, nonetheless they were not sufficient. It became necessary to relinquish discursive reason in favor of higher gnoseological ranks to begin ascending towards transcendent beauty, and still, it was not certain to be reachable during one's earthly life. In a similar way, his philosophy of nature freed asters from the prison of the solid spheres. Both the beauty of nature and of poetry revealed the immensity of the by then incommensurable world. Nevertheless, the poetic means, even with broadened expressive and structural forms, could not anymore exactly reflect the infinity of

10 I obviously use this term in a broad, pre-XVIII century, sense as a set of reflections about beauty, love and language.

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reality. The *harmony of the spheres* had become too difficult for human understanding, so human beings could merely come near to it through authentic poetry[11].

While Patrizi broadened the horizons of Neoplatonism, Montaigne was much more radical in his departure from the most common philosophical traditions: indeed, the strongly *subjective* quality of the aesthetic experience was foremost in Montaigne's *Essais*[12]. Beauty had no autonomous ontological value and was not a predicate of being, but rather it only existed as a category through which the individual experienced the world. Moreover, it tended to vary from individual to individual, together with each one's personal disposition. Therefore, to reach absolute beauty, the individual should have done away with their personal characteristics to embrace the infinity of the world, but this was impossible[13]. However, it was possible, for the subject that desired to be an aesthetic creator, to get closer to natural infinity in an *asymptotic* manner: they should have freely expressed their personal natural inclinations with no external limits, that is with no restraints due to custom or artificial artistic rules.

The distance between the two authors mainly regarded the *objectivity* of beauty and therefore the manner in which the individual experienced and reproduced it. According to Patrizi, beauty was objective and had a proper seat on a transcendent level; therefore, both those who experienced and who created beauty could reach it through an *anamnestic* process. Patrizi did not explicitly state in his work whether it was possible to reach the absolute divine beauty in this way; nonetheless, it was possible to communicate with the higher ranks of being and, in some cases, translate them into poetic work. Patrizi used the concept of poetical alienation[14], following Ficino, who had assigned this process to the

11 About the *suprarational* (not *irrational*) value of the aesthetic experience in Patrizi's philosophy, see mainly L. Bolzoni, *L'universo dei poemi possibili*, cit.

12 For an overview on Montaigne's *aesthetic* see Władysław Tatarkiewicz, *Storia dell'estetica. L'estetica moderna* (vol. 3), Torino, Einaudi, 1980, p. 343-347 (however short) and Silvia Maspoli Genetelli, *Il filosofo e le grottesche. La pluralità dell'esperienza estetica in Montaigne, Lomazzo e Bruno*, Roma-Padova, Antenore, 2006, p. IX-160.

13 See for example M. de Montaigne, *Apologie de Raymond Sebond*, cit., p. 952 [523-4].

14 See Francesco Patrizi, *Della Poetica* (vol. 2), in Idem, *Della Poetica*, éd. critique par Danilo Aguzzi Barbagli (3 vol.), Firenze, Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, 1969-1971, p. 27.

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first phase of his theory of madness[15]. The creation of poetry recalled an *over-rational* dimension beyond human essence: in this process there was no space for rationality, if not in an initial phase as a stimulus for *furor* and/or *nature*. The latter was identified by Patrizi as the second cause of poetry (less worthy than *furor* but higher than rational *art*), in a broadening of Ficino's theory to reach a greater involvement of nature[16]. Nature, even if it was a prelude to *furor*, lended weight to each individual's disposition, which was multifaceted and by now free from the rigid classical system of astrological influences[17]. In any case the rational component was neither necessary nor sufficient for success in poetry. In *Della Poetica* he outlined a poetic *art* but the precepts and rules within represented a first stimulus for over-rational creation and a tool for the audience, which through them would reach a new and broader vision compared to the narrow Aristotelian one. Nonetheless, his innovations did not open the forms of poetry towards infinite possibilities: the mechanism of the possible *topic* combinations showed how poetry had a maximum number of possible forms, however many[18]. The best among these forms could satisfy, albeit at different levels, any kind of audience, even if the philosopher outlined a classification of different human *types*, based on a five-step ranking of their level of rationality[19]. Beauty was objective and its essence could be grasped by the human soul, even if just partially, in the setting of a decidedly larger and richer aesthetic universe than before; however, this universe still found its completion and coordination within a predefined and constant *center*. This principle was consistent with Patrizi's ideological framework, based on revisiting Neoplatonic ideas to build a new cultural *élite* in academies and courts, which would use these ideas for practical ends. Poetry is the *magical* tool to restore knowledge and bind society[20].

On the other hand, Montaigne had no need to legitimate his model of an intellectual, nor he aspired to found a *school* based on his enquiries,

15 See Marsilio Ficino, *El libro dell'amore*, éd. critique par Sandra Niccoli, Firenze, Olschki, 1987, p. 211*sq*.
16 See F. Patrizi, *Della Poetica* (vol. 2), cit., p. 28-30.
17 See Jacomien Prins, *Echoes of an Invisible World. Marsilio Ficino and Francesco Patrizi on Cosmic Order and Music Theory*, Leiden, Brill, 2015.
18 See the calculation in the *Deca Ammirabile*: F. Patrizi, *Della Poetica* (vol. 2), cit., p. 311-327.
19 For the different human types see again the *Deca Ammirabile*: *op. cit.*, p. 290-293.
20 See for example *op. cit.*, p. 345-354.

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therefore he offered no poetic rules. The *Essais* only contained some personal remarks on taste and sometimes method, which nonetheless provided indications towards the requirements of good poetry, or indeed of every kind of beauty. Montaigne removed from the concept of beauty the idea of an autonomous and objective existence, therefore cancelling among the other things the mystical inspiration typical of creation through *furor*. He scorned the possibility to access a Platonical over-rational and transcendent dimension. The Neoplatonical *furor* was forcefully detached from the Hyperuranium and became an all-natural *fureur*, which had a worldly seat and could be reached through *fortune*[21]. The dimension which Montaigne seemed to refer to is actually the individual's most deep and hidden reality, their authentic natural roots, without the influence of artifice and convention[22]. In this sense *fortune*, a tool of nature, seemed able to lead the individual *beyond* their unnatural condition, with significant aesthetic consequences, if correctly followed. His worldly and *a-rational fureur* granted the person a more authentic relationship with this earthly world. From an aesthetic and epistemological point of view, Montaigne's subject tended towards an unreachable center in an asymptotic manner.

Such an *image* was represented, in the case of Montaigne, by the *grotesque*, which became an ideological manifesto, to be read according to his closest source: the *Ars poetica* by Horace, which had codified the idea of grotesque of the time[23]. At the beginning (v. 1-5), the laughter of the audience, sign of the failure of the poetic work, had been determined by a precise system of expectations being disattended. Montaigne quoted and subverted Horace's words to define the *Essais*, going beyond any conventional aesthetic program. Never abandoning his notorious irony, he confessed: "[A] que sont-ce ici aussi à la vérité que *crotesques* et corps monstrueux, rapiécés de divers membres, sans certaine figure, n'ayant ordre, suite ni proportion que fortuite? *Desinit in piscem mulier formosa superne*[24]". To go beyond the mask of convention in natural

21 See for example M. de Montaigne, *Apologie de Raymond Sebond*, cit., p. 1044 [568].

22 See *Idem*, *Divers événements de même conseil*, cit., p. 226 [127].

23 On the diffusion of Horace's norms see the traditional works: B. Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance* (2 vol.), cit. and Cesare Vasoli, *L'estetica dell'Umanesimo e del Rinascimento*, in *Momenti e problemi di storia dell'estetica* (vol. 1), Milano, Marzorati, 1959.

24 M. de Montaigne, *De l'Amitié*, cit., p. 330 [183] (italics mine).

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phenomena meant to start to see them in their authenticity; therefore, ascribing one's work to the category of the grotesque and monstrous meant inserting it among the most authentic works of nature. On the other hand, Patrizi did not give legitimacy to the multiform nature of the grotesque, word which tellingly never appears in his *Della poetica*. However, he too tried to overcome poetic norms based on a system of conventional expectations in favor of natural truth, and therefore criticized Aristotle and his commentators but also Horace's *Ars*. In the already cited *Parere* in defense of Ariosto, he strongly confuted the Horatian code of conventional depiction of characters and their psychological immobility, which was described in another famous passage of the *Ars* (v. 119-127). With regards to this matter Patrizi, answering those who criticize the *Orlando furioso* for not respecting Horace's precepts, stated that they do not know the "*natura degli uomini, la quale fece palese […] quanto ella sia varia, e quanto con niuna catena di necessità leghi adun fermo stato nè le voglie, nè i costumi umani*[25]". Therefore, for both Patrizi and Montaigne the art of writing should have become a mirror of nature.

Furthermore, these considerations also bring us to notice important similarities between the two authors with regards to the continuity between the amorous and poetical-literary experiences, more specifically in the chapter *Sur des vers de Virgile* and the *Discorso* on the *Rime* by Patrizi's friend Luca Contile. Indeed, since Ficino's work the border between the two aspects, ambiguously placed in the first step of the anamnestic ascension, had been very blurred. The human love for beautiful bodies had inevitably overlapped with the poetic *furor*. Inevitably, the two kinds of beauty, physical (visual) and poetic (auditory), had both appealed to the *imaginative* capacity, and their only difference, according to Ficino, had been the grade of attachment to this imaginative component of the spectator: the poetic experience had been stronger than the sight of a beautiful body[26]. These considerations, with all their ambiguities, were inherited and inserted by Patrizi in his peculiar poetical-rhetoric framework. Indeed, in the *Discorso* on Contile there was a passage with a heavy theoretical weight: the author recognized

25 F. Patrizi, *Parere di Francesco Patrizj*, cit., p. 176.

26 See especially Marsilio Ficino, *Commentarium in "Timaeum"*, in *Idem*, *Opera omnia* (vol. 2), Torino, Bottega d'Erasmo, 1962, p. 1453. In any case, there are important variations regarding the priority of hearing.

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that his friend's works all deal with the different grades of beauty of a woman, Giovanna d'Aragona, and stated that "*la bellezza qual si sia, partorisce sempre maraviglia nell'animo di colui, che la vede, e la conosce; et la maraviglia sempre genera o nel cuore dell'ammiratore*, Amore; *o* lode *su la lingua, e su la penna*", and therefore "*prende l'autore per principale suo concetto, o intendimento, in tutti questi sonetti, la lode*[27]". The theme of wonder will be better detailed in the last section, so for now it will suffice to note the duality which it gave origin to there. Like a double portrait, on one hand we have the *heart* and on the other the *tongue* and the *pen*: starting from the wonder evoked by beauty, which represents the hinge of the portrait, one can let themselves be carried by the amorous experience, or translate this beautiful vision through poetry. The power of poetry born from true inspiration to make the listener *fall in love* also came from here, as it was an effective verbal translation of beauty[28]. This was explicitly put into practice in a later work, *L'amorosa filosofia*, in whose narrative frame it was shown how listeners fall in love with the beautiful Tarquinia Monza through a poetical description (albeit in prose) of her, without ever seeing her: "*Giul. Il che ha fatto con così poche parole che ce ne havete detto, verificarsi in me quel detto che "huomo per fama si innamora"*[29]". Words were able to entice the *imagination* of listeners and turn them into lovers, creating a bridge between soul and body[30].

These relationships were more evident in Montaigne: the link between love and the art of writing was represented by the central principle of natural *authenticity*. In other words, if the experience of love had to be free to manifest itself in its polyhedric and true entirety, the same held true for literary works. In this way, the authentic literary work could become a mirror of nature for the reader, eliciting an all-encompassing

27 Francesco Patrizi, *Discorso di M. Francesco Patritio*, in L. Contile, *Le rime di Messer Luca Contile*, Venezia, F. Sansovino, 1560, c. 25v° (italics mine).

28 On this ambiguous union I may suggest to see my thesis: Tommaso Ghezzani, *Per una teoria poetico-amorosa in Francesco Patrizi da Cherso: follia, memoria e magia*, Università degli Studi di Pisa, 2020.

29 Francesco Patrizi, *L'amorosa filosofia*, éd. critique par John Charles Nelson, Firenze, Le Monnier, 1963, p. 7.

30 For the theories on *imagination* in the Renaissance, see the traditional Ioan Petru Culianu, *Eros and magic in the Renaissance*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 3-52 and Eugenio Garin, Phantasia *e* Imaginatio *fra Marsilio Ficino e Pietro Pomponazzi*, in M. Fattori and M. Bianchi (eds.), *Phantasia-Imaginatio. V Colloquio internazionale del Lessico Intellettuale Europeo*, Roma, Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1988.

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love and underlining the indissoluble fusion between the physical and the spiritual. Therefore, by considering the work of writing as an *honest* (or authentic) expression of oneself, Montaigne could not but frame it as a natural extension of a subject's profound individuality[31]. Once the sameness of *honesty*, *naturality*, and *beauty* had been established relatively to the literary activity, the theme of love was added onto it and reinforced all these connections. Montaigne, after noting the inexplicable unwillingness of contemporary people to talk explicitly of carnal love, wondered "[B] qui a pu mal mêler Pallas et les Muses avec Vénus, et les refroidir envers l'amour", since he cannot see "[B] déités qui s'aviennent mieux, ni qui s'entre-doivent plus. Qui ôtera aux muses les imaginations amoureuses, leur dérobera le plus bel entretien qu'elles aient, et la plus noble matière de leur ouvrage: Et qui fera perdre à l'amour la communication et service de la poésie, l'affaiblira de ses meilleures armes[32]". It was necessary to experience love in its entirety and possible to transpose it into a literary form: in this way, on one hand love increased the efficacy of poetry, on the other poetry sustained the passion of love. In this sense, Montaigne went as far as to state that "[B] de ce que je m'y entends: les forces et valeur de ce Dieu se trouvent plus vives et plus animées en la peinture de la poésie, qu'en leur propre essence, *Et versus digitos habet*: Elle représente je ne sais quel air plus amoureux que l'amour même[33]". If Patrizi had outlined a double portrait of *heart* and *tongue* (or *pen*), Montaigne seemed to draw a similar one, in which *Venus* was placed opposite the *Muses*. The latter author places nature as the principle of love and poetical activity, and as the new hinge on which to build the double portrait. As a result, for both authors the literary work is not only capable of continuing the work of nature, but can also highlight it in the human experience, through the ambiguous bridge of imagination, which links soul and body, flesh and spirit[34].

31 See M. de Montaigne, *Sur des vers de Virgile*, cit., p. 1620-1622 [874-6], to read together with Idem, *Des livres*, cit., p. 730-734 [411-2]. On Montaigne's relationship with Ariosto's work, defined in the last work cited as artifical compared to the *Eneid*, in contrast with Patrizi's vision, see the entry edited by Concetta Cavallini, *Arioste*, in P. Desan (ed.), *Dictionnaire de Michel de Montaigne*, Paris, Champion, 2004.

32 M. de Montaigne, *Sur des vers de Virgile*, cit., p. 1568 [848].

33 *Op. cit.*, p. 1570 [849]. On the rewriting of Giovenale's verse (*Saturae*, VI, v. 196) see N. Panichi, *Ecce homo*, cit., p. 36*sq*.

34 On the complex theme of imagination in Montaigne see *Eadem*, *Les liens à renouer*, cit., p. 255-352.

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PLASTIC ACTIVITY: LANGUAGE BETWEEN *RES* AND *VERBA*

Both Patrizi and Montaigne based their reflections on poetry on more general enquiries on language. In the already cited chapter *Sur des vers de Virgile*, Montaigne examined the correspondence between *thought*, *thing* and *word*; or, in simpler terms, between *res* and *verba*. After recalling some verses on love by Lucretius, Montaigne reflected on the most evocative terms, recognizing how "[B] leur langage est tout plein et gros d'une vigueur naturelle et constante[35]". This expressive capacity, free of artificialities and rhetoric corruption and characterized by an unreachable aesthetic efficacy, was made possible by a well-defined principle: "[B] Quand je vois ces braves formes de s'exprimer, si vives, si profondes, je ne dis pas que c'est *bien dire*, je dis que c'est *bien penser*. C'est la gaillardise de l'imagination, qui élève et enfle les paroles. […] Plutarque dit qu'il vit le *langage* latin par les *choses*. Ici de même: le sens éclaire et produit les paroles: Non plus de *vent*, ains de *chair et d'os*[36]". The ability to bind together *res* and *verba*, which the aesthetic power of the word *de chair et d'os* is based on, derived from the union of *thought* and *word*. If in the so-called Isocratean circle from *well speaking* had derived *well thinking*, and from it in turn *well acting*, Montaigne here opted for a strong union of the first two phases, aimed at regaining the hold on reality through linguistic capacity[37]. In addition, the line of division itself between the term and the meaning, however insurmountable due to the intrinsic limits of humankind, was faded in a certain measure. Indeed, the term needed to be as close as possible to the *res*, to the point of almost inheriting their traits, in order to become a mirror through which it would become possible to glimpse them[38].

35 M. de Montaigne, *Sur des vers de Virgile*, cit., p. 1616 [873].

36 *Op. cit.*, p. 1616-1618 [873] (italics mine).

37 On the *Isocratean* circle and its reinterpretations during the Renaissance see Nicola Panichi, *La virtù eloquente. La "Civil conversazione" nel Rinascimento*, Urbino, Montefeltro, 1994.

38 In the same direction see also M. de Montaigne, *Des Livres*, cit., p. 730-732 [411]. One should always remember that Montaigne's position on this matter was very controverial, to the point that it has been observed that "la tendance nominaliste et la tendance

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If Montaigne regarded the correspondence between term and matter as asymptotic and never perfect, Patrizi considered this correspondence as a utopia, belonging to a remote and unreachable stage of humanity. He offered a striking analysis of the matter in the collection of dialogues *Della Retorica*, heterogeneous treatise aimed at confuting mainly the Aristotelian rhetorical and dialectical precepts, where rigorous argumentations intertwined with vivid *mythological* anecdotes with Platonic traits[39]. One such example is the first myth, narrated in the first dialogue, *Il Lamberto, overo del parlare*. Here, Giulio Strozzi reported it, attributing it to none other than Baldassarre Castiglione, who in turn had said to have heard it from an *Ethiopian* in Spain. Strozzi prefaced the myth by describing in a similar tone the primordial world, where "*gli huomini, havendo scienza interna delle mondane cose, parlavano sempre neto; et per lo mezo di così fatto parlare, operavano le maraviglie, et i miracoli*[40]". Since the beginning, the perfect overlap between the *scienza interna* of things and the *neto* speech was stated: in this ideal world *res* and *verba* were analogous and therefore language, formed by absolute knowledge, showed itself in all its operative capacity. The medium of language was connected to the metaphysical design of the world. The magical *mirabilia* that words achieved showed this perfect harmony between human beings and the rest of Creation, which was experienced without impediments and therefore open to the transparent and *honest* requests by humankind. The myth narrated by the Ethiopian explained the origin of decadence, caused by human arrogance. Humans were carried away by an excessive self-love, to the point that they started to progressively lose knowledge; and in their arrogance they demanded to take the place of Saturnus, who then tasked Jupiter with punishing them. As a result, the Earth was ruinously shaken in its foundations, distanced from the sky, and forced to take its current aspect[41]. However, the main damage was the survivors' irreversible intellectual decadence: "*passò anco negli huomini, uno stordimento, che gli arrecò, l'ignoranza di tutte le cose, presa dall'intronamento,*

réaliste se glissent peut-être dans une mesure égale et d'une façon persuasive dans tous les *Essais"* (N. Panichi, *Les liens à renouer*, cit., p. 399). On Montaigne's nominalism, see also Hugo Friedrich, *Montaigne*, Bern, A. Francke, 1949, p. 195*sq*.

39 For an overview of the work, see Anna Laura Puliafito, "Phaedrus' Cicadas: Patrizi's *Dialoghi* and vernacular rhetoric", *Intellectual History Review*, vol. 29, 2019, p. 619-629.

40 F. Patrizi, *Della Retorica*, cit., c. 5r°.

41 See *op. cit.*, c. 5r°-7r°.

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della caduta de primi loro padri. Et se pure par loro, di vedere alcuna cosa, la veggono essi per oltre a un denso velo. Et di vere, che i primi padri, le conosceano, le conoscono essi, adombrate di color di vero[42]". With the fading of knowledge, obviously also the linguistic capacity faded, and it was from this empty shell of a language that the corrupt contemporary rhetoric derived, according to Patrizi. If before the world's fall there was a complete harmony in love, both between members of humankind and between humankind and the rest of Creation, after the fall there was ignorance, and from it fear and from it in turn hate developed. Immediately after the fall language was still capable of showing glimpses of the truth, but then the need to hide from and trick enemies, and the indissoluble link between knowledge and divine punishment, smothered even these embers[43]. However, humankind could still grasp these embers of knowledge to give direction to its language, as was explained in the more optimistic myth on Prometheus, illustrated by Patrizi himself in the second-to-last dialogue, *Il Cornaro, overo della Retorica perfetta*. The *verba* might have not managed to completely express the *res*, but they could still hint at them, if they were adequately educated according to the primordial natural *honesty*[44].

The two philosophers were working at similar projects of *linguistic* re-education of humankind, which were needed to rediscover themselves and the surrounding world, and so held extremely close positions regarding one inevitable side of them: the matter of animal language. Both agreed on the communicative capacity of animals. On this specific point it is possible to suspect an influence by Patrizi on Montaigne, if not direct at least mediated, since there are striking similarities. Returning to the first dialogue in *Della Retorica*, the recounting of the primordial world was prefaced by a deconstruction of the definition of language put forward by Aristotelians, according to whom speech is "*voce d'homo, articolata, significante*[45]". According to the Neoplatonic principle of continuity between all ranks of the universe, all entities tended to express themselves through *communication*, with specific modalities for each one. Therefore, words were not limited to verbal expression nor

42 *Op. cit.*, c. 7r°.
43 See *op. cit.*, c. 7r°-8r°.
44 See *op. cit.*, c. 51v°*sq.*
45 *Op. cit.*, c. 2v°.

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were they an exclusive privilege of humankind[46]. Once again it was Strozzi who, responding to Michele Lamberti's questions, talked about animal communication, stating that it had been accepted by Aristotle himself and moreover it was evident in daily life, since

> *per tutti gli alberi, et per tutte le piaggie, et per la valle a tale stagion dell'anno, si odono cantando, con voce anco articolata, l'usigniuolo, […], et molti altri, senza fine selvaggi uccellini, et il domestico gallo, hinni soavissimi: variati di dolcissimi suoni, all'oriente, o al salente, o al cadente Sole, oltre a molti altri, che hanno lor favella indistinta. […]* Lamberti. *Et come, conoscono essi il giovamento?* Strozzi. *Se'l conoscono essi, et se'l parlano.* Lamberti. *In qual maniera?* Strozzi. *In quella, che intese il gran mago Tianeo quei passerini vantarsi, di haversi presa una buona corpacciatina di grano, sparso in terra: et confortare altri, che v'andassero similmente*[47].

Therefore, not only were animals able to express their states of mind, but they could also communicate among themselves. Once more, in accordance with the hermetic-platonic tradition, it was a *mage*, in this case the philosopher Apollonius of Tyana, who had the ability to go beyond a superficial knowledge of the world. However, Lamberti answered this argumentation by noting that

> *se vera fosse, troverebbesi anco, altro huomo, che'l solo Tianeo, che gli intendesse. Strozzi. Né questo monta molto. […] Perché l'Italiano, non intende il Tedesco, ne l'Indiano, prima che ei s'habbia appresa la sua lingua. Né quegli intendono l'Arabo, o lo Spagniuolo. Et pur tutti sono huomini, di essenza medesima. […] Molto più ci vuole a ragione: ad imprendere lingua d'altro animale. Et non è, se non da huom mago, intendente anco gli altri segreti di natura. […] Né perché io non intenda Turco, o Persiano, resteranno que' due parlari, di esser parlari, et significanti. […] Né parimente resterà, che gli animali, non habbiano favella, perché huom volgare non la intenda. […] Et quegli animali, che voce non hanno, non mancherà loro di favellar con altra cosa: sì come parlan tutte altre creature, et l'huomo stesso*[48].

Therefore, it was ignorance that brought human beings to deprive other natural entities of their prerogatives. Only the mage, capable of somehow rediscovering their slumbering essence and re-establishing their connection with the rest of Creation, could read the polyphony of voices making up the world. To this it was possible to add the *visual language*. In the dialogue the character of Patrizi, astonished,

46 See *op. cit.*, c. 1r°-5r°.
47 *Op. cit.*, c. 3v°.
48 *Op. cit.*, c. 3v°-4r°.

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asked how it is possible to communicate without a voice, and Strozzi answered that

> *i mutoli, non parlano essi già, con la voce? […] Ma si con altro. […] Con gesti e con gli atteggiamenti della persona, ne' quali essi portano quella significanza, che si disse essere la forma del parlare. […] Et vi ha tal di loro, che isprime ogni suo concetto, con quegli atti. […] Quegli atti adunque sono significanti del suo concetto. […] Perché adunque non è parlare, questo? […] Anzi si è. Quando altri, parlando atteggia con le mani, che ve n'ha le migliaia, non si dice egli per dettato ricevuto Colui parla con le mani? […] Et come adunque è, che non sia ricevuto a dire, parlar co' gesti? […] et Cicerone, non disse egli, che l'attione, et i gesti, sono una corporale eloquenza? […] Et Demostene, non disse ei tre volte, l'attione essere le più eccellente parte, che s'habbia l'Oratore? […] E adunque l'attione, et l'atteggiamento della persona, parlare, et eloquenza, et migliore assai, di quella delle parole. […] Et poi, essendo egli significante, et isprimente l'altrui concetto, io'l terrei senza dubbio per buon parlare. Et il vi confermano, con forte testimonio, gli antichi atteggiatori: i quali senza proferir parola, rappresentavano ne Teatri pieni, le Comedie, et le Tragedie. si ch'altri pienamente intendesse tutta quella attione; et etiandio ridesse, et piagnesse, et si commovesse con tutte le passioni*[49].

The physical gesture, i.e., the visual language, had the same power to express meaning as the verbal one, if not even greater, maybe because it was closer to the natural origins of humankind. Not only then did all non-human entities speak, but their language was greatly superior to that of corrupt humankind, "*oprando elle, con gli occulti influssi, et cò palesi movimenti, tutti i maravigliosi effetti, che noi veggiamo, et che noi, non veggiamo. Et è perciò, che il lor parlare, sia del nostro similmente più verace; non errando elle mai, nell'opere loro. Et il nostro errando il più: et non facendo veruna* opra soda*: ma vane tutte, et di* nebbia[50]". On the other hand, the words of natural entities were firm and full of *res*, one could almost say *de chair et d'os*. Indeed, in the myth of the primordial age Strozzi remarked that humankind, thanks to a reciprocal honest comprehension, had lived in peace and "*conversando essi famigliarmente, et ragionando, con gli animali, et con gli uccelli, et con le piante, et con gli spiriti*, *apparevano l'uno dall'altro, tutte le cose*[51]". The brief Platonic description of the golden age in the *Politicus* (272 b-c) was in this way artfully recounted.

49 *Op. cit.*, c. 4r°.
50 *Op. cit.*, c. 5r° (italics mine).
51 *Op. cit.*, c. 6r°.

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Montaigne wrote something very similar with regards to sources, images and argumentations in the *Apologie*. Although he operated in a different context than Patrizi, his enquiry inevitably touched on the problem of animal rationality. Human beings did not have a firm enough intellect to understand, and even more scorn, animals' psychology: indeed, "[C] Platon en sa peinture de l'âge doré sous Saturne compte entre les principaux avantages de l'homme de lors la communication qu'il avait avec les bêtes, desquelles s'enquérant et s'instruisant il savait les vraies qualités et différences de chacune d'icelles[52]". This time, the *Politicus* was explicitly quoted, but its function was once again to show the common dialogue and fruitful learning that had come from the natural relationship between humankind and the other entities of the world. Moving on to the more specific problem of animal language, he then asked:

> [A] C'est à deviner à qui est la faute de ne nous entendre point, car nous ne les entendons non plus qu'elles nous. Par cette même raison, elles nous peuvent estimer bêtes, comme nous les en estimons. Ce n'est pas grand merveille si nous ne les entendons pas, aussi ne faisons-nous les Basques et les Troglodytes. [A_2] Toutefois aucuns se sont vantés de les entendre, comme Apollonius Thyaneus, Melampus, Tirésias, Thalès et autres. […] [A] Au demeurant, nous découvrons bien évidemment que, entre elles, il y a une pleine et entière communication[53].

Here, it is possible to see a radical subversion of points of view as well as the comparison between foreign and animal languages already used by Patrizi: the fact that humans could not understand animals did not mean that the latter could not communicate among themselves. To prove this, he put forward the examples of certain *magical* people, who had been able to understand animals and had already been very important for Patrizi: the first one cited was that same Apollonius of Tyana whose ability to understand birds had already been described by the former philosopher. Immediately after, in the same passage, he discussed the same problem of visual language as Patrizi: even the animals with no voice communicate, since "[C] leurs mouvements discourent et traitent […]. [A] Pourquoi non, tout aussi bien que nos muets disputent,

52 M. de Montaigne, *Apologie de Raymond Sebond*, cit., p. 806 [452-3].
53 *Op. cit.*, p. 806-808 [453].

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argumentent et content des histoires par signes[54]?". He then described the example of mutes, exactly as in the excerpt of *Della Retorica*, and again in the same manner as Patrizi he noted the importance of hand gestures: "[C] Quoi des mains? nous requérons, nous promettons […]. Quoi des sourcils, quoi des épaules? il n'est mouvement qui ne parle et un langage intelligible sans discipline, et un langage public: Qui fait, voyant la variété et usage distingué des autres, que cettui-ci doit plutôt être jugé le propre de l'humaine nature[55]". If Patrizi had resorted to the ability of ancient actors to express whole stories without speaking to further validate body language, Montaigne brought this argumentation even further, literally making a performance of enumerating all possible forms of human communication (not reported here due to its length). In the end he acknowledged, like Patrizi, the greater expressive power of the visual over the verbal language. Montaigne's conclusion was obviously more radical than Patrizi's, since he ended up not only re-evaluating animal dignity, but actually putting all values across different natural entities at the same level[56]; Circe, by transforming men in animals, did them no ill but rather freed them from a false belief of superiority, ingrained in them by convention[57]. On the other hand, for Patrizi humankind remained *imago dei*.

Once established the common need to make vocabulary more natural, it is necessary to observe the strategies adopted to do so by each philosopher. Patrizi focused on this matter, in its *pars destruens*, in another mythical tale in the *Della Retorica*, which was re-utilized in a more constructive theory especially in the *Deca Plastica*, more than twenty years later. In the fifth dialogue, *Il Sansovino, overo de gli ornamenti oratori*, the character of Patrizi himself reported the story of "*un saggio et gran Mago*", according to whom: *"beato il mondo, s'egli non vi si fossero introdotti, tanti ornamenti de parlari, i quali ci hanno oscurato la scienza delle cose. […] Percioché dicea il gran Mago, s'egli si fosse conservata l'antichissima proprietà de nomi delle cose, noi ci harremmo conservato anco la scienza loro*[58]". Having reiterated the link between knowledge and authenticity of linguistic

54 *Op. cit.*, p. 808 [453-4].
55 *Op. cit.*, p. 808-810 [454].
56 See for example one of the conclusions of this reasoning in *op. cit.*, p. 820 [459-460].
57 See *op. cit.*, p. 874 [485-6].
58 F. Patrizi, *Della Retorica*, cit., c. 31r°.

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expression, the decadence of the word was blamed on "*l'eleganza, et la dolcezza del favellare, et dello scrivere, che* disrozando, *et* polendo *et* addolcendo *più di continuo gli antichi nomi, i quali secondo che la natura, ne gli formava, haveano il più dello* aspro *et dello* strepitoso*, si sono informati in gran diversità. Et di naturale, et di una forma, […] secondo il talento della dolcezza altrui, ha partorito le migliaia delle favelle*[59]". Human weakness, incapable of bearing the truthfulness of natural words, had deformed them and corrupted their universal communicative capacity with a sickly *sweetness* derived from rhetoric ornaments. Such a practice, "*sendo caduti gli huomini in ignoranza, non pur dell'altre cose, ma di se stessi, et* dell'utile, et del vero*, et del diritto, chiamò tra loro gli odi, et le nemista*[60]". Moving language away from nature meant losing what Montaigne would call *utile et honnête*, but also oneself and civil coexistence. By observing the development of this specific theme, it is possible to understand that the project of *Della Poetica* inherited in a certain measure that of the search for a truthful language found in *Della Retorica*; this is especially evident when observing Patrizi's great attention for the search of broad topical classifications to build the structure of the poetic discourse, able to overcome tradition's narrow focus[61]. In a certain sense, one could say that the rhetorical mission evolves in the poetical mission, and indeed the many digressions on the magical *mirabilia* made by poets remind the reader of those *mirabilia* that the first men were able to achieve thanks to their perfect language[62]. Authentic poetry could show humankind the way towards its lost origin, albeit with the limits of the current human condition. In addition, the problem of the *polished* word was discussed using vocabulary from the same semantic area of the myth of the great Mage, i.e., that of *labor limae*. The *Deca Plastica*, in which this analysis was placed, had this title exactly because it provided indications on how to *fingere* (in the sense of *model*) the poetic text; the act of modelling "*altro non è che dare ad una cosa forma diversa da quella che havea prima ed apparenza: ciò è una forma nuova, o rinnovata*[63]". The poet

59 *Ibidem* (italics mine).
60 *Ibidem* (italics mine).
61 See L. Bolzoni, *L'universo dei poemi possibili*, cit., p. 120-128 and Cesare Vasoli, "Francesco Patrizi da Cherso: la morte della retorica e il ritorno della "Meraviglia"", *Schifanoia*, vol. 20-1, 2001, p. 111-122.
62 For example, see F. Patrizi, *Della Poetica* (vol. 2), p. 239-240.
63 Idem, *Della Poetica* (vol. 3), p. 19.

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gave a new form to reality by modelling their work and, if they were authentically inspired, they brought to the surface its true and deep structures, beyond the apparent daily experience. On word, he said that

> *tutte quelle voci che o nuove saranno, o nuovamente* trasfigurate*, o in tutto il corpo, o in parte d'esso, saranno* finte *[…]. Le quali tutte maniere, poscia che fanno e il vocabolo, e la favella diversa dalla usata comunale, si potrà a ragione dire* trasfigurata*, e* finta*, e* trasformata *in quella che Aristotile chiamò favella forestiera, e tanto la commendò, e disse essere ammirabile, sì come ammirabile anco essere può l'anima della parola per sè sola considerata in que' modi […]. Per li quali, dandosi alle parole non propri significati, ciò è forestieri a loro, e figurati e* finti *vengono a essere*[64].

The poetic word, remodeled compared to its conventional use in its body and/or soul, i.e., in its form and/or meaning, could achieve poetry's *plastic* aim, that of going beyond daily conventions to rediscover aesthetic wonder, the bridge between humankind and the original matter of the world.

Montaigne, in his passage on verses that *digitos habet*, showed the same enthusiasm towards the *chiaroscuro* matrix of love poetry, and in the following excerpt he suggested a similar solution to the need of *remodelling* words. He too often used the semantic field of plasticity to state that "[B] aux propos roides je n'eusse osé me fier à un idiome que je ne pouvais *plier* ni *contourner* outre son allure commune. J'y veux pouvoir quelque chose du mien. Le maniement et emploite des beaux esprits donne prix à la langue: Non pas l'innovant tant, comme la remplissant de plus vigoureux et divers services, l'*étirant* et *ployant*[65]". Montaigne, rather than modelling the word through a modified form, preferred to *bend* and *model* its meaning, thus developing only one of Patrizi's two plastic strategies. The objective was still to overcome habitual conventions through a renovated use of language, expression of the author's authentic individuality. There was still the need to *re-sharpen* the words that conventional use had dulled to the point of ineffectiveness. Referring to the most evocative words in Lucretius' love verses, he observed that "[B] d'aucuns de ces mots que je viens de trier, nous en apercevons plus malaisément l'énergie, d'autant que l'usage et la fréquence nous en ont aucunement avili et rendu vulgaire la grâce[66]". This reasoning was on

64 *Op. cit.*, p. 28 (italics mine).
65 M. de Montaigne, *Sur des vers de Virgile*, cit., p. 1618 [873] (italics mine).
66 *Ibidem* [874].

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another level than the myth of the great Mage: the corruption of word did not derive from a sweetening of its form that dulled the difficulties of knowledge for a vast and corrupted audience, but rather from a habitual and conventional use that blunted its aesthetic impact. Examining the *Deca Plastica*, it is possible to see that, for both authors, in the current stage of human history the solution to restore word's evocative power was to remodel it away from its daily use.

USE AND ABUSE OF WONDER: MOTOR OF KNOWLEDGE AND TIE OF IMAGINATION

Having examined the theoretical similarities between Patrizi and Montaigne, it is appropriate to finish off on the theme that Platt had indicated as starting point to investigate the possible influence by Patrizi on Montaigne, i.e., the matter of *wonder*, necessary to better understand certain theoretical mechanisms analyzed in the previous sections. In Patrizi's *Della Poetica* wonder was the fulcrum of the poetic experience, to the point that an entire section of the work, the *Deca Ammirabile*, was devoted to it. At the end of this section the philosopher looked into the psychology behind the ability to feel wonder, the *potenza ammirativa* (faculty to wonder). In this dense analysis, made up by different psychological theories, such a faculty was claimed as an original discovery. First, he observed the impossibility to reduce wonder to one single canonical faculty of the soul (vegetative, sensitive, rational) or one emotion, which could however coexist with it in some cases. Then, he argued that it is neither a cognition, although it derived from one. Therefore, such a movement encompassed all levels of the soul, and so one had to deduce it had a specific faculty, the *potenza ammirativa*[67]. From these bases, Patrizi more specifically derived that wonder was born "*da notizia di effetto, da notizia confusa, e da incerta*[68]". The point in between knowledge and ignorance was characterized as the knowledge of the effect but not of the cause; in science, instead, the cause was known.

67 See F. Patrizi, *Della Poetica* (vol. 2), cit., p. 355-362.
68 *Op. cit.*, p. 364.

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The general psychic movement of wonder was similar to that of experiencing poetry, which was one specific case of wonder. Indeed, poetry had been previously defined as a mixture of *topical sources* taken from the realm of the credible and of the incredible; and what is more, for poetry to be considered such it had to be *wonderful*, i.e., able to evoke wonder in the audience[69].

However, in addition to absolute ignorance and complete knowledge, there could be another reason for wonder to cease, *convention*. In this sense, recalling Lucretius,

> *anco nasce [la meraviglia] per cosa facile pure che sia allora la prima fiata che la veggiamo e ci sia nuova. Però che dice:* Sed neque tam facilis res ulla est, quin ea primum/ Difficilis magis ad credendum constet. Itemque/ Nil adeo magnum, nec tam mirabile quicquam/ Principio quod non minuant mirarier omnes/ Paullatim. *E ciò dichiara con altro esempio* ut coeli clarum, purumque colorem/ Quemque in se cohibent palantia sidera passim,/ Lunaeque et solis, praeclara luce nitorem;/ Omnia quae nunc si primum mortalibus adsint/ Ex improvviso cum sint obiecta repente/ Quid magis his rebus poterat mirabile dici?/ Aut minus ante quod auderent fore credere gentes?/ Nil ut opinor, ita haec species miranda fuisset/ Quam tibi iam nemo fessus satiate videndi,/ Suspicere in coeli dignatur lucida templa. *Secondo l'opinione di Lucrezio, adunque, e per ogni agevole cosa che sia nuova ci si muove la maraviglia, e d'ogni grande e difficile ella cessa col tempo, per la sazietà che ci prende di vederla […] e noi dicemmo ch'ella cessa ancora quando la cagion ci si scuopre*[70].

Through the verses of the *De rerum natura* (II, v. 1026-1039) it was shown how any object, after a certain period of fruition, became part of the routine, making any wonder cease[71]. Patrizi separated this case described by Lucretius from the true knowledge of the cause of the wonderous event. On this last point he was even more radical, adding that "*come che già cotanti anni miriam il cielo, e sappiamo la cagione della sua bellezza essere stato Dio, non per tanto non tutti gli huomini finiscono di ammirarsene*"; as in all great things, the unknown causes were still many, "*nella ignoranza delle quali cagioni maraviglia sempre ci accompagna, e nella*

69 See *op. cit.*, 365.

70 *Op. cit.*, p. 365-366.

71 By putting the verses in their context it is possible to see how wonder is introduced, at least in this case, as a negative factor hindering the acceptance of the author's revolutionary cosmological theories; see Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, éd. critique par Marcus Deufert, Berlin-Boston, De Gruyter, 2019, p. 87-88 (II, v. 1023-1046).

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investigazione delle quali loro studio i filosofi ponendo, gran ragione hebbe Platone a dire che il maravigliarsi era propria passione del filosofo e la maraviglia era stata il principio della filosofia[72]". Of particular relevance are the strong doubts on the theme of cosmology, particularly surprising since they were expressed by a Neoplatonic philosopher writing in the same years a *de universis philosophia*. In this context it was natural to evoke the traditional connection between wonder and philosophy through the *Theaetetus* (155d). Wonder was capable of toppling the false idols of routine, leaving a free space to actively exercise reason. The state of wonder was therefore the most suitable and *natural* one for a human being: if they had been capable of reaching a complete knowledge of all causes, it would have meant that

> *perciochè alla cognizione di esse pervenuto, egli è al fine d'ogni suo maraviglioso perventuo; e chi finito ha di prendere maraviglia beato è divenuto. […] Ma s'altri a grado di sapienza è salito che di niente si maravigli, seguita ch'egli anco di niuna cosa sente piacere. […] Secondo che vero è sempre che, mentre maraviglia dura, in mezzano stato s'è d'ignoranza e di imparamento. […] E proprio è il diletto dell'imparamento, per che questo è un ritorno in* perfezione di natura*, e le così tali tutte* piacere arrecano[73].

Therefore, the state of rapture, in which all pleasure ceases, appeared as a divine and inhuman condition, more hypothetical than actually reachable. In this sense, the *pleasure* of wonder, which corresponded to the pleasure of learning, was seen as a peculiar prerogative of human nature; wonder elicited happiness because to follow where it led meant to pursue humankind's specific natural aim; it was a *utile et honnête* pleasure.

Having briefly described Patrizi's view on wonder, it is useful to review the passages of the *Essais* where Platt had supposedly found echoes of it. The first comes from *Des boiteux*: "[C] L'admiration est fondement de toute philosophie, l'inquisition le progrès, l'ignorance le bout. [B] Voire dea, il y a quelque ignorance forte et généreuse qui ne doit rien en honneur et en courage à la science. [C] Ignorance pour laquelle concevoir il n'y va pas moins de science que pour concevoir la science[74]". However, this excerpt is too vague to show a connection to Patrizi, and it is also chronologically improbable, as has already been

72 F. Patrizi, *Della Poetica* (vol. 2), cit., p. 366-367 (italics mine).
73 *Op. cit.*, p. 367 (italics mine).
74 M. de Montaigne, *Des boiteux*, cit., p. 1916 [1030].

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noted. This passage seems to be more closely modeled after the already-cited excerpt of the *Theaetetus* and the *Metaphysics* (I-2, 982b 11-7)[75]. The same holds true for the second passage, from the *De l'expérience*, where in relation to the intellectual research it is said that "[B] ses poursuites sont sans terme, et sans forme: Son aliment, c'est admiration, chasse, ambiguïté[76]". In this case as well the passage is too vague[77].

It is more useful to analyze some passages centered on the risk of routine and on the *chiaroscuro* character of human pleasure, which were key aspects of the theoretical mechanism of wonder as bridge across intellectual activity, literary expression and human life. Convention was the death of wonder according to Montaigne as well, but this concept was expressed with the same Lucretian verses used by Patrizi, with the same reversal of meaning, since in the original poem wonder had been an obstacle to philosophical enquiry. In the *C'est folie de rapporter le vrai et le faux à notre suffisance*, one was encouraged to consider:

> [A] au travers de quels nuages, et comment à tâtons, on nous mène à la connaissance de la plupart des choses qui nous sont entre mains: certes nous trouverons que c'est plutôt accoutumance que science qui nous en ôte l'étrangeté, [B] *iam nemo, fessus satiate videndi,/ Suspicere in cæli dignatur lucida templa*. [A] Et que ces choses-là, si elles nous étaient présentées de nouveau, nous les trouverions autant ou plus incroyables que aucunes autres, *si nunc primum mortalibus adsint/ Ex improviso, ceu sint obiecta repente,/ Nil magis his rebus poterat mirabile dici,/ Aut minus ante quod auderent fore credere gentes*[78].

In addition, if one considers the theoretical danger of Lucretius' text, constantly monitored by the Counter-Reformation (but never actually

75 It is useful to remember that the cited passage was introduced by the statement: "[C] Iris est fille de Thaumantis" (*ibidem*), a clear reference to the abovementioned part of the *Theaetetus*.

76 *Idem*, *De l'expérience*, cit., p. 1988 [1068].

77 However, it is possible to see a link with Patrizi in the passage following it: "[B] Ce que déclarait assez Apollon, parlant toujours à nous doublement, obscurément et obliquement" (*ibidem*). This link between *chiaroscuro* wonder, philosophy and prophetic language was very present in Patrizi. For example, in the *Deca Ammirabile*, he stated that "*lo enimma non è meno mirabile degli altri [detti poetici], perchè ed opera di deità fu da principio e compagno della profezia […]. E la ragione di ciò è perché tra chiaro e scuro, che è lo enimma, fa dubbioso lo suo intendimento e il dubbio è fratello della maraviglia*" (F. Patrizi, *Della Poetica* (vol. 2), cit., p. 260); see also *op. cit.*, p. 254-255.

78 M. de Montaigne, *C'est folie de rapporter le vrai et le faux*, cit., p. 324 [179]. In the same direction, and recalling the same Lucretian verses quoted by Patrizi, see also *Idem*, *De la coutume*, cit., p. 207 [116].

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banned thanks to a series of expedients[79]), its use is even more striking and shows a common interest for a deeply heterodox theoretical source. However, what is significant is especially the reversal of meaning which the verses have undergone in both authors.

Furthermore, when Montaigne specifically analyzed human pleasure, he described it according to the *chiaroscuro* terms which Patrizi used for wonder: if the latter wrote about the mixture of credible and incredible, or of known and unknown, the former found connections between sour and sweet and especially between visible and invisible, which have already in part been noted regarding the theme of linguistic remodeling. In other words, the human being was at the center of a tension without end. This principle had a specific application in the field of poetry also according to Montaigne. Going back to the love verses by Virgil and Lucretius investigated in *Sur des vers de Virgile*, it was said that "[B] traitant ainsi réservément et discrètement de la lasciveté comme ils font, me semblent la découvrir et éclairer de plus près. Les dames couvrent leur sein d'un réseau, les prêtres, plusieurs choses sacrées, les peintres ombragent leur ouvrage pour lui donner plus de lustre[80]". The *chiaroscuro* effect could liven up the experience, just as Patrizi's wonder was able to move people's souls and bodies, accessing the hidden but more authentic structures of the world. Conversely, Montaigne commented so on a more explicit erotic description by Martial: "[B] Il me semble qu'il me chaponne. Que Martial retrousse Vénus à sa poste, il n'arrive pas à la faire paraître si entière. Celui qui dit tout, il nous soûle et nous dégoûte. Celui qui craint à s'exprimer, nous achemine à en penser plus qu'il n'en y a[81]". The vagueness typical of the best love poets, obtained thanks to the *chiaroscuro*, started an unrestrained imaginative game in the audience, similar to the one which possessed the philosopher, able to feel wonder and thus correctly interpret the world.

Poetry which *digitos habet*, which was similar in this to the expressive *chiaroscuro* polymorphism of the *Essais* themselves, was able to move the reader's body and soul through the psychosomatic medium of imagination, just like the description of Tarquinia Molza's ambiguous

79 See Valentina Prosperi, *"Di soavi licor gli orli del vaso". La fortuna di Lucrezio dall'Umanesimo alla Controriforma*, Torino, Aragno, 2004.

80 M. de Montaigne, *Sur des vers de Virgile*, cit., p. 1630 [880]. See also *Idem*, *De l'inéqualité qui est en nous*, cit., p. 474 [265].

81 *Ibidem*.

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and evasive, i.e., wonderful, beauty made listeners fall in love with her. Therefore, wonder was the common foundation and epistemological motor of love, literary production and imagination, which were all inevitably connected. The never-ending tension started by the psychic motion of wonder, triggered by worldly or literary *mirabilia*, was a distinctive trait of specifically human action. If it was correctly followed, it brought to the most authentic form of pleasure, that in which the physical merged with the intellectual and the poetical with the philosophical. According to Patrizi this happened on a vertical level, while Montaigne believed it to happen on a horizontal one.

Obviously, also wonder had an unnatural and damaging counterpart, but analyzing it in depth would stray from this work's scope. To introduce this phenomenon, it is sufficient to observe two passages, respectively from the chapter *De la force de l'imagination* and from the fifth dialogue of *Della Historia* (a collection of dialogues immediately preceding *Della Retorica*, very close to it for the style). Montaigne, investigating the use and abuse of imagination, observed that "[A] il est vraisemblable que le principal crédit des miracles, des visions, des enchantements et de tels effets extraordinaires, vienne de la puissance de l'imagination, agissant principalement contre les âmes du vulgaire, plus molles: On leur a si fort saisi la créance, qu'ils pensent voir ce qu'ils ne voient pas[82]". The intellectually fragile common population was particularly impressed by all that was wonderful, but this was dangerous from a political point of view. If its *pliable* imagination made the population well-disposed to the civilizing action of the *prisci sapienti*'s symbolic poetry, as Patrizi himself had noted, it also put it at risk of being subjugated by tyrants who abused such a method. Montaigne's text on the matter can be paired to the reflection carried out by his friend Étienne De La Boétie in the *Discours de la servitude volontaire*[83]. In the fifth dialogue of the *Della Historia*, titled *Il Contile, overo della verità dell'historia*, the character of Luca Contile illustrated a similar reversal. Recalling the deformation of truth operated by historians for fear or flattery towards rulers, he noted that wonder has a key role in it: "*le* cose nuove*, e le* nascoste *[…] ce la commuovono? […] Et anco le* grandi […]. *Qual maraviglia è adunque, se i Prencipi, […] per tenirsi o divoti i popoli*

82 *Idem*, *De la force de l'imagination*, cit., p. 172 [99].

83 See Étienne De La Boétie, *Le discours de la servitude volontaire*, éd. critique par P. Léonard, Paris, Payot, 1978, p. 145-6.

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loro, o timidi gli altrui adoprano la maraviglia *nelle cose loro? […] Col* silentio *de difetti loro […] e de consigli. Et poi anco con le* ostentationi *delle forze loro e delle ricchezze*[84]". Here a completely different side of wonder was shown, far from the ideal of it as moved by authentic divine beauty and capable of making one holy. Wonder which had been obtained by altering the truth became a means for subjugation, although it still acted by *altering* the human soul. In this case, the soul did not *move away* from the body to become holy, but to serve the false idol of the ruler.

All these inquiries into wonder converged towards a very characteristic picture. Patrizi used the picture of a wonderful poem as a world, while Montaigne reversed it to describe the world as a *wonderful* poem, in an effective synthesis of their theoretical similarities and differences. In a very complex and brief passage of the *Deca Dogmatica Universale*, Patrizi put the topical sources of wonderful poetry in a correspondence with the original principles which formed reality. Having established the intrinsic continuity of the former, he wrote that *"e' si può dir con vero che tutti i principali capi, e i lor sottordinati tutti, sieno in tutti, e ciascuno in tutti, e tutti in ciascheduno, e che in loro si rinnovi l'antico dogma: tutte le cose essere in tutte, e v'habbia luogo quella ammirabile mistione che nel Filebo ci insegnò Platone*[85]". Like in the *Philebus* (25a-6d) the three original principles of *finite-determined*, *infinite-indetermined*, and their *mixture* hed been described, in a similar way Patrizi built a poetical-rhetoric model in which the *credible* and the *incredible* mixed to form the *wonderful*. Poetry was born as a product of mediation between different polarities, just like the world, whose metaphysical structures it followed. Humankind might have not been able to perform all the *mirabilia* of the golden age through the medium of poetry, but it still remained the preferred method to point them back towards their real destination. Patrizi's cultural reformation aimed to restore the imaginative and evasive expression of the *prisca sapientia*: the world could no longer be constrained in rigid scholastic classifications but had to be left free to express its polymorph vitality, which could be partially expressed through a truly inspired poetry, i.e., a poetry truly based on it.

Montaigne's work was inevitably detached from Patrizi's socio-cultural project; however, it is still possible to find an unbreakable bond between

84 Francesco Patrizi, *Della Historia. Diece dialoghi*, Venezia, A. Arrivabene, 1560, c. 28v° (italics mine).

85 Idem, *Della Poetica* (vol. 3), cit., p. 222.

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linguistic action and intellectual and moral progress in it. Once more, this bond was held up by the bridge of imagination, which, if appropriately directed towards wonder, could point humankind back towards its natural origin. Montaigne's honest writer did not go back to a unique metaphysical reality but, through the rediscovery of themselves, was still able to give form to their writing and get closer in this way to the inner structure of this world. A work of literature was able to somehow represent, albeit always in an imperfect manner, the natural infinity of the world. In this sense in the *Apologie*, speaking about the true image of reality, he explicitly stated that: "[C] Ai-je pas vu en Platon ce divin mot, que nature n'est rien qu'une poésie énigmatique? Comme peut-être qui dirait une peinture voilée et ténébreuse entreluisant d'une infinie variété de faux jours à exercer nos conjectures [...]. Et certes la philosophie n'est qu'une poésie sophistiquée[86]". The arrogance of dogmatic philosophy, an artificial compound of conventions, could not but bring about a *poésie sophistiquée*, empty and false like the world it described. True poetry was able to translate the infinity of natural reality into words and it was defined as *énigmatique*, recalling the *chiaroscuro* lexicon of wonder with a pictorial simile. One had to always be open towards the infinity of the world, and the literary medium, as a translation of wonder into words, was able to point them in this direction. The two authors considered the world a wonderful object, albeit on different ideological levels, and the person who was truly in connection with it could not but be in a constant state of wonder. For both of them, with different levels of radicality, the aesthetic dimension began to carve for itself that space of psychological ambiguity and executive variety which would be typical of the first part of the German XVIII century, when aesthetic would receive an official name.

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86 M. de Montaigne, *Apologie de Raymond Sebond*, cit., p. 978-980 [536-7].

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