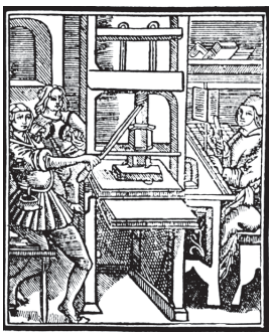
TRADIÇÃO E TRANSFORMAÇÃO

A Herança Latina no Renascimento



Grupo República das Letras
Estudo de textos Renascentistas em Latim

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HUMANITAS

São Paulo, 2018

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II. Prosa: Filosofia e Literatura de Viagem

EPIC CHALLENGES. BASINIO DA PARMA'S *CYRIS* AND THE DISCOURSE OF GENRE IN EARLY HUMANISTIC ELEGY

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Resumo: The *Cyris* by Basinio da Parma is an example of an early 15th century elegiac collection. This article analyses the way in which Basinio inscribes it into the generic discourse of his time, especially in the tension between elegy and epic. Furthermore, it is suggested that some of the *carmina varia* by Basinio originally belonged to the *Cyris*, as well.

Palavras-chave: Basinio da Parma, Elegy, *Epos*, Genre.

When Basinio da Parma died in 1457 at the age of only 32, he left an impressively diverse *œuvre*: among the *opera maiora*, the *Hesperis*, the first epic poem in praise of a contemporary ruler in fifteenth-century Italy, takes pride of place (it glorifies

* The paper was first delivered at the conference of the IANLS in Vienna in 2015. I thank the audience for their questions and suggestions. Furthermore, I thank Ricardo da Cunha Lima for having invited me to a conference in São Paulo in 2013 and for the possibility to contribute a chapter for this volume. Finally, I am grateful to Laura Napran for having corrected my English.

Sigismondo Malatesta and his fight against Alfonso of Aragón);[1] and apart from this long underestimated poem, other larger compositions are an astronomical didactic poem (*Astronomica*),[2] an unfinished *Argonautica*, and the early *epyllion Meleagris*.[3] Among the minor works, the three books of the *Liber Isottaeus* celebrate the love of Sigismondo Malatesta and his concubine Isotta degli Atti in the hyperbolic form of Ovid's heroic letters.[4] The *Diosymposeos liber* describes a banquet given by Jove himself.[5]

A group of twelve elegies among the *carmina varia* will be in the focus of this paper. The poems treat the mostly unhappy love story of the poetic speaker and a *puella* called Cyris. Ferruccio Ferri edited the twelve short poems under the title *Cyris* at the beginning of the twentieth century. Basinio composed them when he was still in Ferrara, i.e. between 1446 and 1449. Together with the *Meleagris*, they testify to the early poetic career of Basinio. The collection has thus far seldom attracted scholarly interest. In Augusto Campana's excellent entry on Basinio in the *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* the poems are mentioned with one sentence only: "To these years belong a dozen of love elegies for a girl whom he called Cyris and who was not the only woman beloved by him (another elegy, for a certain Lissa, is Var., I); also,

1 *Cf.* PETERS (2016); SCHAFFENRATH (2017, pp. 1-21). See also SCHAFFENRATH (2015, pp. 57-71, esp. 64f).

2 *Cf.* CHISENA (2018, pp. 151-196). See also CHISENA (2016).

3 *Cf.* BERGER (2002).

4 *Cf.* PIEPER (2006, pp. 91-110); COPPINI (1996, pp. 449-467). See also COPPINI (2009, pp. 281-302).

5 The text is edited and introduced by Coppini (2003, pp. 301-336).

in these years he wrote many smaller works in distichs or hexameters, which, together with the love story concerning Cyris, offer much biographical information of this period"[6]. Whereas Campana's interest in the elegies obviously was merely biographical, as he found in them references to Basinio's family background and early years, he did not consider their poetological potential or the role they played within the development of fifteenth-century love elegy. This has hardly changed until now. In contrast to the *Liber Isottaeus*, the *Cyris* is not mentioned in the overviews of elegiac poetry in the recent Neo-Latin encyclopedia or handbooks, and to my knowledge no substantial treatment of the cycle exists in academic literature.[7]

1. *Philological preliminaries*

One reason for the absence of recent discussions might be the difficult transmission of the text. It is hard to pinpoint exactly when the poems were written, and it is not even completely clear whether they were indeed conceived as one coherent cycle. For most of the twelve poems we only have one witness: the *codex Bevilacqua* (Biblioteca Estense Universitaria di Modena, α J 5.19), a manuscript containing mostly humanistic poetry of poets active

6 "Appartengono a questi anni una dozzina di elegie amorose per una fanciulla, che chiamò Ciride (Cyris), che non fu la sola donna da lui amata (un'altra elegia, per una Lissa, è in Var., I); e molte composizioni minori in distici o in esametri, che forniscono, oltre alla storia dell'amore per Ciride, parecchie notizie biografiche di questo periodo". All translations in this paper are my own.

7 DE BEER (2014, pp. 387-397); MOUL (2015, pp. 41-56); HOUGHTON (2017, pp. 98-112).

in Northern Italy (among others, Tito Vespasiano Strozzi, Gaspare Tribraco, and our Basinio). In this *codex*, the poems of the *Cyris* are not arranged as one cycle but are scattered as single poems or in small groups on more than 50 folios. *Cyris* 1 on fol. 19r-v is followed by three of Basinio's *varia* (numbers 3, 2, and 4 in Ferri's edition: a poem about his *Meleagris*, a praise of the Virgin Mary, and a laudatory poem on Theodore Gaza). *Cyris* 2 follows on fol. 22r-v, then we have *carmen varium* 5 Ferri (a valedictory poem to his friends before embarking on a journey). Afterwards, *Cyris* 3-7 form a coherent group on fol. 23r-26v. They are separated from the following, *Cyris* 8 (fol. 28r-29r), by two poems (*carmina varia* 6 and 7 Ferri), on the death of Filippo Maria Visconti and a poem for Leonello d'Este. So far, the poems of what Ferri called *Cyris* have been interrupted only by a few Basinian poems. The final four of the cycle, however, are more remote from this group. In between, there are almost fifty poems by various poets on a huge variety of themes (the first of the group is Basinio's *carmen varium* 8 Ferri, a eulogy of the ingenious painter Pisanello. *Cyris* 9-12 follow only on fol. 71v-74r).

Although this finding might be an argument against the existence of a cycle called *Cyris* as postulated by Ferri and Campana (indeed, the *codex Bevilacqua* does transmit the *Liber Isottaeus* almost completely and continuously on fol. 78r-113r), it does not have to be so. Also in the case of Tito Vespasiano Strozzi's *Eroticon*, the *codex* displays the poems rather loosely all over the *codex*. For the following reflections, I assume that the *Cyris* was indeed planned as an elegiac *corpus*. One hint is offered by *carmen varium* 8, a eulogy of the famous artist Antonio di

Puccio Pisano, called "il Pisanello", who was especially known for his medallions. At the end of his poem, Basinio seems to refer to two of his poems: the poetic speaker would stop working on his *Meleagris* if Pisanello would fabricate a work of his art representing Cyris.[8] The verses suggest that Cyris is not only invoked as an individual girl, but as representative of an alternative poetry that contrasts the epic-like scenes of the *Meleagris*. The girl's name stands for the elegiac poetry dedicated to her, a literary *topos* since Antiquity.[9] What is more: Basinio likes to engage in a contest between visual and verbal arts; the theme can also be found several times in the poetry composed for Sigismondo Malatesta.[10] *Carmen varium* 8 is specific in that here for once the artist seems to be more powerful than the poet as he can make the latter change his literary subject.

But even if we accept my hypothesis that the poems of the *Cyris* indeed belong to one cycle, the philological problems do not

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8 *Cf*. Basinio, *Carm. var*. 8.73-78: *Quid si fecisses nivea mihi Cyrida forma / qualia dona tibi, vir venerande, darem? / Quin cuperem positis nostrum Meleagron habenis / linquere venatus ipse poeta meos. / Te canerem solum, solus tibi carmina soli / inciperem placida posse ciere lyra* ("But if you would make me an image of Cyris in her snow-white form, which gifts would I give you, venerable man? Indeed, I myself, the poet, would wish to slacken the rein and to leave our Meleager and my hunting. I would only sing of thee, I alone would begin to produce my poems from the agreeable lyre for you alone").

9 *Cf*. the classical article by Keith (1994, pp. 27-40, *e.g.* on p. 39): "Throughout the *Amores*, Ovid endows *puellae* with the physical, sartorial and moral characteristics of flesh-and-blood women. But, as this study has argued, their qualities may be described singly or in combination in such a way as to articulate simultaneously an aesthetic position".

10 *Cf*. D'ELIA (2016, pp. 226-234) on the theme of sculpture and poetry at the Malatesta court.

end there. In order to realise that, it is again helpful to take the case of Strozzi's *Eroticon* as a point of comparison. Its transmitted poems in the *codex Bevilacqua* do not follow the chronology of the traditional arrangement we know from other manuscripts, but rather seem to be arranged at random: if we examine their order, the earliest is *Eroticon* 3.4, followed by 1.7, 1.8, 2.15, 2.4, 2.6, 3.1, 1.2, and so on. Ferruccio Ferri published the poems of the *Cyris* in the order that they appear in the Bevilacqua-manuscript, but only *faute de mieux*; it must by no means represent the author's original arrangement.

I proceed even one step further in my speculations: in the *codex Bevilacqua* the first 8 poems of the *Cyris* are separated from each other only by other poems written by Basinio, which Ferri had labeled the *carmina varia*. Would it be unreasonable to postulate that these various poems should not have been part of the *Cyris*, as well? It is well known that several elegiac *corpora* of the *Quattrocento* were not restricted to love poetry proper: Cristoforo Landino's *Xandra*, in both its first and second versions, includes poems directed to potential patrons, to fellow humanists or artists, and other epigrammatic material as well. The same is true for Strozzi's *Eroticon*.[11] Basinio knew Tito Vespasiano Strozzi since the time they had followed the classes of Guarino da Verona together – according to Augusto Campana, they even befriended each other.[12] When examining the *carmina varia* that surround the poems of Ferri's *Cyris*, several poems fit the categories

11 *Cf.* Donatella Coppini's useful and rich introduction in CARDINI & COPPINI (2009, pp. vii-xviii, esp. xvi).

12 *Cf.* CAMPANA (1965, pp. 89-98, here 89).

mentioned above: the praise of the Byzantine scholar Theodore Gaza (*Var.*, 4) could, for example, be paralleled with Landino's epitaph on Leonardo Bruni (*Xand.*, 1.18)[13] or Strozzi's verses on Janus Pannonius (*Erot.*, 1.8); the eulogy of Leonello d'Este (*Var.*, 7) resembles the poems on the members of the Medici family in Landino's later version (*e.g.*, *Xand.*, 2.1 or 3.1)[14] or the poems on Borso d'Este in the fourth book of Strozzi's *Eroticon* (esp. 4.17). The elegy on the death of the duke of Milan, Filippo Maria Visconti, could be paralleled to the (admittedly later) elegy *Xandra* 3.18 on the death of young Cosimo, the son of Giovanni di Cosimo de' Medici, in 1459. The short poem addressed to his humanistic friends with the exhortation to keep reading his poems, even when he is away from the city for some time (*Var.*, 5), has no direct parallels in Landino or Strozzi, but is in principle not alien to an elegiac collection of the fifteenth century either (for example, one could think of book two, the *Elegiae ad amicos*, of Alessandro Braccesi's poems). The above mentioned poem for Pisanello has a close parallel in Strozzi's *Eroticon* 2.13 which is also addressed to the same artist;[15] as well, in the *Xandra* we find two epitaphs for Filippo Brunelleschi, the great exponent of Florentine

13 In the first version of the *Xandra*, which is almost contemporary or only slightly antedates the *Cyris*, the poem is included as a praise of the living Bruni: *Xand. ant.*, 36, *cf.* WENZEL (2010, pp. 220-223).

14 In the earlier version, *Xand. ant.*, 48, a praise in hexameters of his first patron, Francesco Alberti degli Altobianchi (who through the first verse, *Magnanime Alberta clara de stirpe create* is assimilated with Horace's Maecenas of Odes 1.1.1), has a similarly eulogistic tone. See on the poem WENZEL (2010, pp. 268-275), who does not mention the link with Horace.

15 *Cf.* ALBRECHT (1891, pp. 341-344).

architecture and art (*Xand*., 2.15 and 16). Less expected would be *carmen varium* 2 celebrating the Virgin Mary – but considering the huge impact of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* on Latin poetry of fifteenth-century Italy,[16] it would also not be impossible for Basinio to incorporate a hymn to the Virgin (who in v. 29f. is addressed as the inspiring divinity for his poetry) in imitation of Petrarch's final canzone 'Vergine bella' in the *Canzoniere*.[17]

If the interspersed *varia*-poems indeed originally belonged to the same elegiac collection as the *Cyris*-poems, then the most striking component would be *carmen varium* 3, the first one immediately following *Cyris* 1. The poetic speaker addresses a study friend, Girolamo Castelli, and asks him to examine critically the first two books of the *Meleagris*.[18] The first two distichs (*I, Meleagre, meoque refer iam, grate, salutem / Hieronymo, haud tanto fabula digna viro. / I tamen, o felix! quod te susceperit ille, / sis licet infelix, nempe beatus eris*, "Go, pleasant Meleager, and greet my friend Girolamo, a man whose renown does not seem apt for such a kind of story. But go anyway, happy Meleager! If he will receive you, even if your fate is unhappy, you will surely be blessed") seem to contradict the attribution to an elegiac collection, as the thematic reference to the *Meleagris* is too distinct. On the other hand, the *topos* of the book approaching the *aula* of the poet's

16 *Cf*., *e.g.*, ROBERT (2004, pp. 111-154).

17 A verbal resonance of *Cyris* 9.89f. in *Var*. 2.5-6 cannot be used as proof, as Basinio is known to have re-used verses regularly within his *œuvre* (the *apparatus* in BERGER (2002) gives valuable material which could easily be enlarged for the other works, as well). On the idea of re-used poetry, see now SCHIRG (2016).

18 *Cf*. BERGER (2002, pp. 10-11).

patron and hoping to find friendly reception is extremely common in elegiac cycles of the fifteenth century. Landino uses it at the beginning of the first and third book of his *Xandra* (1.1 and 3.2), Strozzi at the end of the second book of his *Eroticon* (2.19). Furthermore, as mentioned above, the poem addressed to Pisanello stresses how closely related the *Meleagris* and *Cyris* are to each other. This also means that a poem about the composition of the *Meleagris* that plays with the elegiac *topos* of how to begin a book could be a surprising addition to the *Cyris*.

Whether Basinio ever finished his elegiac collection *Cyris*, is difficult to say (the scarce transmission suggests not). However, that he wanted to collect the poems which Ferri labeled *Cyris* is very plausible, and I argue that it was planned as an elegiac collection similar to the *Xandra* or the *Eroticon*, that is, as a combination of amorous poems and epigrammatic components of different themes.

2. *Cyris 1: How to Become an Elegiac Poet?*

Henceforth, I will concentrate on the poems which Ferri has labeled *Cyris*, i.e., the love elegies proper. As I have previously mentioned, the text, written more or less contemporaneously with the first versions of the *Xandra* and the *Eroticon*, is one of the earliest elegiac collections of the *Quattrocento* – the only sure predecessor being Giovanni Marrasio's *Angelinetum*.[19] Therefore, it is especially interesting to see how Basinio participates in the ongoing poetological discourse of his time and how he inscribes

19 *Cf.* DE BEER (2014, p. 389); PIEPER (2008, pp. 78-83).

his collection into the newly shaped ancient genre. Such a question seems particularly apt in the case of Basinio, whose major works are notoriously innovative on formal grounds. His *Liber Isottaeus* is a free combination of Ovid's *Heroides* and panegyric, and in his epic *Hesperis* not only the obvious Vergil, but also Homer and Dante are important pretexts. Basinio's generic freedom was based on his stupefying learnedness which included a thorough knowledge of Greek as well: in a famous controversy with his colleague at the court of Rimini, Porcelio de' Pandoni, he defined the *studia Graeca* as indispensable part of any humanistic education and denied that someone without them could be properly called humanist.[20]

So what about the *Cyris*' generic positioning? A first crucial moment in any elegiac collection is the description of the falling in love of the poetic speaker. In principle, two ancient models were available. In Propertius' *Monobiblos*, the beginning of the collection and the *innamoramento* overlap. Cynthia's (and Cupid's) almost military assault on the speaker[21] marks a radical change in his existence, which is now dedicated to the service of love alone and distances itself radically from any public order (the famous *nullo vivere consilio,* 1.1.6). Only after having been trapped in these feelings for an entire year (*iam toto furor hic non deficit anno*, 1.1.7), does the speaker begin to write his elegies. Opposite to this pathetic, pseudo-biographical narrative, which invites the

20 *Cf.* recently D'ELIA (2016, pp. 76-78).

21 *Cf.* the verb *cepit* in Prop. 1.1.1 and Cupid's position of triumphant victor after the battle at the end of v. 4: *caput impositis pressit Amor pedibus* ("Amor pressed my head after having put his feet on it").

reader to identify with the male protagonist and to engage with the text on a content level, there is Ovid's model as presented at the ironic and light-hearted opening of his *Amores*. Here, no desperate lover turns into a poet of love elegies, but a poet turns into a lover against his own will: we encounter a poet ready to write an epic poem, when Cupid forces him to write love elegies. Only in the third poem is an object for his love, Corinna, presented to him.

The two models were received enthusiastically by poets of the *Quattrocento*. They offered not only two different beginnings, but also, more importantly, two different views on the value of elegiac poetry within the generic network of poetry in general. Was elegy the beginning of an implied author's career (as in the case of Propertius), the work of a juvenile and passionate spirit, or was it a genre worthy of mature poets (as in the case of Ovid, who thinks himself capable of writing epic), a genre that could be an adequate alternative for epic aspirations?[22]

Basinio's *Cyris* participates in both ancient discourses. *Cyr*. 1.3-6 refers to the immediacy of Propertius' beginning:

22 The question is already important for Antiquity and debated in almost all elegiac *corpora* of the Augustan poets, often in combination with the so-called *recusatio* in which the poet apparently declares himself unworthy of more elevated (panegyric or epic) poetry, but implicitly nobilitates his own generic choice. *Cf*. for a re-assessment SHARROCK (2013, pp. 151-165).

Nec studium neque honos, famae nec summa voluntas
me miserum, sed enim scribere cogit Amor.
Namque meos oculos una est furata puella,
quae tamen et mentem torserat ante meam.[23]

Neither zeal nor honour nor my ultimate wish for glory forced poor me to write – it was Amor. For one girl has stolen my eyes, the same one who previously had turned my head.

The joined efforts of Amor and the *puella*, whose actions seem to be related to each other (further stressed by their prominent position at the respective ends of verses 2 and 3), are especially reminiscent of Propertius, where Cynthia's name (beginning of v. 1) and Amor (end of v. 4) frame the first two elegiac couplets and also seem to collaborate in order to subdue the poetic speaker.[24] Basinio then combines the Propertian model of the falling in love with the equivalent representation of the poetic speaker as unexperienced youngster. Verse 7 of the poem labels him as *rudis et simplex et qui non talia noram* ("uncouth and

23 That the verses are meant to recall Propertius' opening is obvious from a thick net of allusions: *cf.* Prop., 1.1.1: *Cynthia prima suis miserum me cepit ocellis*; 1.1.8 *cogor* ("Cynthia first caught poor me with her eyes").

24 In Propertius, this effect is enforced by the syntax of lines 3 and 4. The reader thinks that Cynthia, the triumphant subject of the first couplet (*cepit*), is also the subject of the second – the harsh terminology of the verbs "crush down" (*deiecit*) and "pressed my head" (*caput pressit*) fits her previous posture –, until Amor as the grammatical subject is introduced. This syntactical state of temporary uncertainty opens many associations of the status of the *puella*: is she Amor's medium/partner, i.e., is she herself a semi-divine entity?

simple, someone who did not know anything of all this").[25] Verse 29 masterfully captures this Propertian idea of youthful immediacy in a plea to Amor, *parce igitur pueroque puer ignosce poetae* ("so spare, you boy, the boyish poet and have pity on him"). The expression *puer poeta* could almost be an equivalent of "elegiac poet".

It would be straightforward if this self-presentation also led to the apt elegiac poetics: elegy as the genre for very young, very unexperienced men, the poems being the first step in their poetic career. Indeed, Basinio twice characterises elegiac poetry as *facilis*, "easy".[26] But this most probably means not only easy to compose, but moreover, in a rhetorical context, "natural, unforced" or even "skilful".[27] In *Cyr*. 1.31, he parallels the friendliness with which his beloved approaches him with the lightness of elegy (*ad faciles elegos venio placidamque puellam*), thus attributing the same charming character to the object of his verses and the poetry itself. *Cyr*. 1.45f. includes a pun about the ease with which his poems move in spite of the limping character (the

25 *Cf*. Prop., 1.1.2: *contactum nullis ante cupidinibus* ("untouched by any amorous desires so before").

26 *facilis versus* is no common expression, but *cf*. Tac. *Ann*. 16.19 *levia carmina et faciles versus* (about the poems Petronius was listening to when he committed suicide, there contrasted to philosophical writings *de immortalitate animae et sapientium placitis*) – the *ThLL* 6.1, 61 *s. v. facilis* II 1bβ takes this passage as pejorative ("speciatim cum nota vitii, fere i. q. levis, inanis"); *faciles elegos* or *facilia carmina* are not found in classical poetry. Ovid, however, addresses his elegiac verses in *Fast*. 2.5 as "easy servants in love" (*faciles in amore ministros*). *Cf*. also *Laus Pisonis* 165 "easy page" (*facilis pagina*) and Claud. 9.9 "easy lyre" (*facilem barbitron*).

27 *Cf. OLD s.v. facilis* 11b and d.

inequality between hexameter and pentameter being a traditional and always ironic joke since Ovid's *Amores* 1.1, which has been imitated by many early modern poets): *ergo ad vos faciles venio, mea gaudia, versus, / qui trahitis claudo carmina nostra pede* ("thus I come to you, my joy, my easy-moving verses, you that make my poetry move with limping foot").

But apart from such topical reflexions on the value of his own poetry, Basinio's speaker puts the Propertian model into question in a much more explicit way, and he does so from the very beginning. Compared to the first verses of Prop. 1.1 that immerse the reader in the plot, *Cyr*. 1.3 (the first of the just quoted verses) is surprisingly reflected. Three alternative reasons for writing poetry are mentioned and dismissed before the fourth verse, with the Propertian *me miserum*, makes the transition to the true impulse, namely Cyris. Such a distanced speaker, seemingly in control of his senses and able to reflect his poetic program on a metaliterary level, is more Ovidian in tone and diminishes the impression of the simple young man whom Amor has transformed into a poet. The first two verses, not yet quoted, strengthen this idea. Obviously the *Cyris* has not been the first poetic attempt of the poetic speaker:

> *En ego quem puerum divina tragoedia novit,*
> *cogor ab imparibus carmina ferre modis*.
>
> Here I am, whom godlike tragedy knew as a boy, but now I am forced to bring forth poems that spring from unequal metre.

The two verses combine two Ovidian models. The second verse alludes to *Am*. 1.1 and Amor's joke that forces the poet aspiring to epic verses to continue his work in uneven, i.e., elegiac metre. The first verse, however, recalls the opening of the third book of Ovid's *Amores*, in which the poetic speaker finds himself, similar to Hercules, at the crossroads with personified Elegy and Tragedy seducing him to follow them. Tragedy thereby formulates the elegiac poetics known so well to *Quattrocento* poets: fine that you wrote elegiac verses until now, but it is time to leave this juvenile playground and turn to more serious endeavours.[28] But as so often in humanistic poetry, the obvious similarities between the Ovidian model and Basinian reception are especially meant to underline the differences of the situation: whereas Ovid's poetic speaker was just dreaming of writing an *epos* and is called to tragedy only after having compiled two books of elegies, Basinio's speaker seems to have been a tragic poet already before turning to love elegy.

3. *Cyris and Meleagris as Diptychon Poeticum: Genre Questions*

It is clear from what I have said so far that we should not read the reference to a Basinian tragedy autobiographically (indeed, we do not have any traces of such a work). Within the

28 *Cf.* Ov. *Am*., 3.1.27-30 (Tragedy addresses the poet): *quod tenerae cantent, lusit tua Musa, puellae, / primaque per numeros acta iuventa suos. / nunc habeam per te Romana Tragoedia nomen! / inplebit leges spiritus iste meas* ("Your Muse has written poems that young girls sing, and your early youth has expressed itself in verses that fit youth; Now let me, Roman Tragedy, be famous because of you; your inspiration will fulfill my laws").

programmatic first poem, the passage helps the author to position his own poetry within an ancient discourse on the value of elegiac writing. Basinio's speaker not only shows a similar self-confidence as Ovid's poetic *persona*, but is even one step further than the ancient pretext: he has already developed a more mature poetic voice before writing his elegies. These elegiac poems are thereby presented not as a poetic pastime of the youth, but as part of a more elevated poetics. And indeed there is one *maius opus* that the historical Basinio had begun to write more or less contemporaneously with the *Cyris* – no tragedy, however, but his *epyllion Meleagris*. The first poem expresses that very clearly (*Cyr.*, 1.21-24):

> *Iamque vale, Meleagre! vocat me nostra puella.*
> *Fixisti horrendum cuspide tutus aprum;*
> *invenias alium tua qui tibi funera dicat:*
> *ingenio satis est te incaluisse meo.*
>
> Farewell, Meleager! My girl calls me. You have safely killed the dreadful boar with your spear; now you must find someone else to describe your funeral: it is enough that you have been roused through my talent.

Obviously, the writing of the *epyllion* has to pause when love elegy calls.[29] The choice to turn away from the elevated

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29 Also in the third poem of the *Cyris* we find a reference to the *Meleagris* (*Cyr.*, 3.41-44*): Haec manus aeternum solum tractavit Homerum / Virgiliumque simul Pieridesque deas; / haec manus Oenidem primis mihi lusit ab annis, / haec mea composuit te, Meleagre, manus* ("This hand has only held the eternal poets Homer and Vergil and the Muses. This hand has written a poem about the son of

themes of epic-like poetry is by no means a sign of weakness, but shows huge confidence: Meleager has been made alive by the implicit author Basinio, now someone else can let him die (again). It is no coincidence that the verses preceding the quote turn the classical *recusatio* (a poet declaring that writing epic is too heavy a burden for his shoulders) upside down: *et cuperem demens Mavortia bella referre / cum placidos possem tutus adire locos?* ("and should I insanely want to describe the wars of Mars, when I could safely come to pleasant places?"). Writing epic where elegy is the alternative would be mad – no alleged inability, but free choice turns the epic into an elegiac voice.

With the first poem of the *Cyris* and its ennobling of elegiac poetry against the epic tradition, Basinio is one of the most powerful champions of the cause of elegy in the early Italian *Quattrocento*. But he does not do so in order to diminish the value of epic-like poetry – while elegy is elevated to the level of a genre in need of good poets, such a poet must be in control of both voices: the epic (*genus grande*) and the elegiac one (*genus tenue*). This becomes especially visible if my hypothesis is valid that (part of) the *carmina varia* could have been part of the project of the *Cyris*. For the contention that he stopped working on the *Meleagris* cannot be taken at face value (and indeed, as far as we know, Basinio did finish his *epyllion* without any longer temporal break). Instead, elegy formed a necessary condition in order to be able to finalise the *Meleagris*. In the above mentioned *carmen varium* 3, the first two books of the *Meleagris* are sent to a friend

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Oeneus [i.e., Meleager] when I was very young: this hand of mine has composed you, Meleager").

for correction, the third will follow soon. That books 1 and 2 are closely connected to each other, is obvious. They thematise the hunting of the boar and end with a happy feast. Two verses, however, form a prelude to book 3 in which Meleager's love for Atalanta is narrated at length and which ends with the hero's death.[30] In order to achieve the thematic switch, the narrator has to modulate his voice and replace his epic sound with elegiac tones.[31]

I have highlighted the concept of "poetic voice", and indeed Basinio reflects on it rather explicitly. One of the recurring themes of the collection is the *puella* reading the poet's verses aloud. More closely than in the other early elegiac cycles of the *Quattrocento* that I know, love and poetry are interrelated and form an inseparable entity. Thereby I do not only mean that many poems contain poetological elements such as the one discussed above or in footnote 31, neither do I hint at the almost topical reference to Propertius 2.1.3-4 (one of the most successful elegiac

30 *Cf. Meleagris* 2.900-901: *Ille quidem fixos – quis enim seducat amantis? – / semper amans oculos adversa in virgine habebat*. ("The amorous Meleager, however, kept his eyes' sight firmly on the maiden opposite to him – for who could separate lovers?").

31 From such a perspective *Cyr.* 2, a poem about the elegiac speaker's metamorphoses, makes sense, as well: as he cannot be close to his beloved, he wishes to be transformed into the paper on which his own verses are written (2.9-10) and later into an elm tree on her grounds (2.23-24) in which birds would sing happy and *tenues* tunes because of Cyris being close to them. The imagined changes symbolise the speaker's transformation into an elegiac singer. This kind of allegorical-poetological metamorphoses is indebted to Petrarch's famous Metamorphoses-canzone, *Canzoniere* 23, which with its six Ovidian metamorphoses is deeply poetological and tells "the story how the narrator both fell in love and became a poet" (BAROLINI, 2009, pp. 33-62, here 50).

couplets in fifteenth-century elegy)[32] in *Cyris* 10.1-2, where the speaker declares that he does not need Apollo or the Muses for his poetry, which is instead inspired by love: *non sunt Calliopes, non sunt mihi numina Phoebi, / ingenuus nobis carmina dictat Amor* ("For me, Calliope or Phoebus Apollo's divinity do not exist; honest and noble love dictates my poems").[33] Basinio goes one step further: in the first instance his love for Cyris is awakened not by her beauty (although there is a description of her bodily perfection in *Cyr.*, 3.21-32), but by the girl sending him bouquets of flowers and reading the poems he sends her as gift in return. Her tender mouth (*tenerum os*) perfectly matches his tender verses (*tenerae Musae*), and her voice leads to a thrilled sigh (*ah!*) from the poetic speaker (*Cyr.*, 1.11-14):

> *Saepe illi teneras misi mea carmina Musas*
> *et saepe – ah! – tenero lectus ab ore fui*
> *et legor! atque enim repetit mea carmina Cyris,*
> *Cyris Apollineos digna referre sonos.*
>
> Often I have sent her my poems, my tender Muses, and often – ah! – I was read by her tender mouth. And I still am read! For

32 Propertius' verses are imitated, among others, by Giovanni Marrasio, *Angelinetum* 7.33f.; Giovanni Pontano, *Tumuli* 1.30.7; Fabrizio Genesio, *Elegiarum libellus* 16.1; Raffaele Zovenzoni, *Istrias* 2.54.7; Naldo Naldi, *Elegiae* 1.8.19 and 2.1.7; Ugolino Verino, *Flammetta* 2.42.57; and Bartolomeo Fonzio (della Fonte), *Saxettus* 12.3.

33 *Cf.* Prop., 2.1.3-4: *non haec Calliope, non haec mihi cantat Apollo. / ingenium nobis ipsa puella facit* ("Neither Calliope nor Apollo sing this for me; it is my girl who gives me inspiration"). It is a proof of Basinio's learned creativity that he replaces *ingenium* with the assonant *ingenuus*.

> Cyris repeatedly reads my poems, Cyris, who is worthy to produce Apollinean sounds.

In *Cyris* 4, a similar reference to the importance of reading is found. The elegy thematises the speaker's (and his Muses') departure to Modena. But he does not want to leave his beloved Cyris, for it is she who has introduced him to the world of classical poetry.[34] The verses refer to the afore-mentioned *imitatio Propertiana* with Amor (i.e., his love for Cyris) being the poet's only inspiration. They make the topical and somewhat dim statement surprisingly concrete: even Basinio's famous reverence for (and knowledge of) Homer is said to be connected to Cyris' intervention. Later, the poem offers an alternative for his departure: a joint trip of the happy couple to the poet's native city Parma (which, through Cyris' visit, would also be introduced to Homer's works, [*Parma*] *addiscet magni carmina Meonii*, 4.44).[35]

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34 *Cyr.*, 4.5-8: *illa colit vates, illi sunt carmina cordi; / quis Mutinae nobis Cyridos addat opes? / illa mihi dederat sacros legisse poetas / illa mihi magni carmina Meonii* ("She venerates great poets; poetry is dear to her heart; who could enlarge Cyris' richness with that of Modena? She had given me the holy poets to read, and she had given me the poetry of the great Homer").

35 It would also be a rewarding study to examine in detail the Italian topographies of Basinio's works. In *Cyris* 5, an autobiographical poem, his native Parma (*at mihi Parmensi felix natalis in agro / praebuit infantes tempora prima dies*, "a happy birthday in Parma's fields gave me the first years of my life, my youthful days", 5.19-20) is not the first city to be mentioned. Instead, the *radix* of the family in Mantua is stressed, and the city is labelled as holy (*ille ego, quem patriae docuerunt carmina Musae, / ubera cui tenero Mantua sancta dedit, / haec mihi prima fuit radix generisque domusque / hac fuit e patria Basiniana domus*, "I, whom the native Muses taught poetry, whom as tender boy holy Mantua fed with her breasts: this was the first root of my family and house; from this native land the house of Basinio has its origin", 5.15-18). Obviously, this is not only due to his

The apex of this blissful vision is reached immediately afterwards (*Cyr.*, 4.45-48):

> *Et mecum poterit nostros cantare poetas,*
> *Virgilius qualis, qualis Homerus erit.*
> *Forsitan et quondam cum carmina sancta legemus,*
> *iungemus sanctis oscula carminibus.*
>
> And she will be able to sing [the verses of] our poets with me; she will be like Vergil, like Homer. Perhaps we will also, while reading holy poems, join our kisses with the holy poems.

The verses are very complex through their several intersected symbolic images. The voice of the elegiac *puella* Cyris reaches transcendent spheres, her transformation into a Muse-like figure (speaking holy verses and inspiring the poet with her kiss) is complete. However, differently from the first two poems, where Basinio fell in love with Cyris because she read his poems, and where he wishes to become the page carrying his own poetry in order to be read by her, here Cyris is reading Vergil and Homer and thereby is transformed into the venerated ancient models of epic poetry herself. On the other hand, Basinio's poem stresses that Cyris reads the poetry together with the elegiac speaker: the joined recitation of Muse and poet leads to an ideal of poetic perfection in which inspiration and love are captured in one

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school years in Mantua, where he was pupil of Vittorino da Feltre and met Theodore Gaza (*cf.* CAMPANA, 1965, p. 89), but celebrates the historical roots of his family in Mantua. The epitheton *sanctus* reminds of the holy poet from Mantua, Vergil, whose inspiration is implicitly invoked with this reference.

image: the merging of reading and kissing[36] – the kisses themselves being an ambiguous symbol both for the fulfillment of elegiac love and for inspiration through a Muse's kiss.[37]

After having read these highly poetological verses, the beginning of the poem, in which Cyris introduces the elegiac speaker to Homer's works, makes sense, as well. When the *Cyris* is read as the biography of its implied author, this passage could seem contradictory as the reader has learned in the first poem that the implied author had been an epic writer before turning to love elegy. On a poetological level, however, the elegiac *puella* Cyris, introducing the model of all epic poetry, Homer, to the speaker, symbolises the ideal amalgam of epic and elegy that Basinio aims at with his two early works, the *Meleagris* and the *Cyris*.

4. *Conclusion*

For other authors of the *Quattrocento*, elegy also possessed a two-sided nature: it was presented as juvenile poetry and first works of the implied authors; but it also served as a proof of their moral integrity and, as such, as a transitional genre towards the

36 Note the iconic word order of v. 48 in which the kisses are visibly part of the *sancta carmina*.

37 In this context, the end of the collection is again very dense. The poet imagines Cyris having received his verses and wishing to merge with the booklet – i.e., to be turned into nothing else but poetry. *Cf. Cyr.*, 12.13-14 [*Cyris loquitur:*] *O fierem versus, fierem mea charta, tabella, / ingredererque tuos, littera parva, sinus.* ("[Cyris speaks:] O could I turn into verses and become my own paper, you book! And could I enter your bosom, little letter"). The hexameter is a verbal repetition of *Cyr.*, 2.7.

more elevated *epos*.[38] For Basinio, this transitional character is not completely absent. However it is not presented as the starting point of a poetic career; instead, elegy is closely intertwined with first epic attempts and is especially useful as a preparation for the epic treatment of love. In a way, Basinio thus stresses that love and *epos* have never been fully opposed to each other: on the contrary, love for him is a crucial thematic field of epic and tragedy and as such does not need to be ennobled – it has been nobilitated since Antiquity. Basinio thus adopts a holistic view on poetry and poets, one in which the high and the low belong together at any moment of a poet's career. If we may indeed assume that at least some of the *carmina varia* might have been planned as part of the *Cyris*, this idea would be intensified: a *eulogium* on the duke of Milan, a praise of the Virgin Mary, and of Leonello d'Este next to the amorous poems of the *Cyris*, the *Meleagris* always lurking at its back – all this shows in practice the variety of poetic voices a young man needs in order to deserve the name of poet. Of course, the epic voice that *Cyris* 4 so explicitly evokes remains the final benchmark to be reached, but the collection also makes it clear that it is not the only one. The question whether *epos* is the best and only option for the future career is problematised in the rather ironic poem 10, a long *recusatio* in classical style. After having stressed that love is the speaker's only impulse to write and that he will continue to write elegy as long as Cyris loves him, the last couplet returns to the model of Homer. The reader remembers that it has been introduced as the ideal junction between him and

38 See for this aspect PIEPER (2016, pp. 61-80, esp. 61 and 77).

his beloved, and thus as representing his ideal poetics, in *Cyris* 4. In the last verses of *Cyris* 10, the speaker reproaches himself that he, an uncultivated youngster (*agrestis*)[39], neglects Homer (10.39-40): *Nec colis, agrestis, magni tibi carmen Homeri? / Ocia sunt magnis insidiosa viris*. ("Don't you care for the poetry of great Homer, peasant? Leisure is cunning for great men"). The rebuke for having neglected Homer is balanced by the pentameter, which alludes to the last stanza of Catullus' famous *carmen* 51, where the poetic speaker's indulging in Sapphic poetry is similarly criticized by his alter ego.[40] In Catullus it is relatively obvious that this "second voice" is not more authoritative than the neoteric poetic voice of verses 1-12. Basinio's Catullian quotation is similarly ironic and serves the same aim: *epos* and elegy, high and low, are dialectically related to each other. Every reader (and every poet) has to decide time and again when and where the one is more powerful and more authoritative than the other.

39 *Cf.* the above mentioned characterisation in *Cyr*. 1.1.7 (*rudis et simplex*) and the remarks about this verse above.

40 *Cf.* Cat., 51.13: *otium, Catulle, tibi molestum est* ("pastime is inconvenient for you, Catullus").

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