



04  
2016

# Breaking the Rules

*Textual Reflections on  
Transgression*

The *Journal of the LUCAS Graduate Conference* was founded in 2013 to publish a selection of the best papers presented at the biennial LUCAS Graduate Conference, an international and interdisciplinary humanities conference organized by the Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society (LUCAS). The peer reviewed journal aims to publish papers that combine an innovative approach with fresh ideas and solid research and engage with the key theme of the LUCAS, the relationship and dynamics between the arts and society.

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# CONTENTS

# 04

- 1** Foreword  
*Barbara Rosenwein, Keynote Speaker, LUCAS Graduate Conference 2015*
- 4** Introduction  
*Editorial board JLGC-04*
- 8** Agobard of Lyon, Empire, and Adoptionism: Reusing Heresy to Purify the Faith  
*Rutger Kramer*
- 24** Model Speakers: the Subversive Potential of Reported Female Speech in the New Testament Gospels  
*Amanda Jarvis*
- 40** Sinful Catholics and Repentant Protestants? The Penitential Process in the Medieval and Early Modern Tradition of the *Twelve Virtues*  
*Ine Kiekens*
- 52** Restricted Movement: Dancing from Late Antiquity through the Early Middle Ages  
*Donatella Tronca*
- 64** Beyond the *flammantia moenia mundi*: the Transgressive Notion of the Sublime in Lucretius' *De rerum natura*  
*Giulia Bonasio*

# Breaking the Rules

# FOREWORD

## *BREAKING THE RULES!*

If we think about breaking the rules in the abstract, the topic seems straightforward. There are rules, written or unwritten. Some people break those rules. They have their reasons, and we can speculate about them. They are rewarded, or punished, or experience no consequences; we can trace these various results and talk about why they are the case.

But as soon as we try to apply these observations to particular cases, the issue suddenly becomes quite murky. Whose rules are broken when people break the rules? And are they breaking all rules in so doing? Even deviants, as sociologist Howard Becker has argued, create their own sorts of rules. Textual materials are said to follow rules of genre and grammar. But that means that poetry must break the rules of prose and that works in Korean must violate the grammar of writings in English. Adhering to one set of rules means breaking others.

The LUCAS Graduate Conference of 2015 brought together papers of remarkable variety, all treating the topic of transgression in one way or another. The texts taken up ranged from the Bible to modern novels. In the end, the theme that united them was less the crossing of boundaries

than the extraordinary variety of ways that human beings found to assert themselves with and against rules – and how they often associated with others in doing so.

One might consider the original Judeo-Christian transgressor to be Eve in the Garden of Eden. She knew God's prohibition not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil lest she die. Indeed, she repeated God's very words to the serpent. But she had good reasons to violate those words. First, the serpent assured her that she would not die. Second, she "saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise" (Genesis 3:6). She broke God's law not to transgress *per se*, but rather because she saw the benefits outweighing the drawbacks: she would probably not die (and we later learn that the serpent was not entirely wrong about that), and she would gain in nourishment, in pleasure, and in wisdom. Moreover, she knew that she was not alone; she immediately recruited her husband. Once she did so, you might say that there were two rule breakers; three if we count the serpent. But another way to view the matter is that these two (or three) were making their own rules. Those rules might roughly be summed up thus: eat food that is good; take pleasure in delights of the senses; and pursue wisdom at every opportunity.

Augustine recognized this new set of rules as original sin. Today we have largely adopted them as our own. But we may also recognize another

implication: transgression of one set of rules brings with it another set. Had Adam refused to eat, he would have violated Eve's new rules even as he adhered to God's. It is, then, I submit, impossible to break all rules. Transgression itself becomes so rule bound that the next movement needs to transgress it. The attempts to do so are, as the LUCAS Graduate Conference of 2015 shows, endlessly fascinating.



Barbara Rosenwein  
Loyola University Chicago

# INTRODUCTION

In a brief note in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* of 20 November 1931, essayist Walter Benjamin discussed what he called the ‘destructive character’, which he presented as someone who makes room for the new by clearing away existing traditionalist structures. Only when we, as researchers or thinkers in general, clear our thoughts of existing paradigms, he argued, can we break down the boundaries that obstruct new possibilities. As doctoral students of the Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society (LUCAS), we see an analogy between Benjamin’s figure and our institute’s scholars, who dedicate themselves to innovative research on the cusp between culture and society. Although LUCAS researchers use a variety of methods and study various periods from Antiquity to the present, they share the *a priori* agreement that their research aims at opening up new avenues and of breaking down boundaries: we study cultural communicative processes, and investigate the existing, though often implicit rules that form frameworks for interaction.

The theme of the third biannual LUCAS Graduate Conference, titled ‘Breaking the Rules! Cultural Reflections on Political, Religious and Aesthetic Transgressions’, aligned closely with this common aim. The conference, with keynote addresses by historian of science Lorraine Daston (Max Planck Institute, Berlin) and medievalist Barbara H. Rosenwein (Loyola University Chicago), featured no fewer than 45 graduate speakers from 30 international universities. Their diverse academic interests and methods matched the interdisciplinary and cross-cultural methods LUCAS supports, and made the event buzz with enthusiasm and energy. Five of the best conference papers are presented as articles in this fourth issue of the *Journal of the LUCAS Graduate Conference*. The current collection of articles reflects the variety of responses to transgressions in political, religious, and philosophical domains through the ages. Moreover, they are linked by another common thread: all five deal with transgressions that are recorded in texts.

Whereas the conference theme listed three distinct realms of transgression, the articles in this issue highlight the complex interactions between them. For instance, the interplay between religious and political motives is central to Rutger Kramer’s study of Archbishop Agobard of Lyon’s (d. 840) opposition to Adoptionist sentiments in the Carolingian Empire. Agobard’s argument against heterodox transgressions was first and foremost inspired by the belief that Christianity should form a unified whole. However, this theological argument had a deeper geopolitical purpose. Since Adoptionism developed just beyond the Empire’s borders, the Carolingians used the fight against this heterodoxy to extend their political influence into these areas formerly beyond their control in the name of Christian cohesion. Lastly, Agobard, as an up-and-coming courtier, was able to use the Adoptionist controversy to his own advantage, making a name for himself by taking a firm stance against it. Agobard denounced Adoptionism through written treatises, which in form closely followed all established rules of Carolingian debate. This ensured a positive reception of his texts at the imperial court, and



thus affirmed his authority in writing. As such, transgression does not only present those in authority with opportunities to reinforce the rules: in this case, reinforcement also proved an occasion for political expansion and, on a more personal level, career advancement. With his article, Kramer also reminds us that the alternating rejection and acceptance of certain rules establish them more firmly: boundaries become explicit when they are crossed and when that transgression is contested.

Transgression can also be found at the intersections of normative gender performance and cultural records. Amanda Jarvis addresses the subversive potential of reported female speech in the canonical Gospels, compared to the dominant public representations of contemporary Roman women. Jarvis first discusses how written accounts from first-century BCE Rome show that men primarily celebrated Roman women for their domestic virtues. This discourse, she argues, modelled representations of future generations of Roman women, and their potential to express themselves in public. Jarvis then demonstrates that several women in the Gospels were represented through the literary device of reported speech, such as the Samaritan women in the Gospel of John, and the witnesses to the Resurrection in the Gospel of Mark. The fact that these women are presented as having acted and spoken in public thwarts the preceding Roman paradigm. For their early Christian audience, these reports may have effectively provided a new model for future written representations as well as for women's opportunities to engage in public discourse. However, the fact that the Gospels' male authors persistently undercut women's credibility as witnesses, Jarvis suggests, may also have had an effect. This study argues that representations, in this case of women's public speech, both echo existing models and establish new ones. The event of rule-breaking thus becomes a necessarily temporary situation that must be continuously re-established to effectively question the status quo.

Ine Kiekens' article also showcases that normative frameworks develop and change as a result of being continuously contested rather than through abrupt abandonment of old models. Rejecting the decisive rupture in time and faith that is often assumed, she argues that penitential processes followed a continuous tradition in the medieval and early modern practices of both Catholics and Protestants in the Low Countries. Kiekens traces the reception of a late fourteenth-century Middle Dutch text, *Vanden twaelf dogheden*, which contains some theologically questionable claims about penance: the penitent should not regret his sins, and exterior works of penance are unnecessary. By examining how both Catholic and Protestant authors and compilers dealt with these problematic passages, she explores medieval and early modern ideas of proper behaviour after breaking God's rules. Kiekens' exploration demonstrates that both Catholics and Protestants considered the same (occasionally boundary-pushing) textual tradition about penance as a useful lesson for their repentant readers.

As Kiekens demonstrates, in our attempt to describe historical norms it seems we too eagerly create illusions of clean breaks, at which old frameworks are overthrown in favour of the new. This suggests that we tend to locate processes of rule-breaking at specific points in history, and that we sometimes rely upon discourses that perpetuate these structures so firmly that we face difficulty in stepping out of them. Donatella Tronca's article presents original criticisms of such a perpetuated discourse: that about the denunciation of dancing by early Christian authorities. She challenges the reductive but persistent misconception that the increasingly disputed legitimacy of dancing in religious ceremonies resulted from the Church's condemnation of dancing as a diabolical act. Tronca analyses various approaches to dancing from Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages, by both pagan and Christian authorities, either condemning or endorsing the practice. Judgments of dancing, she maintains, arose from religious and philosophical concerns about the relationship between physical acts and spiritual harmony. The Church strove to foster social harmony within its congregations, and dancing for other reasons was deemed incompatible with that ideal. The eventual result was a fundamental disapproval, not because dancing contradicted the spirit of Christ, but because it weakened the Church's interpretive authority and social control.

In the final article in this issue, Giulia Bonasio takes a contrasting approach to rule-breaking texts; she focuses not on social or political order, but on the individual's freedom of experience and thought. She draws attention to the first-century CE interpretation of the sublime by Lucretius in a reading of his poem *De rerum natura*. Our contemporary notion of the sublime, as nature's aesthetic quality of greatness, has been influenced by the eighteenth-century philosophies of Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant. Bonasio argues that Lucretius' much older notion of the sublime, despite sharing some similarities with other approaches, is particularly unique. She explains how Lucretius urges the individual to not only rationally investigate natural phenomena, but to also emotionally experience them; she dubs this notion 'the scientific-poetic sublime', since Lucretius envisages and describes it with the combined perspectives of the scientist and the poet. According to Bonasio, Lucretius' notion of the sublime is not only characterized by its ground-breaking approach, but also by its subversive content: *De rerum natura* uses the story of Epicurus to call for an active rejection of the era's superstition and political oppression. The sublime thus becomes a philosophical instrument for breaking the chains on individual autonomy of thought.

Each of these articles explores a transgressive scenario – and the reactions to it – in a particular historical period, religious or philosophical framework, and social context. The ambitious Carolingian archbishop, the witness-bearing Samaritan woman, (in)appropriately repentant Catholics and Protestants, diabolically dancing Christians, and the awe-struck Epicurean philosopher all illustrate the significance of rule-breaking as a cultural process. To begin to understand the human experience, the study of explicit and implicit political,

religious, and aesthetic boundaries must be complemented by analyses of the diverse ways in which these rules are contested, broken, and rebuilt. Interdisciplinary approaches prove to be fruitful on this topic, as, we hope the reader will agree, this issue shows.

Before we continue with the five articles in this issue of the *Journal of the LUCAS Graduate Conference*, we wish to express our gratitude to those who were so helpful in its development. Our publisher, Leiden University Library, and especially Birte Kristiansen, has offered continued assistance since the first issue was released in 2013. We also would like to thank Joy Burrough-Boenisch, both for her excellent guidance on the editorial process, and for her contagious enthusiasm for copy-editing. Barbara Rosenwein wrote the foreword of this issue, which we appreciate deeply. We also thank all authors who submitted a conference paper, yet specifically those five selected to publish their articles in this issue, for their patience and eager cooperation during the revision rounds and the editorial process. To the anonymous graduate peer reviewers from LUCAS and elsewhere, we owe our gratitude as well. We offer a special thanks to Leonor Veiga, who has been responsible for this issue's layout, and to Gerlov van Engelenhoven for contributing his ideas during the editing process. A final word of thanks is due to the LUCAS management team, Thony Visser, Geert Warnar, and Korrie Korevaart, for their sustained support.

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## THE ALTERNATING REJECTION AND ACCEPTANCE OF CERTAIN RULES

ESTABLISH THEM MORE FIRMLY:

BOUNDARIES BECOME EXPLICIT  
WHEN THEY ARE CROSSED AND WHEN  
THAT TRANSGRESSION IS CONTESTED

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# AGOBARD OF LYON, EMPIRE, AND ADOPTIONISM

## REUSING HERESY TO PURIFY THE FAITH

Rutger Kramer

Institute for Medieval Research, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna, Austria

**ABSTRACT** — *In the late eighth century, the heterodox movement Adoptionism emerged at the edge of the Carolingian realm. Initially, members of the Carolingian court considered it a threat to the ecclesiastical reforms they were spearheading, but they also used the debate against Adoptionism as an opportunity to extend their influence south of the Pyrenees. While they thought the movement had been eradicated around the turn of the ninth century, Archbishop Agobard of Lyon claimed to have found a remnant of this heresy in his diocese several decades later, and decided to alert the imperial court. This article explains some of his motives, and, in the process, reflects on how these early medieval rule-breakers (real or imagined) could be used in various ways by those making the rules: to maintain the purity of Christendom, to enhance the authority of the Empire, or simply to boost one's career at the Carolingian court.*

1 Alan H. Goldman, "Rules and Moral Reasoning," *Synthese* 117 (1998/1999), 229-50; Jim Leitzel, *The Political Economy of Rule Evasion and Policy Reform* (London: Routledge, 2003), 8-23.

### INTRODUCTION

If some rules are meant to be broken, others are only formulated once their existence satisfies a hitherto unrealized need. Unspoken rules are codified – and thereby become institutions – once they have been stretched to their breaking

point and their existence is considered morally right or advantageous to those in a position to impose them.<sup>1</sup> Conversely, the idea that rules can be broken at all rests on the assumption that they reflect some kind of common interest; if unwanted rules are simply imposed on a group by an authority, conflict may ensue and be resolved along different mechanisms.<sup>2</sup> Codified behaviour thus demonstrates the existence of an almost paradoxical interplay between societal norms, perceived popular needs, and pastoral power.<sup>3</sup>

Regardless of whether regulations are created for conservative or progressive reasons, making or enforcing rules is a matter of social power, authority, and acknowledging them.<sup>4</sup> Authority is derived as much from the ability to act as a guarantor of order as from the visibility of that act; as such, the acceptance or rejection of rules also strengthens the bond between rulers and their subjects, and between subjects themselves.<sup>5</sup> Matters were no different during the Carolingian period.<sup>6</sup> It was a time when cultural ideas were reinvented, when courtly and ecclesiastical ideologies recombined into a political structure that, though hierarchical, aimed at fostering a collective sense of responsibility for the whole of Christendom.<sup>7</sup> Merely debating the limits of orthodoxy, thinking about the extent of certain rules, and attempting to enforce them, had become part of the pastoral duty of everybody in a position of authority.<sup>8</sup>

One of these people was Archbishop Agobard of Lyon (r. 816-839, d. 840), a colourful character with an interest in the consideration and reconsideration of rules.<sup>9</sup> After a short overview of his early career, this article highlights Agobard's attempts to bring attention to a heterodox movement several decades after it ceased to be a threat to the Carolingian Church. By explaining what this supposed heresy was about, the archbishop could reiterate what its existence meant for the Frankish Empire and how it was everyone's duty to ensure some rules remained unbroken. Thus, he participated in a context where debate was encouraged, and conflicts over orthodoxy were seen as part of a necessary discourse of authority, pastoral power, and imperial responsibilities.

2 Alan Segal, "Portnoy's Complaint and the Sociology of Literature," *The British Journal of Sociology* 22 (1971), 257-68; see also Warren C. Brown and Piotr Górecki, "What Conflict Means: The Making of Medieval Conflict Studies in the United States 1970-2000," in *Conflict in Medieval Europe: Changing Perspectives on Society and Culture*, eds. Warren C. Brown and Piotr Górecki (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 1-35.

3 John Forrester, "Foucault's Face: The Personal and the Theoretical," in *Foucault Now: Current Perspectives in Foucault Studies*, ed. James D. Faubion (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 112-29.

4 Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power Volume 1: A History of Power from the Beginning to AD 1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), esp. 1-33, 301-40 and 373-415. On authority as "something more than power", see Frank Furedi, *Authority: A Sociological History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1-16.

5 Alan H. Goldman, "The Rationality of Complying with Rules: Paradox Resolved," *Ethics* 116 (2006), 453-70; Robert Wuthnow, *Communities of Discourse: Ideology and Social*

*Structure in the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and European Socialism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 1-22.

6 Mann, Sources of Social Power, 327-35; Thomas F. X. Noble, "Kings, Clergy and Dogma: The Settlement of Doctrinal Disputes in the Carolingian World," in *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald*, ed. Stepher Baxter et al. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 237-52, esp. 244-45 and 252; Ildar H. Garipzanov, *The Symbolic Language of Authority in the Carolingian World* (c. 751-877) (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

7 Giles Brown, "Introduction: The Carolingian Renaissance," in *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1-51; Janet L. Nelson, "Charlemagne and Empire," in *The Long Morning of Medieval Europe: New Directions in Early Medieval Studies*, eds. Jennifer R. Davis and Michael McCormick (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 223-34.

8 Irene van Renswoude, "License to Speak: The Rhetoric of Free Speech in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages" (PhD diss., Utrecht University, 2011), 137-73 and 259-83.

## AGOBARD AND THE CAROLINGIAN CHURCH REFORMS

Hailing from the south of Aquitaine, a melting pot of Roman, Visigothic, Frankish, and other local identities, Archbishop Agobard emerged at the Carolingian court from a provincial, if not peripheral background.<sup>10</sup> Although Aquitaine was long seen as a region where Roman and early Christian traditions had persisted much more visibly than in other parts of the former Empire in the West, its integration into the Frankish sphere of influence, completed by 768, had resulted from hard-fought battles and skilful diplomatic manoeuvring, and occurred as the Carolingian frontiers were expanding both territorially and culturally.<sup>11</sup> Especially from the 780s onwards, the court around Charlemagne became the cultural, social, and political centre *par excellence*, from whence ever greater efforts were poured into all-encompassing ecclesiastical reforms (*correctio*).<sup>12</sup> Over the decades, liturgical and theological inconsistencies were debated, the behaviour of the clergy tested, and a grand endeavour to edit and explain the many books of the Bible undertaken.<sup>13</sup> The goal of all this was nothing less than the salvation of all the realm's subjects.<sup>14</sup> According to fundamental texts such as the *Admonitio generalis* (789) or the *Epistola de litteris colendis* (c. 781), bishops, counts, abbots, as well as the lowest parishioners, should have the tools to live well and thereby attain heaven.<sup>15</sup> Since 'knowing comes before doing', it stands to reason that education was key in achieving this.<sup>16</sup>

To ensure that *correctio* was properly orchestrated from the court, Charlemagne gathered a group of talented scholars and intellectuals from all over his realm and beyond, a practice continued by his son Louis the Pious (r. 814-840).<sup>17</sup> *Correctio* was a collective effort, and these courtiers were its standard-bearers, responsible for its implementation.<sup>18</sup> It was an honourable but heavy burden, and only the best and brightest were able to thrive in the court's competitive environment as it developed around the palace in Aachen.<sup>19</sup> For aspiring courtiers like Agobard of Lyon, it was of the utmost importance to show that he had what it took intellectually, and that he always had the Empire's best interests at heart.

This drive to prove himself absorbed much of Agobard's energy throughout his career. Peripheral or not, Agobard wanted his voice to be heard.<sup>20</sup> In part, this was a matter of principle. It was important for all prelates to show their active participation in the Carolingian *correctio* movement, as they had, over the years, established themselves as the prophetic "watchmen over the house of Israel", a phrase borrowed from Ezekiel 3:17, with Israel symbolically representing the Frankish Church.<sup>21</sup> Bishops were to seek out any errant sheep and bring them back into the fold, so as to protect the ecclesiastical herd. In addition to fulfilling this pastoral calling, Agobard hit the ground running in 816 when he was appointed bishop by his still-living predecessor Leidrad rather than elected by his colleagues or the Emperor.<sup>22</sup> This unconventional elevation to the prestigious See of Lyon prompted a debate about whether it should even be possible for a see to have two bishops.<sup>23</sup> While the matter was ultimately resolved by Leidrad's death later in 816, the circumstances regarding his rise to prominence may have made Agobard sensitive to the importance of correct ecclesiastical order, which influenced his sense of pastoral duty towards the Empire.

If anything, Agobard's career demonstrates his tenacity and intellectual prowess. He knew his strengths, and was aware that the way to the Emperor's ear was through his courtiers.<sup>24</sup> Despite the occasional misstep, such as an ill-timed sermon on church property on the occasion of Louis the Pious' first public penance at Attigny in 822, or backing the wrong horse during the 'crisis years' between Louis, his sons, and various groups of disgruntled aristocrats, the archbishop managed to create a niche by preaching ecclesiastical unity and purity to all who would hear it. In the process, he also framed his own place at the Carolingian court within the *ecclesia* it was building.<sup>25</sup>

Given this emphasis on the idea that Christianity should form a unified whole, it is no surprise that Agobard was interested in rules, their application, and those breaking them. He was, for example, particularly bothered by anyone in his

9 For a biography of Agobard, see Egon Boshof, *Erzbischof Agobard von Lyon: Leben und Werk* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1969).

10 Philippe Wolff, "L'Aquitaine et ses marges sous le règne de Charlemagne," in *Regards sur le Midi médiéval*, ed. Philippe Wolff (Toulouse: Privat, 1978), 20-67.

11 Marios Costambeys, Matthew Innes, and Simon MacLean, *The Carolingian World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 47-48 and 64-65; Eugen Ewig, "L'Aquitaine et les pays rhénans au Haut Moyen Âge," in *Eugen Ewig: spätantikes und fränkisches Gallien – Gesammelte Schriften (1952-1973)*, ed. Hartmut Atsma (Munich: Artemis, 1976), 553-72; Thomas F. X. Noble, "Louis the Pious and the Frontiers of the Frankish Realm," in *Charlemagne's Heir: New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814-840)*, eds. Peter Godman and Roger Collins (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 333-47.

12 Percy Ernst Schramm, "Karl der Große: Denkart und Grundauffassungen – die von ihm bewirkte Correctio," *Historische Zeitschrift* 198 (1964), 306-45.

13 For a broad study see Rosamond McKitterick, *The Frankish Church and the Carolingian Reforms, 789-895* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977). See also Thomas F. X. Noble, "The Monastic Ideal as a Model for Empire," *Revue Bénédictine* 86 (1976), 235-50; John Contreni, "Carolingian Biblical Studies," in *Carolingian Essays: Andrew W. Mellon Lectures in Early Christian Studies*, ed. Uta-Renate Blumenthal (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1983), 71-98; Geneviève Bührer-Thierry, "Le conseiller du roi: les écrivains carolingiens et la traduction biblique," *Médiévales* 12 (1987), 11-23.

14 Janet L. Nelson, "Religion in the Age of Charlemagne," in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Christianity*, ed. John H. Arnold (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 490-514; Mayke de Jong, "Charlemagne's Church," in *Charlemagne: Empire and Society*, ed. Joanna Story (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 103-36. "Admonitio generalis," in *MGH Fontes iuris Germanici antiqui in usum scholarum separatim editi 16: Die Admonitio generalis Karls des Großen*, eds. Hubert Mordek, Klaus Zechiel-Eckes, and Michael Glatthaar (Hannover: Hahn, 2012); "Epistola de litteris

diocese invoking 'Burgundian' law, which allowed for trial by combat, a practice that he found so distasteful that he composed two treatises against it.<sup>26</sup> More importantly, however, this multitude of laws contradicted the sacrifice made by Christ on the Cross in order to bring unity to the "circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian and Scythian, Aquitanian and Langobard, Burgundian and Alaman, slave and free".<sup>27</sup> A single law, he went on to argue, would bring the Empire one step closer to that ideal, and therefore Emperor Louis the Pious ought to make Salic Law the one definitive legal system. A universal framework, the Church, had been put in place to define sins, their spiritual consequences, and how to avoid them. Agobard advocated a similar institutional framework for those breaking worldly rules, so that divine and secular law would be brought closer together still, in accordance with his ideas about *correctio*.<sup>28</sup>

A similar rhetoric belied the treatises he produced against Jews. The continued existence of Jews in the so-called Christian Empire was a thorn in Agobard's side, and he frequently pursued the Emperor and his entourage with advice on which privileges Jews should be allowed to retain, or more importantly why they should be baptized.<sup>29</sup> It was on the first point especially that Agobard stood out. While a certain degree of anti-Jewish rhetoric is to be expected from early medieval ecclesiastical elites, it usually remained on a theological level.<sup>30</sup> By and large, Jews were tolerated and enjoyed considerable freedom and status under the Carolingians.<sup>31</sup> While converting to Judaism was generally frowned upon – as in the case of Bodo-Eleazar, a deacon who converted and moved to Spain – Jews were neither prosecuted, nor subjected to concerted conversion efforts.<sup>32</sup> This rubbed Agobard the wrong way, and he spent many a quill decrying their errors. Much to his frustration, however, this often fell on deaf ears at court.<sup>33</sup> Still, as with the multitude of legal options available in the Frankish realm, one of Agobard's primary concerns was the preservation of ecclesiastical unity.<sup>34</sup> As unpleasant as his vitriolic diatribes are to modern audiences, they should be – at least partially – understood as a defence of a Christendom that, he felt, remained beleaguered on all sides.<sup>35</sup> Agobard's agenda was pastoral. His duty



was to educate people about the dangers of straying too far from the straight path, regardless of whether they were Jewish or Burgundian, proper sinners or simply ignorant of Christian teaching.<sup>36</sup>

To Agobard, Christian teaching on the proper way of life formed the basis of good behaviour, and the rules that emerged from the framework of imperial *correctio* provided Christians with everything they needed to lead proper Christian lives as explained by their pastors.<sup>37</sup> To break the rules was to hold a mirror to the system, to show the dangers of walking a different path. To Agobard, rules existed so that Christians could show their ability to weather the tribulations of earthly life without flinching. Parishioners and princes alike shared this burden. “Let him heed divine judgement”, Agobard wrote in 833, reflecting on Louis the Pious’ political troubles, “for nothing on this earth happens without a reason”. “The Lord”, he continued, quoting Job 12:24, “changes the heart of the princes of the earth’s people, and deceives them that they walk in vain where there is no way’ [...]. Therefore the Lord is terrible, not only to the people of the earth but also to the princes of those people”.<sup>38</sup> According to Agobard, everyone ought to guard against worldly trouble, and rulers even more so, for their transgressions would have repercussions on an altogether grander, cosmological scale.<sup>39</sup>

It is in this context of *correctio* that we should regard one of Agobard’s earlier works, which is the focus of the remainder of this article. It was written in or shortly after 818, two years after Agobard became Archbishop of Lyon, at a time when *correctio* was in full swing. More importantly, he began its composition in the same year that the primary rule-breaker against whom Agobard directed his energy had died. This treatise is titled *Adversum dogma Felicis* (Against the Teaching of Felix). The Felix in question had been the Bishop of Urgell, just south of the Pyrenees, who had spent his years from 799 until his death as an exile in Lyon in 818, accused of being that most heinous of transgressors: a heretic.<sup>40</sup>

colendis,” in *MGH Capitularia regum Francorum 1*, ed. Alfred Boretius (Hannover: Hahn, 1883), 78-79.

16 “Epistola de litteris colendis,” 79; Florence Close, *Uniformiser la foi pour unifier l’Empire. Contribution à l’histoire de la pensée politico-théologique de Charlemagne* (Brussels: Classe des Lettres, Académie royale de Belgique, 2011), 299-301.

17 Rosamond McKitterick, *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 292-345.

18 Carine van Rhijn, “Priests and the Carolingian Reforms: The Bottlenecks of Local *Correctio*,” in *Texts and Identities in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Richard Corradini et al. (Vienna: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2006), 219-38; Carine van Rhijn, “Charlemagne and the Government of the Frankish Countryside,” in *Law and Empire: Ideas, Practices, Actors*, ed. J. Duindam et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 157-76; Geneviève Bühler-Thierry, “Pensée hiérarchique et différenciation sociale: quelques réflexions sur l’ordonnement des sociétés du haut Moyen Âge,” in *Hiérarchie et stratification*

*sociale dans l'Occident médiéval (400-1100)*, eds. Dominique Iogna-Prat, François Bougard and Régine Le Jan (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 363-90.

19 Claire Tigolet, "Jeux poétiques à la cour de Charlemagne: compétition et intégration," in *Agôn. La compétition Ve-XIe siècle*, eds. François Bougard, Régine Le Jan and Thomas Lienhard (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 221-34; Stuart Airlie, "'For It Is Written in the Law': Ansegis and the Writing of Carolingian Royal Authority," in Baxter et al., *Early Medieval Studies*, 219-35.

20 In addition to Boshof, Stuart Airlie, "'I, Agobard, unworthy bishop,'" in *Ego Trouble: Authors and Their Identities in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Richard Corradini et al. (Vienna: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2010), 175-84, provides an insight into the mind of this bishop and his ambitions; Pierre Riché, "Les réfugiés wisigoths dans le monde carolingien," in *L'Europe héritière de l'Espagne wisigothique: colloque international du C.N.R.S. tenu à la Fondation Singer-Polignac* (Paris, 14-16 mai 1990), eds. Jacques Fontaine and Christine Pellistrandi (Madrid: Casa de Velazquez, 1992), 177-83.

## ADOPTIONISM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Felix of Urgell was one of the main instigators of the Iberian variant of a heterodox movement more commonly known as Adoptionism, which emerged on the peninsula in the second half of the eighth century, right when the Carolingians were striving to consolidate their recently expanded frontiers and keep Umayyad incursions into their realm at bay.<sup>41</sup> This is partly why the Carolingians took an interest in this particular movement; it added a theological and pastoral challenge to their more worldly preoccupations with expanding and safeguarding their territories.<sup>42</sup>

This is not to say that the Carolingian intellectuals involved in this debate had a clear picture of what was going on. At the instigation of Pope Hadrian I (r. 772-795), through whom the Carolingian court first learned of this heterodoxy, it was thought that Adoptionism was a form of Nestorianism.<sup>43</sup> Based on early Eastern Christian teachings, this heresy proclaimed that Christ's nature was essentially bipartite: he was a 'natural' son of God and an 'adopted' one.<sup>44</sup> That was how the intellectuals at the court in Aachen, chief among them Alcuin of York, understood it; modern reinterpretations have pointed out that the controversy may have been rooted in the differing roles of patristic discourse on each side of the Pyrenees.<sup>45</sup> But the cat was out of the bag, and Felix, together with his colleague, Archbishop Elipandus of Toledo (c. 755-c. 808), was charged with misrepresenting the nature of the Trinity itself.<sup>46</sup>

Even if this *Hispanicus error* was based on a misunderstanding, it was nonetheless worthy of attention.<sup>47</sup> Such different views of Christ gnawed at the roots of their model Church, and should not be allowed to spread.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, Carolingian interest in this presumed heterodoxy allowed them to exert their influence over territories with Christian communities beyond their control. If the court was where correct practice was shaped, this practice should be exported to all subjects of the Empire; such was the pastoral zeal of those living in the *sacrum palatium* of the Frankish rulers.<sup>49</sup> Another problem was that these were

bishops propagating Adoptionist teachings, since this contravened the carefully cultivated self-image of the Carolingian episcopate, according to which there should be a divinely inspired and imperially formulated consensus about their responsibilities for the wellbeing of the Church both in this life and the next.<sup>50</sup> As such, it should involve someone who was *rex et sacerdos* – king and priest – at the same time.<sup>51</sup> Even Pope Hadrian acknowledged that his was a job for Charlemagne and his court.<sup>52</sup> As important as it was to nip Adoptionism in the bud from a theological point of view, it was equally important to incorporate the Spanish bishops into the Frankish community while doing so, as this would also enhance the power and prestige of the Carolingian court itself.<sup>53</sup> Taking the lead in combating heresy was not only about doctrinal uniformity, it was also a way to gain credibility as a Christian court, to show their subjects and neighbours alike that they had what it took to be good rulers.<sup>54</sup>

The multifaceted nature of this debate explains why so many Carolingian intellectuals became involved. Between the first appearance of Adoptionism on the Frankish scene and its final suppression at the turn of the ninth century, practically everyone who was anyone at court weighed in on this matter, by preaching, composing treatises, writing letters, or being present at the councils devoted to this movement held in 792, 794, and 799.<sup>55</sup> Important courtiers such as Alcuin, bishops and papal delegates including Paulinus of Aquileia, and monastic reformers such as Benedict of Aniane found increasingly interesting ways to convince their Iberian counterparts that they were errant sheep. They too seized the opportunity to fight for the greater good as much as they were out to strengthen their own position. These courtiers were vying for *Königsnähe*, a place close to the throne where their ideas and authority were heard and their involvement was visible.<sup>56</sup> By combating Adoptionism and chastising the supposed rule-breakers, they showed that they were willing to play by the rules.<sup>57</sup> They worked comfortably within the parameters set by the “most holy authority” of the court – personified by its ruler – through whose instruction, as Alcuin wrote, “the starving people who live in deserted places are sated with the catholic faith”.<sup>58</sup>

21 Mayke de Jong, *The Penitential State: Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814-840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 114-18; Mary Garrison, “The Franks as the New Israel? Education for an Identity from Pippin to Charlemagne,” in *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages*, eds. Yitzhak Hen and Matthew Innes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 114-61.

22 Anna Beth Langenwalter, “Agobard of Lyon: An Exploration of Carolingian-Jewish Relations” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2009), 57-60.

23 Van Renswoude, “License to Speak,” 299-300.

24 Airlie, “‘I, Agobard’,” 176; Philippe Depreux, “Lieux de rencontre, temps de négociation: quelques observations sur les plaids généraux sous le règne de Louis le Pieux,” in *La royauté et les élites dans l’Europe carolingienne*, ed. Régine Le Jan (Lille: Centre d’Histoire de l’Europe du Nord-Ouest, 1998), 213–31, at 231; Philippe Depreux, “Hiérarchie et ordre au sein du palais: l’accès au prince,” in Iogna-Prat, Bougard and Le Jan, *Hiérarchie et stratification*, 305-24.

25 Van Renswoude, "License to Speak", 295-316; De Jong, *Penitential State*, esp. 124-26 and 220-40; Courtney Booker, *Past Convictions: The Penance of Louis the Pious and the Decline of the Carolingians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 130-77. See also Steffen Patzold, "Eine 'loyale Palastrevolution' der 'Reichseinheitspartei'? Zur *Divisio Imperii* von 817 und zu den Ursachen des Aufstands gegen Ludwig den Frommen in Jahre 830," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 40 (2006), 43-77.

26 However, Janet L. Nelson, "Kingship and Empire," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c.350-c.1450*, ed. James H. Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 211-52, at 213, points out that Agobard's proposed solution was equally impractical.

See also Boshof, *Agobard*, 39, and Ian Wood, "Ethnicity and the Ethnogenesis of the Burgundians," in *Typen der Ethnogenese unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Bayern*, Teil 2, eds. Herwig Wolfram and Walter Pohl (Vienna: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1990), 54.

27 Agobard, "Adversus legem Gundobadi," 3: "circumcisio et preputium, barbarus et Scitha,

On the other side, the Spanish bishops also engaged with their Frankish counterparts, in person and in writing, even though the outcome of the debate may have been pre-determined.<sup>59</sup> It is tempting to think they saw some advantages to this, too: debating the *fine fleur* of Carolingian intellectual life would not only give them credibility at a local level, but also allowed them to have their voice heard on a grander scale.<sup>60</sup> This they did with gusto. While defending their point of view, the Spanish bishops warned Alcuin against becoming a heretic and false advisor himself.<sup>61</sup> They admonished Charlemagne not to abuse his power like Constantine the Great, who also had Christianity's best interests at heart but ended up a sinner and heretic.<sup>62</sup> Going beyond doctrinal matters, these bishops even seized the opportunity to dispense appropriate political advice. It was an acceptable strategy. Both in his rebuttal to the Spanish bishops, and as a general part of court policy, Charlemagne – and his successors – fostered a climate where courtiers were allowed to criticize and admonish their rulers as long as they avoided outright invective.<sup>63</sup> Elipandus and Felix may have been accused of heresy, but they certainly were not breaking the rules of debate itself.

All things considered, the ensuing debates show the willingness of both parties to at least pretend to take their opponents seriously. The emergence of Adoptionism gave cause for Carolingian intellectual elites to defend their faith and establish consensus about the nature of the Trinity. It also enabled them to close their ranks and strengthen their own somewhat disparate community. By overstepping the boundaries of acceptable religious diversity, the Adoptionist bishops had handed the Carolingians a tool to build new religious norms that were previously unnecessary and unheard of.<sup>64</sup> In the process, they too became part of the ever-growing Carolingian *ecclesia*.

#### THE LEGACY OF FELIX

Although the actual Adoptionist movement had run out of steam by the start of the ninth century, it had not completely disappeared from the agenda for

decades. Shortly after ascending to the imperial throne in 814, Louis the Pious was confronted with a resurgence of the Adoptionism issue around 818, in the midst of his attempts to continue his father's legacy.<sup>65</sup> The instigator of this renewed confrontation was the newly appointed Archbishop of Lyon, Agobard.

Agobard claimed that he had found a remnant of Adoptionist teachings among writings left by Felix after his death in 818, written in a "document of the genre of questions and answers".<sup>66</sup> Apparently, the Spanish bishop formally recanted his teachings, but had never given up his beliefs and, worse yet, may have convinced others with his arguments. Notably, Felix had managed to do this by leading an impeccable life, following the rules, and thereby deceiving his friends and admirers. This was cause for alarm, "for", as Agobard wrote, "they do not realize that faith is not measured by the life of a man, but that life is demonstrated through faith". No matter how much people played by the rules, they needed to internalize their faith in order to be open to *correctio*: "nobody will be saved who believes badly but lives well".<sup>67</sup> It was now Agobard's responsibility to aid those who had misinterpreted Felix's words "with which he went beyond the true faith", and to "oppose [these words] with the sentences of the Holy Fathers, so that whomever would deign to read this may realize that the surety of catholic truth is followed with the purest senses".<sup>68</sup> This is pastoral duty and Carolingian *correctio* at its finest: Agobard protecting those who do not know better, and teaching them "so that they may subtly correct their faith".<sup>69</sup> It is everyone's duty to help and teach each other, he writes, whereas those who are too proud of their own unblemished record to aid others in their struggles "will find fault with everybody in the community" and therefore "cannot please him, who said 'learn from me; I am gentle and humble of heart'" [Matt. 11:29].<sup>70</sup>

What follows is a systematic takedown of Felix's arguments, reconstructed from the booklet found by Agobard, combined with what he had been told.<sup>71</sup> Still assuming he was dealing with a kind of Nestorianism, Agobard presented a dossier of quotations from a large group of Greek and Latin Church Fathers. Although

Aquitanus et Langobardus, Burgundio et Alamannus, seruus et liber", in *Agobardi Lugdunensis opera omnia*, ed. Lieven van Acker, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis 52 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981), 20. Unless otherwise mentioned, all translations by Rutger Kramer.

28 Langenwalter, "Agobard," 66.

29 Langenwalter, "Agobard," 140-41 – these paragraphs summarize Langenwalter's argument made in the course of the entire thesis.

30 Johannes Heil, "Labourers in the Lord's Quarry: Carolingian Exegetes, Patristic Authority, and Theological Innovation, a Case Study in the Representation of Jews in Commentaries on Paul," in *The Study of the Bible in the Carolingian Era*, eds. Celia Chazelle and Burton van Name Edwards (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 75-95; but see by the same author, "Theodulf, Haimo, and Jewish Traditions of Biblical Learning: Exploring Carolingian Culture's Lost Spanish Heritage," in *Discovery and Distinction in the Early Middle Ages: Studies in Honour of John J. Contreni*, eds. Cullen J. Chandler and Steven Stofferahn (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2013), 103-34, on how Christian

and Jewish intellectuals could also cooperate.

31 Bernard S. Bachrach, *Early Medieval Jewish Policy in Western Europe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 66-105.

32 Frank Riess, "From Aachen to al-Andalus: The Journey of Deacon Bodo (823–76)," *Early Medieval Europe* 13 (2005), 131-57.

33 Bat-Sheva Albert, "Christians and Jews," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity Volume 3: Early Medieval Christianities, c.600-c.1100*, eds. Thomas F. X. Noble and Julia M. H. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 175, even assumes this was why Louis and Agobard "despised" each other.

34 See Cullen J. Chandler, "A New View of a Catalanian *Gesta contra Iudaeos*: Ripoll 106 and the Jews of the Spanish March," in Chandler and Stofferahn, *Discovery and Distinction*, 187-204, for similar ideas underlying another text corpus.

35 Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 136.

it is unclear to what extent he based his arguments on earlier anti-Adoptionist treatises rather than his own research, he was sure to follow common Carolingian rules of debate. Among many other things, the Frankish bishops accused their Spanish colleagues of having gone beyond the teachings of the Fathers, as if they were not good enough. Agobard avoided this mistake by carefully teaching only those venerable certainties which had been proven by age.<sup>72</sup> He even went one step further: for him, the "sentences of the Holy Fathers" that should help his readers purify their faith were like a *regula* (rule), rather than mere guidelines.<sup>73</sup> Concluding this passage with an admonitory quotation from the Athanasian Creed that those who do not follow the catholic faith "shall doubtless perish everlastingly",<sup>74</sup> Agobard thus steered a course between persuasion and admonition, between what his intended audience should know, and what ought to be self-explanatory. He essentially reinforced religious normativity in the face of a supposedly heterodox movement, but he presented his argument as the confirmation of a rule and demonstration of the truth. For "it is the truth that is loved, not words", he writes, and that is why it was necessary to compose this work and to send it to the court.<sup>75</sup>

It is here that we see an ulterior motive to the *Adversum dogma Felicis*. This composition was not a sermon for the instruction of his diocese, nor was it intended for potential 'victims' of Felix. Agobard's refutation of Adoptionism was instead dedicated to Emperor Louis the Pious, who, as the intended recipient of the work, also appears as the model reader. While it was not unusual for the imperial court to patronize of this type of work, it also demonstrates Agobard's adherence to the Carolingian system, within which the ruler bore the greatest responsibility for teaching his Empire.<sup>76</sup> As explicated in its prologue, Louis the Pious was called upon to correct and approve of the *opusculum* Agobard composed against this "heresy, reused from the ancients".<sup>77</sup> The threat still lurked, and it was up to the Emperor to "recommend [Agobard's book] to those for whom it may be advantageous to read", that is, those who may have been affected by subversive teaching.<sup>78</sup> It is unclear whether those who had been

exposed to Felix's teachings were meant, or simply those whose faith needed to be refreshed. Agobard seized the occasion to explain, referencing Paul's letter to Titus, that "those who would want to be a priest 'must hold firmly to the truths which have tradition for their warrant; able, therefore, to encourage sound doctrine, and to show the wayward their error'" [1 Tim 1:9].<sup>79</sup> The statement is a double-edged sword: Agobard is reflecting on his own position as bishop, and emphasizes the expectation that he advise and help the Emperor run his realm, while also evoking Louis' own position as *rex et sacerdos* at the secular and ecclesiastical centre of the Empire. Presenting Louis with the tools to teach others about "the Son of God, who supports [his] *imperium*", Agobard subtly implied that by teaching others about Christ's true nature he would also strengthen his own position.<sup>80</sup>

It is unclear if Adoptionism remained a threat in 818. Although the appearance of the *Adversum dogma Felicis* so shortly after the death of Felix can hardly have been a coincidence, and despite persistent memories of the heterodoxy, it seems likely that Agobard oversold the importance of Felix's legacy, and used the memory of Adoptionism as a pretext for writing an educational text to the Emperor.<sup>81</sup> This makes sense from his perspective: he was a young prelate, out to make a name for himself, to demonstrate that his appointment to the archiepiscopacy had been deserved, and that he was part of the admonitory tradition of his predecessors.<sup>82</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The debate about Adoptionism was not a matter of us versus them, or about a Church falling apart under the pressure of those unwilling to play by the rules.<sup>83</sup> The issue even brought the conflicting parties closer together, as the willingness to debate and the ability to communicate took precedence over conservatism and persecution.<sup>84</sup> The spectre of Adoptionism was used to strengthen the internal structure of the Carolingian Empire and to consolidate the authority

36 Bruce Eastwood, *Ordering the Heavens: Roman Astronomy and Cosmology in the Carolingian Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 170-77; Alexander Murray, *Conscience and Authority in the Medieval Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 7-8.

37 An idea borrowed from Roger Teichmann, "Explaining the Rules," *Philosophy* 77 (2002), 597-613.

38 Agobard, "Liber apologeticus II," 12: "Cedat diuinis iudiciis, quia nihil in terra sine causa"; "Qui inmutat cor principum populi terrę et decipit eos, ut frustra incedant per inuium.'[...] Ideo ergo terribilis Dominus, non tantum populis terrę, sed et ipsis principibus populi."

39 Rob Meens, "Politics, Mirrors of Princes and the Bible: Sins, Kings and the Well-Being of the Realm," *Early Medieval Europe* 7 (1998), 345-57.

40 See John C. Cavadini, *The Last Christology of the West: Adoptionism in Spain and Gaul, 785-820* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993) for a comprehensive overview of this debate. For Agobard's role in all this see Boshof, *Agobard*, 55-74.

- 41 Cullen J. Chandler, "Heresy and Empire: The Role of the Adoptionist Controversy in Charlemagne's Conquest of the Spanish March," *The International History Review* 24 (2002), 505-27; Ann Christys, *Christians in al-Andalus (711-1000)* (Richmond: Curzon, 2002).
- 42 Christine Caldwell Ames, *Medieval Heresies: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 126-30.
- 43 Wilhelm Heil, "Adoptianismus, Alkuin und Spanien," in *Karl der Grosse: Lebenswerk und Nachleben*, 5 vols., ed. Helmut Beumann et al. (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1965-8), 2:95-154.
- 44 Langenwalter, "Agobard," 21-22.
- 45 Cavadini, *Last Christology*, 103-106.
- 46 Lauge O. Nielsen, "Trinitarian Theology from Alcuin to Anselm," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, eds. Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 155-56.
- 47 Alcuin, "Epistola 137," in *MGH Epistolae 4: Epistolae Karolini aevi II*, ed. Ernst
- of the Emperor as an educator of his people. Charlemagne involved himself because he had to meet an existing challenge to his *ecclesia*. Louis was called to arms to educate his people about potential dangers. As far as Agobard was concerned, this heterodoxy presented him with a prime opportunity to reinforce the rules he thought were worth reinforcing, to the benefit of the Emperor, his subjects, and himself.<sup>85</sup>



- Dümmler (Berlin: Weidmann, 1899), 211; and “Epistola 200,” 331. See Close, *Uniformiser la foi*, 164-68.
- 48 De Jong, “Charlemagne’s Church,” 127-28.
- 49 Mayke de Jong, “*Sacrum palatium et ecclesia*: l’autorité religieuse royale sous les Carolingiens (790-840),” *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 58 (2003), 1243-69.
- 50 Steffen Patzold, “Bischöfe als Träger der politischen Ordnung des Frankenreichs im 8./9. Jahrhundert,” in *Der frühmittelalterliche Staat: europäische Perspektiven*, eds. Walter Pohl and Veronika Wieser (Vienna: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009), 255-68, or by the same author, *Episcopus: Wissen über Bischöfe im Frankenreich des späten 8. bis frühen 10. Jahrhunderts* (Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke, 2008).
- 51 Arnold Angenendt, “Karl der Große als rex und sacerdos,” in *Das Frankfurter Konzil von 794. Kristallisationspunkt karolingischer Kultur. Akten zweier Symposien (vom 23. bis 27. Februar und vom 13. bis 15. Oktober 1994) anlässlich der 1200-Jahrfeier der Stadt Frankfurt am Main*, ed. Rainer Berndt (Mainz: Gesellschaft für Mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte, 1997), 255-78.
- 52 Close, *Uniformiser la foi*, 83-93; Michel Lauwers, “Le glaive et la parole: Charlemagne, Alcuin et le modèle du rex praedicator – notes d’ecclésiologie carolingienne,” in *Alcuin de York à Tours. Écriture, pouvoir et réseaux dans l’Europe du haut Moyen Âge*, eds. Philippe Depreux and Bruno Judic (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2004), 221-44.
- 53 Karl F. Morrison, *The Two Kingdoms: Ecclesiology in Carolingian Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 68-98.
- 54 Roger Collins, “Charlemagne and His Critics,” in Le Jan, *La royauté et les élites*, 193-211.
- 55 Matthias Kloft, “Der spanische Adoptionismus,” in *794 – Karl der Große in Frankfurt am Main: Ein König bei der Arbeit*, ed. Johannes Fried (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1994), 56-61.
- 56 Costambeys et al., *Carolingian World*, 276.
- 57 Leidulf Melve, *Inventing the Public Sphere: The Public Debate During the Investiture Contest (c. 1030-1122)* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 50-56.
- 58 “[...] per vos esurienti populo et in desertis locis habitanti ad satietatem catholice ministrentur”. Alcuin, “Contra Felicem Urgellitanem episcopum libri VII,” *Praefatio. Patrologia Latina* 101, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1863), col. 128A.
- 59 Chandler, “Adoptionist Controversy,” 520-21.
- 60 Christys, *Christians in Al-Andalus*, 14-27.
- 61 Elipandus, “Epistola ad Albinum,” in *MGH Epistolae 4: Epistolae Karolini aevi II*, ed. Ernst Dümmler (Berlin: Weidmann, 1895), 302-3.
- 62 “Epistola episcoporum Hispaniae ad Karolum Magnum,” in *MGH Concilia 2.1: Concilia aevi Karolini (742-817)*, ed. Albert Werminghoff (Hannover: Hahn, 1906), 121; see Eugen Ewig, “Das Bild Constantins des Großen in den ersten Jahrhunderten des abendländischen Mittelalters,” *Historisches Jahrbuch* 75 (1955), 1-46; Walter Pohl, “Creating Cultural Resources for Carolingian Rule: Historians of the Christian Empire”, in *Cultural Memory and the Resources of the Past in Early Medieval Europe*, eds. Clemens Gantner, Rosamond McKitterick and Sven Meeder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 15-33.

- 63 De Jong, *Penitential State*, 112-47. See also Janneke Raaijmakers and Irene van Renswoude, "Guardians of Orthodoxy: Rulers and Religious Controversies in the Ninth Century," and Rutger Kramer, "Adopt, Adapt and Improve: Dealing with the Adoptionist Controversy at the Court of Charlemagne," both in *Religious Franks: Religion and Power in the Frankish Kingdoms – Essays in Honour of Mayke de Jong*, ed. Rob Meens et al. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, forthcoming 2016).
- 64 Raymund Kottje, "Einheit und Vielfalt des kirchlichen Lebens in der Karolingerzeit," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 76 (1965), 323-42, on the dynamics between local interests and unitary ideals.
- 65 Karl-Ferdinand Werner, "*Hludovicus Augustus*: gouverner l'empire chrétien – idées et réalités," in Godman and Collins, *Charlemagne's Heir*, 54-69.
- 66 Agobard, "Adversum dogma Felicis," 1, in Van Acker, *Agobardi opera omnia*, 74: "quedam scedula ab eo edita sub spetie interrogationis et responsionis".
- 67 Ibid., 2, 74: "nescientes quia non ex uita hominis metienda est fides, sed ex fide probanda est uita"; "nullus tamen male credens bene uiuendo saluatur".
- 68 Ibid., 1, 74: "in quibus a ueritate fidei excessit"; "sanctorum patrum sententias opponere, ut quisquis dignatus fuerit legere, agnoscat, qua cautela catholicae ueritatis purissimum sensum sequatur".
- 69 Ibid., 1, 74: "ut fidem suam subtilissime corrigant".
- 70 Ibid., 2, 74-75: "omnibus tamen in commune detrahunt"; "non possunt illi placere, qui dixit: 'Discite a me, quia mitis sum et humilis corde'".
- 71 Ibid., 6, 77.
- 72 "Epistola episcoporum Francia": "Et quare aliquid confirmare audemus, quod in illorum non inueniatur scribtis?", Werminghoff, *MGH Conc.* 2.1, 143.
- 73 Agobard, "Adversum dogma Felicis," 3, 75: "sanctorum patrum sententias".
- 74 Ibid., 3, 75: "absque dubio in aeternum peribit".
- 75 Ibid., 3, 75: "ueritas amanda est, non uerba".
- 76 Rosamond McKitterick, "Royal Patronage of Culture in the Frankish Kingdoms under the Carolingians: Motives and Consequences," in Centro italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, *Committenti e produzione artistico-letteraria nell'alto medioevo occidentale* (Spoleto: Presso La sede del Centro, 1992), 93-129.
- 77 Agobard, "Adversum dogma Felicis," Prologue, 73: "ex ueteri rediuuam heresim".
- 78 Ibid., Prologue, 73: "Quia, si probatur, illis, quibus profuturum est, ad legendum commendatur; si autem improbatur, auctor eius per uos emendatur". See also Van Renswoude, "License to Speak," 299-303.
- 79 Ibid., Prologue, 73: "Sacerdotem quoque esse uult amplectentem eum, qui secundum doctrinam est, fidelem sermonem, ut potens sit exhortari in doctrina sana, et eos, qui contradicunt, arguere".
- 80 Ibid., Prologue, 73: "Filii Dei, qui uestrum iuuat imperium".
- 81 For example in Ardo Anianensis, "Vita sancti Benedicti Abbatis Anianensis," c. 8, ed. and trans. Gerhard Schmitz et al., [www.rotula.de/aniane/](http://www.rotula.de/aniane/).
- 82 Van Renswoude, "License to Speak," 30.

83 Carl T. McIntire, “Transcending Dichotomies in History and Religion,” *History and Theory: Theme Issue 45 – Religion and History* 45 (2006), 80-92.

84 Rutger Kramer and Irene van Renswoude, “Dissens, Debatte und Diskurs: Kirche und Imperium in der Karolingerzeit,” *Historicum 31, Themenschwerpunkt Visions of Community* (2014), 22-27.

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Rutger Kramer received his PhD from the Freie Universität Berlin in 2014. He is currently a post-doctoral researcher at the Institut für Mittelalterforschung of the Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften in Vienna. In addition to his research on the intersection between Carolingian religious reforms and imperial policies in the eighth to tenth centuries, he works as a coordinator of the SFB *Visions of Community: Comparative Approaches to Ethnicity, Region and Empire in Christianity, Islam and Buddhism (400-1600 CE)* ([www.viscom.ac.at](http://www.viscom.ac.at)).

# MODEL SPEAKERS

## THE SUBVERSIVE POTENTIAL OF REPORTED FEMALE SPEECH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT GOSPELS

Amanda Jarvis

Boston University, Boston, United States

*ABSTRACT – Several female characters in the canonical Gospels provide the reader with models for public speech and behaviour that test the boundaries of appropriateness. These characters include the Samaritan woman (John 4:1-42), female witnesses to Jesus’ resurrection (Mark 16:7-8), and Mary Magdalene (John 20:1-2, 18 and Luke 24:8-11). The modelling potential of these figures derives from the Gospel authors’ use of reported female speech, a feature that deviates from the typical paradigm for the representation of female figures by male authors. Roman epigraphic and literary records exhibit the key features of this paradigm, against which the Gospel accounts may be compared. This comparison reveals that, although the reported words and actions of the women of the canonical Gospels do complicate the extant model, the Gospel authors also employ aspects of the typical paradigm (especially at Luke 24:8-11), thereby ultimately reconciling divergent female speech and behaviour with appropriate norms.*

### INTRODUCTION

1 On the epigraphic evidence available, see John P. Bodel, *Epigraphic Evidence: Ancient History from Inscriptions* (London: Psychology Press,

The laudable words and deeds of ancient Roman women survive in a number of written forms, including literary accounts, public inscriptions on plaques and statue bases, and epitaphs on public grave markers.<sup>1</sup> However, due to the limited extent to which Roman women could partake in the affairs of state – much less than men

of similar status – the amount of public space dedicated to their commemoration contrasts with the physical space these women would actually have occupied in the public sphere. Many scholars have described how such prominent Roman women, noteworthy for their personal accomplishments, benefactions, and outstanding *personae*, were primarily represented in public, written commemorations as standardized iterations of domestic duties and virtues.<sup>2</sup> If the city and its citizen body could be conceived of as a macrocosmic amplification of the home and its hierarchy of gender and station, such women served as a magnifying glass. The effects of this projection were described in a thoroughly predictable manner, creating a significant discrepancy between the unique lived experiences of women who acted outside of their station and the homogenous representation of their deeds in written form. Most importantly, the limited number of characteristics for which women could appropriately be praised, once set in writing, served as a persistent model not only for subsequent written accounts, but also for the actual deeds of the women who read, or were read, these records.

Given this premise, I argue that the words and deeds of the women featured in the canonical Gospels complicate the models for female behaviour that are preserved in the written records of Rome. These women, who served and travelled as disciples of Jesus, lived in regions that were, at the time, only loosely connected to the imperial centre in Rome.<sup>3</sup> They were removed, by some degree, from the direct and daily influence of inscribed monuments located in the city and its immediate environs, and from written documents in circulation there. They would have been speaking and acting publicly at a time characterized by the development, rather than the finalization, of canonical written prescriptions for acceptable behaviour within the nascent Christian community.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the Gospel accounts differ from written models preserved at Rome, in that their authors consistently report the self-directed words of individual women. These words are neither explicit reproductions of male speech, nor the exact product of training overseen by a male authority. However, the same authors also persistently undermine the non-normative actions of these women by questioning the reliability and authority

2001); Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Source Book in Translation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993); Brian K. Harvey, *Roman Lives: Ancient Roman Lives as Illustrated by Latin Inscriptions* (Newburyport: Focus Publishers, 2004).

2 The scholarship on this topic is rich and multifaceted; useful overviews are found in Ramsay MacMullen, "Women in Public in the Roman Empire," *Historia* 29 (1980), 208-18; Natalie Kampen, *Image and Status: Roman Working Woman in Ostia* (Berlin: Mann, 1981); Richard. A. Bauman, *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome* (London: Routledge, 1992); Elaine Fantham et al., *Women in the Classical World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Emily Ann Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta: Educated Women in the Roman Elite from Cornelia to Julia Domna* (London: Routledge, 1999); Suzanne Dixon, *Reading Roman Women: Sources, Genres and Real Life* (London: Duckworth, 2001); Kristina Milnor, *Gender, Domesticity, and the Age of Augustus: Inventing Private Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

3 Judea, for example (from whence the Samaritan woman

of Jn 4:1-42), was governed only by a prefect or equestrian procurator until the rebellion of 69-70 CE (see Tacitus, *Annals* 12.60; Flavius Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 17.355, 18.1-2).

In response to the revolt, the province was brought under the much stricter control of a legate with full military authority.

4 I accept the standard dates of composition proposed in Michael

D. Coogan (ed.), *New Oxford Annotated Bible, NRSV 4th edition* (Oxford: Oxford University

Press, 2010): Mark c. 60-70 CE (1791); Matthew c. 80 CE (1746);

Luke c. 85 CE (1827); John c. 85-90 CE (1879). On the role of

women as organizers and office holding members of the early Christian community, see Ute E.

Eisen, *Women Officeholders in Early Christianity* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000); Margaret

MacDonald, "Was Celsus Right?"

in *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary*

*Dialogue*, eds. David. L. Bach and Carolyn Osiek (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 157-

84; Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek, *Ordained Women in the*

*Early Church: A Documentary History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005);

and Carolyn Osiek, Margaret MacDonald, and Janet H.

Tulloch, *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity*

of their self-produced speech and self-directed action. As a result, the reader of these texts is left with a problematized version of a recognizable model. The Gospel accounts suggest that Jesus' female followers had the potential to provide the reader with an alternative paradigm for appropriate public female behaviour. Yet they also evince the power of writing – and of male authorship – as a means by which to preserve the social norms that these women disrupted by speaking and acting independently.

#### THE WRITTEN MODEL: WOMEN AS WORDS

In order to continue this exploration, it is first necessary not only to confirm the existence of such a paradigm, but also to explain how this model served as the basis for the array of subsequent written accounts, in which male authors portrayed unique, individual women as recognizable iterations of their predecessors. Modern linguists argue that writing systems develop not merely in response to the need to record speech in symbolic form, but also as a tool by which to establish a symbolic framework for spoken communication.<sup>5</sup> Put another way, we do not write only what we can already say; we also use writing to explore and to confirm what we could say, before we say it. As David Olson explains, "writing systems are developed for mnemonic and communicative purposes, but because they are 'read' they provide a model for language and thought [...] we introspect our language along lines laid down by our scripts".<sup>6</sup> Applied to the situation at hand, one can hypothesize that what is written by men about women not only utilizes preapproved sentiments and characterizations, but also perpetuates these paradigms as appropriate models for female representation (and for how female readers will represent themselves). Although numerous scholars have already convincingly delineated the salient features of this system in the Roman context, a few examples might help to better orient the reader.<sup>7</sup> The women in these examples are of different ages and social levels, and their commemoration takes different forms (spoken, epigraphic, and literary). Given the diversity of their lived experiences, the numerous confluences between the

written records of their deeds serve to demonstrate the pervasive nature of the predictable set of appropriate praises attributed to these women by the male authors who commemorate them.<sup>8</sup>

To begin with a popular example: the first century BCE marble-inscribed eulogy for Murdia (*CIL* 06, 10230) evinces the homogeneity of public praise of women, in both spoken and written form.<sup>9</sup> Reportedly delivered by one of her sons, the eulogy highlights Murdia's supreme equanimity when distributing her estate among her sons,<sup>10</sup> and current and former spouses, but does not go so far as to assign any unique praise to Murdia herself, because:

[T]he praise of all good women is straightforward and comparable: since [their] natural, in-born quality of goodness and lasting trust do not call for a diversity of words; and because it is sufficient that they have done the same good deeds worthy of repute.

Murdia's eulogy also explains that it is difficult to find novel terms of praise (*novae laudes*) for women, therefore it is better to celebrate their shared qualities (*communia*): "lest some expression, parting from the legitimate maxims, should corrupt the rest".<sup>12</sup> In all, the eulogy (and subsequently, the inscription) identifies and rationalizes a type of commemoration that draws from an acceptable set of pre-existing praises (*iustis praeceptis*), applicable to any woman. Murdia's particular accomplishments are subsumed by a homogenous, written model for all good deeds done by women, and any unique insight into her life is interrupted by its refraction through the words of a male author who is used to talking about women in a certain way, and writing about them with the same words.

Constancy, simplicity, and a nod to an established canon of language: these features are found in literary sources as well. For example, Cicero, when evaluating the public speaking skills of Laelia,<sup>13</sup> writes:

(Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006).

5 The previous hypothesis, shared by linguists and developmental psychologists, was that one learned to read and write in order to translate sounds into written signs. Developmental psychologist David Olson, in light of the work done by Noam Chomsky, Roger Brown, Jerome Bruner, and Lev Vygotsky (among others), helped introduce a new perspective, in which literacy was considered an aspect of learning to think about the rules of language that are implicit in oral communication. For a comprehensive examination of twentieth-century theories of language, see Mortéza Mahmoudian, *Modern Theories of Language: The Empirical Challenge* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992).

6 David G. Olson, "How Writing Represents Speech," *Language and Communication* 13 (1993), 2; 15.

7 All *CIL* texts were accessed via the *Clauss-Slaby Epigraphik Datenbank* (<http://www.manfredclauss.de/gb/index.html>). For Bible passages, I have used Nestle-Aland, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece, 26th*

edition (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979). All translations are my own.

8 The use of these non-Christian examples is necessitated by the lack of distinctly 'Christian' material culture until (at earliest) the middle of the first century CE; see Orazio Marucchi, *Christian Epigraphy: An Elementary Treatise, with a Collection of Ancient Christian Inscriptions Mainly of Roman Origin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912; Chicago: Ares Publishing, 1974) and, more recently, Graydon F. Snyder, *Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life before Constantine* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2003).

9 Hugh Lindsay, "The 'Laudatio Murdiae': Its Content and Significance," *Latomus* 63 (2004), 88-97.

10 Lefkowitz and Fant, *Women's Life*, inscription no. 43, 17-18.

11 *CIL* 06, 10230, 21-25:  
 "... quom omnium bonarum  
 feminarum simplex simi / lisque  
 esse laudatio soleat quod  
 naturalia bona propria custo /  
 dia servata varietates verborum  
 non desiderent satisque sit /  
 eadem omnes bona fama digna  
 fecisse...".

The very sound of her voice is so direct and clean, as to convey no aspect of showmanship or imitation; from [these qualities of] her speech I [can] adjudge the manner of her father's speech, [or] that of her forebears.<sup>14</sup>

Although Laelia is herself portrayed as the speaker, the words she produces are not her own. Like the every-woman in the *Laudatio Murdiae*, Laelia (and thus, her manner of speaking) remains unspoiled by the social changes occurring around her. Unaffected by the evolution of styles and tastes of public speakers and their audiences, Laelia preserves a set of *iustis praeceptis dicendi* (approved rules of speaking), which she reproduces without ostentation or originality. For this she is, at least in Cicero's narrative, worthy of approbation.

Finally, Eucharis of Licinia also serves as a mouthpiece for her male forebears. Her first-century BCE funerary inscription (*CIL* 06, 10096) narrates, in the voice of the deceased 14-year-old former slave herself, how her parens arranged for her epitaph in order to inform passers-by of her best qualities and outstanding accomplishments.<sup>15</sup> Eucharis was an unmarried girl, learned and accomplished in every skill,<sup>16</sup> and so proficient that she could have been educated by the Muses themselves, as evinced by her stage-performance as a member of a chorus.<sup>17</sup> Yet no crowd of admiring fans mourns the loss of so talented a performer: "I, the daughter, have left tears to my progenitor".<sup>18</sup> Eucharis' father brackets either side of her inscribed 'address'. Like Laelia's ancestors in Cicero's account, he has arranged for her artistic education, and for the form and content of her speech. He will suffer most from the loss of this girl, trained to speak and perform according to his own proclivities. Like Laelia, Eucharis speaks words that are not her own.

From these examples, the reader can see that Roman women of various ages and social levels had the potential to be publicly noted. Yet these examples also demonstrate the numerous ways in which male authors effectively homogenized an array of unique circumstances and personalities, and asserted the presence of a



domestic and patriarchal boundary within which women could appropriately speak and act. In doing so, the authors ensured that to whatever extent such women confounded domestic expectations by speaking out or venturing into the public sphere, the records of their rule breaking represented these actions as normative rather than subversive. Within such linguistic boundaries these women served, at the time of each text's creation, as graphic reproductions of the tastes and values of the men who wrote about them. Moreover, they became symbolic models for what women could appropriately say and do thereafter, for one who reads an account comprised of such persistent prefabrications engages with this normative set of words and concepts, allows it to model her own behaviour, and in doing so, translates the written symbols back into tangible actions.

#### IN THEIR OWN WORDS? THE REPORTED SPEECH OF THE FEMALE DISCIPLES

Now that the model has been established, it is possible to consider how the words and deeds of several women from the New Testament Gospels engage with it and complicate it. Although the written record of these women's words and deeds is authored by men, the content of their accounts differs somewhat from the model we have seen because the words and actions of the women are reported as being independently produced and motivated, rather than formed from, and limited by, *iusta praecepta*. As a result, at the moment of speaking or acting, these women are neither mouthpieces of preapproved speech, nor do they limit their actions to those portrayed by the model as appropriate. The male authors do have the last word, so to speak, which allows them to reframe potentially subversive content in a manner befitting the paradigm. Nonetheless, the words and deeds of Jesus' female disciples retain significant potential as written models for subsequent readers. Those readers can recognize that the male authors' attempts to reassert the model are primarily necessary because the model was questioned in the first place.

The parable of the Samaritan woman in John 4:1-42 constitutes one of the longest sustained dialogues in the canonical Gospels.<sup>19</sup> Of course, the words

12 Ibid., 27-28: "... ne quod / amissum ex iustis praeceptis cetera turpet. "

13 The mother-in-law of L. Licinius Crassus, consul in 95 BCE.

14 Cicero, *De Oratore* 3.45, in *Rhetorica: Volume I*, ed. Augustus S. Wilkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1922): "sono ipso vocis ita recto et simplici est, ut nihil ostentationis aut imitationis adferre videatur; ex quo sic locutum esse eius patrem iudico, sic maiores."

15 *CIL* 06, 10096, 3-4.

16 Ibid., 2: "docta erodita omnes artes virgo."

17 Ibid., 11: "docta erodita paene Musarum manu"; 12-13.

18 Ibid., 18: "reliqui fletum nata genitori meo."

19 On the Samaritan woman, see Mark Edwards, "The Samaritan Woman: John 4.3-45," in *John* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 53-61. For the Gospel of John in general, see Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary, Volume I* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003).

the Samaritan woman speaks are not entirely her own; a male author serves as intermediary between the woman's actual words and deeds, and those reported to the reader. Yet, it is precisely in the author's attempts to render the Samaritan woman paradigmatic that the reader can detect that the woman herself had spoken and acted independently of appropriate social paradigms. From the outset of their meeting alongside a well, Jesus himself, as Barbara MacHaffie notes, disregards predominant social prohibitions when he asks the woman for a drink of water: "Not only does he, a Jew, speak to a Samaritan, but he disregards the Jewish norm prohibiting men from speaking to women in public".<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, the Samaritan woman continues to engage with him, and eventually realizes that the man before her is a divine prophet: "And the woman said to him, 'Lord, I see that you are the Messiah'".<sup>21</sup>

20 Barbara J. MacHaffie, *Her Story: Women in Christian Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 16.

21 Jn 4:19: "λέγει αὐτῷ ἡ γυνή, Κύριε, θεωρῶ ὅτι προφήτης εἶ σύ."

22 E.g. Plato, *Gorgias* 523e; Aristotle, *Metaphysica* 1003b15; Epicurus, *De natura* 2.6.

23 Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, comps., *Greek-English Lexicon* (1843; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), s.v. "θεωρῶ", I. Its secondary connotation, 'to view a spectacle' (s.v. "θεωρῶ", II) likewise constitutes an interaction with the world outside the subject's own mind.

24 On ancient seers, see Michael A. Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), esp. 22-71.

The verb for 'seeing' (θεωρῶ), although it can indicate an act of internal contemplation,<sup>22</sup> is primarily used in Greek literature to indicate the consultation of an oracle.<sup>23</sup> The one who consults (θεωρός) was tasked with receiving the words spoken through the oracle, the direct communication from divine to mortal. As such, a θεωρός served a different function than a μάντις (also often translated as 'seer'), whose skill rested in his ability to interpret signs sent by the gods (e.g. dreams or weather patterns).<sup>24</sup> The distinction is crucial in emphasizing that Jesus' identity becomes apparent to the Samaritan woman in the course of a verbal exchange, in which both parties play an active role, rather than as the result of the woman's contemplation of concrete, physical signs or symbols – such as text, which occupies space on a stone or page – corresponding to a particular paradigm.

Yet the Samaritan woman is not a traditional θεωρός, either, as this consultant's task does not generally require active interpretation of the gods' pronouncements. Instead, the θεωρός functions as a mouthpiece, a reporter who strives for as faithful a reproduction of the model – i.e. the god's 'original' words – as possible. The Samaritan woman, on the other hand, makes an independent decision about how she will convey her experiences to the men of her village. Several aspects

of John's text indicate her autonomy as both an actor and speaker. First, before she departs, the woman receives confirmation from Jesus regarding his Messianic status: "Jesus said to her, 'I am [the Lord] who converses with you'".<sup>25</sup> As we shall see, the woman does not merely report this confirmation in her address to her townspeople, but provides her own uniquely-worded account of the encounter. Then the woman departs: "Therefore, the woman left her water jug behind and came from there into the city; she speaks to the men [...]"<sup>26</sup> This action reveals a shift in the woman's priorities: she had left her home, and the confines of the city, to fulfil a domestic responsibility (gathering water for the household); when she returns, her primary concern is the public address that she will make to the men of her village.<sup>27</sup> John underscores this contrast by switching back to the simple present tense (λέγει). Furthermore, the woman had not simply forgotten the vessel in her haste, but deliberately left it, and the domestic priority it symbolized, at the well as she departed to pursue a public priority. This dichotomy is well represented by the structure of the text: the jug is 'left' at one end of the sentence, and the woman, placed squarely in its centre, moves forward towards the city. Thus, John indicates to the reader that, even before she addresses the townsmen, the Samaritan woman is acting on her own prerogative. Unlike the typical θεωρός, who is sent to fulfil a specific task and is only successful if he returns to precisely reproduce the words he has heard, the Samaritan woman returns not only without the water for which she had set out, but also without the exact words of Jesus on her lips.

When she speaks, furthermore, the Samaritan woman does not merely repeat Jesus' claims of divinity, but fashions her address in such a way as to elicit a particular response from the townsmen: "Come now and see the man who told me all things, as many as I have done; surely this man is not Christ, is he?"<sup>28</sup> By encouraging the incredulity of her fellows, the Samaritan woman prompts the men to act. According to the Gospel of John: "Many of the Samaritan men from that city believed in [Jesus] as a result of the Samaritan woman's account (λόγον τῆς γυναικός), when she attested (μαρτυρούσης) that '[Jesus] told me all the things I have done'".<sup>29</sup> As with his description of the water jug, the

25 Jn 4:26: "λέγει αὐτῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Ἐγὼ εἰμι, ὁ λαλῶν σοι."

26 Jn 4:28: "ἀφῆκεν οὖν τὴν ὑδρίαν αὐτῆς ἡ γυνὴ καὶ ἀπῆλθεν εἰς τὴν πόλιν καὶ λέγει τοῖς ἀνθρώποις."

27 For an alternative interpretation, see Frank A. Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider: Exclusion and Inclusion in the Biblical Story* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 154-55.

28 Jn 4:29: "δεῦτε ἴδετε ἄνθρωπον ὃς εἶπέν μοι πάντα ὅσα ἐποίησα: μήτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ Χριστός?"

29 Jn 4:39: "Ἐκ δὲ τῆς πόλεως ἐκείνης πολλοὶ ἐπίστευσαν εἰς αὐτὸν τῶν Σαμαριτῶν διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς γυναικὸς μαρτυρούσης ὅτι εἶπέν μοι πάντα ἃ ἐποίησα."

author's choice of words is significant with respect to the Samaritan woman's deviation from social norms. As one able to attest the words of Jesus due to her role as a witness (μαρτυρούσης), the Samaritan woman again calls to mind the figure of the θεωρός. In the absence of Jesus himself, the woman produces her own λόγος, her own credible report of her experiences.

The significance of the fact that her initial address is called a λόγος is revealed as the reader continues, for when the men go and meet Jesus himself, they quickly discard the Samaritan woman's speech in favour of the words of the Messiah:

And more by far believed on account of [Jesus'] word (λόγον) and to the woman they said, 'No longer do we believe because of your idle talk (λαλιάν), since we have heard for ourselves'.<sup>30</sup>

30 Jn 4:41-42: "καὶ πολλῶ πλείους ἐπίστευσαν διὰ τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ τῇ τε γυναικὶ ἔλεγον ὅτι Οὐκέτι διὰ τὴν σὴν λαλιάν πιστεύομεν: αὐτοὶ γὰρ ἀκηκόαμεν."

31 The usual derogatory connotation is evident at Aristophanes, *Clouds* 931 and Polybius 3.20.5. Over time, the term acquires a more neutral connotation, e.g. Jn 4:26. See Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. "λαλιά", II.

32 Kasper B. Larsen, "Anagnorisis and Arrival (John 1-4)," in *Recognizing the Stranger: Recognition Scenes in the Gospel of John* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 138-40.

Now, Jesus' own speech (λόγος) inspires belief, while the Samaritan woman's words, by comparison, are reduced to mere loquaciousness.<sup>31</sup> From the outcome of the episode of the Samaritan woman, one can see how the written medium of the Gospel of John is used to arrange a hierarchy that privileges the public authority of a male speaker. When the Samaritan woman's words are first reported, they are assigned the status of λόγος, and are believed on their own merit; when Jesus provides his own λόγος, however, the status of the woman's words diminishes by comparison to be considered gossip or chatter (λαλιάν).

Kasper Larsen equates the Samaritan woman to certain of Jesus' male disciples, since her testimony "arouses the Samaritans' interest, and it has the same effect as the testimonies of Andrew and Philip in [John] 1:35-51. It creates new observers who approach Jesus in order to see for themselves".<sup>32</sup> However, this passage is noteworthy for another reason. At John 1:35-37, John the Baptist points Jesus out to two of his own disciples, with whom he is speaking: "and the two disciples heard [John] saying this (λαλοῦντος), and they followed after

Jesus”.<sup>33</sup> In this case, the two disciples accept John the Baptist’s identification of Jesus, although his words are an example of λαλιά rather than λόγος. The derogatory connotation of λαλιά is not present, and John’s words are believed without further justification.

From this we can posit that the hierarchy of accounts, in the case of the Samaritan woman, does not result merely from Jesus’ superior status as a divine figure, but from his superior status as a male authority figure whose public address to other males does not break any social rules. Jesus’ initial conversation with the Samaritan woman corroborates this supposition, for a neutral connotation of the term is also used at 4:26: “Jesus said to her, ‘I am [the Lord] who converses (λαλῶν) with you.’”<sup>34</sup> The Gospel of John again employs the neutral meaning of λαλιά, and indicates its subordinate status to λόγος when describing Jesus’ response to the sceptical Jews at 8:43: “For what reason do you not understand what I say (λαλιάν)? It is because you are unable to receive my word (λόγον)”.<sup>35</sup> In none of these instances can λαλιά/λαλῶν be adequately translated as ‘chatter’ or ‘gossip’. The latter example, furthermore, illustrates the priority of λόγος over λαλιά; as an authority figure, Jesus is able to credibly produce both types of speech, but his λόγος still serves as the basis of any λαλιά that follows. All the more important, then, is the Samaritan woman’s brief production of her own λόγος, and its power to compel belief.<sup>36</sup> Her initial success reveals the potential for women to model speech that has not already been modelled, as she does not simply report the words of Jesus, but fashions her own. The author need only assert the ultimate preference for Jesus’ speech over that of the Samaritan woman if the reader is initially able to consider the divergent λόγοι as equally legitimate and authoritative. Put another way, the subjugation of the woman’s words is necessitated precisely because they threaten both the verbal hierarchy of λόγος over λαλιά, and the related hierarchy of credibility based upon the speaker’s gender.

John’s Samaritan woman also responds to the portrayals of appropriate female speech and action found in the other canonical Gospels. The fact that she addresses

33 Jn 1:37: “καὶ ἤκουσαν οἱ δύο μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ λαλοῦντος καὶ ἠκολούθησαν τῷ Ἰησοῦ.”

34 Jn 4:26; see note 24.

35 Jn 8:43: “διὰ τί τὴν λαλιάν τὴν ἐμὴν οὐ γινώσκετε; ὅτι οὐ δύνασθε ἀκοῦειν τὸν λόγον τὸν ἐμόν.”

36 Jn 4:39; see note 29.

the men of her town at all, for example, seems a notable contrast with the stunned silence of the women who discover Jesus' empty tomb in Mark:

'Go and tell the disciples of Jesus and Peter that [Jesus] is going ahead of you into Galilee [...]'. And they fled from the tomb, for fear and wonderment seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were frightened.<sup>37</sup>

It is here that Mark's Gospel comes to an abrupt conclusion, which, Richard Horsley concludes, "invites the reader to continue the story of Jesus and the kingdom".<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the very existence of this text suggests that Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, and Salome were eventually able to overcome their shock and report what they had seen to the male disciples. While the instructions given at 16:7 suggest the content of the report, and thereby provide a model for the reader's own imagining, they do not go so far as to shape the exact form of either the women's report, or of the male disciple's reactions. As a result, Mark's male and female speakers are left on an ambiguous, yet equal plane, as potential reproducers of the account of Jesus' resurrection.

37 Mk 16:7-8: "ἀλλὰ ὑπάγετε εὔπατε τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ καὶ τῷ Πέτρῳ ὅτι Προάγει ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν [...] ἔφυγον ἀπὸ τοῦ μνημείου, εἶχεν γὰρ αὐτὰς τρόμος καὶ ἔκστασις· καὶ οὐδενὶ οὐδὲν εἶπαν, ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ."

38 Richard Horsley, "Gospel of Mark," in Coogan et al., *New Oxford Bible*, 1791.

39 Horsley (ibid., 1824) writes that the emender wanted Mark's original text to "conform to the common pattern" of the resurrection as described in the other canonical Gospels. An additional 'shorter ending' was composed as an alternative to the first emendation, though not before the fourth century CE.

40 Mk 16:17: "ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου δαιμόνια ἐκβαλοῦσιν, γλώσσαις λαλήσουσιν καιναῖς."

While the original author of the Gospel of Mark was comfortable with such a possibility, an emender of his text clearly was not. Likely added to the original text in the second century CE, the 'long ending' of Mark (16:9-19) elides the potentially self-directed words of these women, and those of the reader, by emphasizing the correspondence between physical symbols and speech as mutual confirmations of an account's veracity.<sup>39</sup> For example, in Mark 16:17, Jesus explains that believers who proclaim his word will be attended by signs of their belief (σημεῖα), and uses the neutral connotation of λαλέω when describing such proclamations: "In my name they will cast out inferior spirits, they will make utterances (λαλήσουσιν) in novel tongues".<sup>40</sup> The emended ending further confirms, in the voice of the omniscient narrator, that symbols (σημεῖα) and speech (λόγος) are complementary parts of the Lord's oversight in the apostolic process (16:20). Here, the σημεῖα likely connote portents or omens rather than written symbols.<sup>41</sup> Yet the term embraces a wide

range of connotations, all of which are linked by the fact that σημεῖα can engage any number of senses, including sight and touch,<sup>42</sup> while spoken words engage only the ears. Given the flexibility of the term, it is not too indulgent to imagine that the emended ending, the written account comprised of observable, linguistic symbols, is itself a σημεῖον, through which the emender of the Gospel of Mark augments the ambiguous original ending and asserts a fixed version of events. The unspoken and unwritten testimony of the female witnesses consequently cedes to the authority of articulate men (λαλήσουσιν) whose utterances claim the superior status of a λόγος corroborated by symbols of God's approbation.

Perhaps a model for the emender of Mark, the Gospel of John also addresses the authority of graphic witnesses, although in his account they take priority over the words of both male and female speakers. Nonetheless, the words of male speakers still prove to be more authoritative than those of female interlocutors. In addition to the Samaritan woman, Mary Magdalene stands out in John's text as a female speaker whose words are prompted by nothing but her own experience:

Mary Magdalene came [...] to the tomb, and she saw that the stone had been taken away [...] therefore she ran to Simon Peter and to other disciples, whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and I do not know where they have put him'.<sup>43</sup>

Like the Samaritan woman, Mary uses words of her own design to encourage her addressees to investigate. When Mary speaks again at 20:18, she not only reports what Jesus told her but, again like the Samaritan woman, adds her own words to his: "Mary Magdalene arrived, announcing to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord', and also the things he said to her".<sup>44</sup> This time, however, her words elicit no response that the author saw fit to record. Her incredible role as the sole recipient of Jesus' seminal revelation is rendered ambivalent by her elision from the text immediately thereafter. When Mary disappears from the text, the reader's

41 A typical meaning, applicable in both poetry and prose, e.g. Sophocles, *Oedipus Coloneus* 294 or Plato, *Phedrus* 244c.

42 E.g. dog tracks (Sophocles, *Antigone* 257); a shield device (Herodotus 1.171); a signet on a ring (Aristophanes, *Knights* 952); symbols for written shorthand (Plutarch, *Cato Minor* 23).

43 Jn 20:1-2: "Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ ἔρχεται [...] εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον, καὶ βλέπει τὸν λίθον ἠρμένον [...] τρέχει οὖν καὶ ἔρχεται πρὸς Σίμωνα Πέτρον καὶ πρὸς τὸν ἄλλον μαθητὴν ὃν ἐφίλει ὁ Ἰησοῦς, καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς, ἦραν τὸν κύριον ἐκ τοῦ μνημείου, καὶ οὐκ οἶδαμεν ποῦ ἔθηκαν αὐτόν."

44 Jn 20:18: "ἔρχεται Μαριά ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ ἀγγέλλουσα τοῖς μαθηταῖς ὅτι Ἐώρακα τὸν κύριον, καὶ ταῦτα εἶπεν αὐτῇ."

attention is abruptly shifted to the male disciples; apparently unmoved by Mary's speech, they are instead prompted to believe from the physical signs Jesus gives them (20:19-30). John's reader, furthermore, is instructed to base his own belief on the written commemoration of these physical signs:

There are many other signs (πολλά...σημεῖα) as well which Jesus enacted in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book (οὐκ γεγραμμένα); but these, on the other hand, are written (γέγραπται), that you may believe that Jesus is Christ the Son of God.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, in the penultimate chapter, John's author adds an additional rung to the ladder of authority: Mary's words, a form of λαλιά corroborated neither by Jesus' word nor by σημεῖα, occupy the bottom rung. Jesus' reported speech to the disciples, confirmed by signs, represents a step up in terms of authority, but it is the tangible, inscribed account of these signs that occupies the top rung, and that forms the basis for continued belief.

The inscribed status of John's text thus adds to its legitimacy. As in the case of our Roman evidence – Eucharis' or Murdia's epitaphs, or the mention of Laelia – the author portrays his women in a manner that assures conformity to expectations established by the model women whom the texts themselves help to create and approve. However, the Gospel of John's report of the actual words of the Samaritan woman and Mary Magdalene presents the reader with a more complex model: each woman does, in the end, conform to the paradigm, but the author forces her to do so only after she spoken and acted outside of the norm. Mark's original report also allows for this complexity, although less explicitly; by suggesting the speech of the women at the tomb without committing it to any final form, Mark's author enables his reader to imagine the women's words as she sees fit. The emender of Mark removes this ambiguity in a manner comparable to John's technique, namely, by asserting the priority of a written model over that of unscripted speech.

45 Jn 20:30-31: “Πολλά μὲν οὖν καὶ ἄλλα σημεῖα ἐποίησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐνώπιον τῶν μαθητῶν [αὐτοῦ], ἃ οὐκ ἔστιν γεγραμμένα ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ / ταῦτα δὲ γέγραπται ἵνα πιστεύ[ς]ητε ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ Χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ.”



Finally, the Gospel of Luke provides a negative example that can help the reader to appreciate the complexity of the respective portrayals in Mark and John, for Luke goes further than either of them, both in terms of the elision or condemnation of female speech, and in the assertion of the ultimate authority of male-produced written models for speech.<sup>46</sup> In Luke 24:8, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary mother of James, and a group of other women provide a collective report to the apostles based upon their recollection of the ‘spoken’ (i.e. modelled) words of Jesus.<sup>47</sup> Notably, their words are not of the same independently-inspired nature as those of the Samaritan woman, Mary Magdalene, or (potentially) the women at the end of Mark’s original text. Furthermore, the male disciples immediately disregard the women’s account as ‘mere nonsense’ (λῆρος).<sup>48</sup> Two of the sceptical male disciples are confronted by Jesus soon thereafter, who rebukes them for doubting the account, but only because it was previously predicted by male prophets, and Moses in particular.<sup>49</sup> Thus, although the women had reported the same information contained in the prophetic accounts, Luke’s Gospel asserts that the accuracy of their report does not assure its authority.<sup>50</sup>

Yet Luke’s author is not satisfied with merely asserting the authority of male over female speakers. Rather, the men’s disbelief is only expelled when Jesus directs their attention to the written scriptures (γραφάς) from which his words are drawn: “And he said to them, ‘Thus it was written [...] You are witnesses (μάρτυρες) of these things’”.<sup>51</sup> Unlike the Samaritan woman in John, who is a witness (μαρτυρούσα) to Jesus’ words, the male disciples in Luke’s Gospel corroborate their own testimony based upon their witness of more compelling, written models. In addition to eliding the potential for independently-produced female speech, then, Luke further undermines even modelled female speech by presenting it as doubtful testimony that is best ignored in favour of male speech and male-authored written accounts. Furthermore, in Luke’s Gospel the opportunity to witness such an account is offered only to male disciples: this circumstance removes the potential for women in his text to serve as models for the reader, as regards the proliferation of Jesus’ word.

46 Upon cursory examination, Matthew’s Gospel reveals little, if any, sense of anxiety over the production of a written model for speech. A closer look, however, which I have forgone in the interest of space, might prove productive.

47 Lk 24:8: “ἐμνήσθησαν τῶν ῥημάτων αὐτοῦ.” Cf. Liddell and Scott, Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. “ῥῆμα”, I.

48 Lk 24:11.

49 Lk 24:25: “ἐπὶ πᾶσιν οἷς ἐλάλησαν οἱ προφῆται” (another example of the neutral connotation of λαλέω, when related to male speakers, οἱ προφῆται). Compare to Lk 24:26-27.

50 Compare Lk 24:1-10 to 24:24-27.

51 Lk 24:45-48: “καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὅτι Οὕτως γέγραπται ... ὑμεῖς μάρτυρες τούτων.”

The portrayal of Jesus' female disciples by Luke's author represents a reaction to non-normative, female words and deeds that is more restrictive than that of his fellow Gospel authors. Yet the level of authority that the Gospel of Luke grants to written testimony, as a definitive means of communicating a fixed, normative model, ultimately corresponds to that granted by the author of John and the emender of Mark.

## CONCLUSION

The features of this normative written model are evident in the broader cultural paradigms for appropriate female behaviour established prior to the early-mid first century CE, namely those preserved in the form of Roman eulogies, epitaphs, and literary accounts. Given this definition of appropriate female behaviour and speech, one can examine the potential challenges to these cultural norms that would derive from independently-produced female speech, which the male Gospel authors navigate by reconciling non-normative speech and deeds to the broader paradigms. As such, the respective Roman and Gospel texts bracket the lived experiences of these female disciples: their words and deeds exist in the time and space between the typical model, in both literary and epigraphic form, from which they deviate, and the more specifically Christian model found in the Gospels which report these deviations. They are, however, then undermined in a manner guided by the rules of the original model.

The examples employed are by no means exhaustive. Yet by identifying a few female figures, such as the Samaritan woman or Mary Magdalene, who speak and act in the space between the rejection of one model and the creation of another, I hope to have encouraged the reader to continue thinking about the potential that such women had as models for novel types of speech and action. Of course, it is highly unlikely that any of the Gospel authors set out to compose their respective accounts with the primary aim of overtly glorifying or emphatically undermining their female characters.<sup>52</sup> What seems more likely, and

52 Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for directing my attention to Sandra M. Schneiders, "Women in the Fourth Gospel and the Role of Women in the Contemporary Church," *Biblical Theological Bulletin* 12 (1998), 513-35.

53 I extend my sincere gratitude to Karine Laporte and Tessa de Zeeuw, as well as to the anonymous reviewers of the previous versions of this paper, and to the participants of the LUCAS Graduate Conference (Leiden, 29-30 January 2015), all of who have helped me to refine and organize my ideas, and to strengthen my argument. Any extant weaknesses in argumentation and presentation are entirely my own.

what can help explain the parallels between the Gospel accounts explored above, is that the broader Roman written models, from which our female characters diverge, were nonetheless ubiquitous enough to unobtrusively influence the Gospel authors' accounts, even as these authors portrayed women speaking and acting in ways outside the norm. Yet it is precisely this discrepancy between the models that allows the reader to receive the reported speech and actions of these women (John), or to imagine these things (Mark), and to recognize the modelling potential of these outstanding words and deeds, even if only for a moment.<sup>53</sup>

In 2012, Amanda Jarvis earned her BA in Classics from Hofstra University, where she also completed a minor in Religious Studies. She is now in her fourth year of the PhD program in Classics at Boston University. Her current academic interests include sixth and fifth century BCE Greek history, Euripidean drama, Ovidian poetry, and early Christian literature, especially the Apocryphal Acts.

# SINFUL CATHOLICS AND REPENTANT PROTESTANTS? THE PENITENTIAL PROCESS IN THE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN TRADITION OF THE *TWELVE VIRTUES*

Ine Kiekens

Ghent University and Ruusbroec Institute, University of Antwerp, Belgium

**ABSTRACT** – *In the study of religious culture, a clear rupture between the ‘dark’ Middle Ages and the ‘glorious’ early modern epoch has often been presumed. Likewise Protestants, as initiators of a new Christian era, are sometimes still believed to have rejected traditions rooted in ‘medieval’ Catholicism. Although these assumptions have received general opposition, further nuance can be reached through renewed study of the penitential process. This paper investigates the penitential process in the long and widespread tradition of the Middle Dutch treatise Vanden twaelf dogheden (On the Twelve Virtues) and its various early modern translations and adaptations, used in both Catholic and Protestant milieus. New research reveals that both Catholic and Protestant compilers relied on this medieval tradition to compose their own treatises on virtuousness.*

## INTRODUCTION

In her study on penitence and preaching, Anne Thayer argues “the penitential process as taught and practiced in the Late Medieval Period was to be severely criticized by the Protestant reformers of the sixteenth century as well as passionately reasserted by Catholics”.<sup>1</sup> This statement belongs to a centuries-old tradition in the study of religious perceptions, practices, and texts. By disparaging

1 Anne T. Thayer, *Penitence, Preaching, and the Coming of the Reformation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 92.

the late Middle Ages as a dark period of decline, sixteenth-century humanists, nineteenth-century Romantic historians, and modern scholars in the wake of Dutch historian Johan Huizinga contributed to the invention of a strict distinction between the ‘culturally exhausted’ Middle Ages and the ‘glorious’ early modern epoch.<sup>2</sup> Similar sentiments also gave rise to a black-and-white dichotomy between ‘spiritually inferior, sinful Catholics’ and ‘superior, repentant Protestants’.<sup>3</sup>

Recent research has shown that such divisions are too stringent and inconsistent with historical reality.<sup>4</sup> Although the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation exerted radical modifications over Christian observance, similar changes and calls for reform already occurred before the sixteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, it has become clear that both Catholics and Protestants sometimes strove for conservation and even restoration of earlier medieval traditions. The depiction of Protestants as turning over a new leaf and criticizing anything rooted in the medieval Church is therefore largely exaggerated.<sup>6</sup> However, these new insights have not yet reached all areas of research in the field. The study of the penitential process – the practices concerning sin, repentance, and penance – still suffers from a one-sided perspective. It is clear that the current discourse needs moderation, and opportunities for further discussion remain.

This article aims to show that, in the early modern period, both Catholic and Protestant authors used late medieval ideas on penance, and that they themselves did not see a clear rupture between the Catholic and Protestant ways of thinking. It adds nuance to generalizations about the penitential process from a literary-historical perspective by examining the reception of *Vanden twaelf dogheden (On the Twelve Virtues)*, a fourteenth-century Middle Dutch treatise on how to live virtuously, and how to behave after breaking God’s rules. This text was widespread in the medieval Low Countries and was later adapted by both Catholics and Protestants. The tradition of the *Twelve Virtues* thus serves as a good case study to examine how the process of breaking the

2 This misleading historiography is denounced in Robert W. Shaffern, *The Penitents’ Treasury: Indulgences in Latin Christendom 1175-1375* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2007), 5-17. The decisive role played by Huizinga in the modern interpretation of the late Middle Ages is discussed in John Van Engen, “Multiple Options: The World of the Fifteenth-Century Church,” *Church History* 77 (2008), 257-59.

3 See, for example, John Foster, *An Accurate Report of the Speech of the Right Hon. John Foster* (Dublin: R. Parchbank, 1798), 17-18; Edmund Hepple, *The Great Question between Protestants and Catholics, Viewed in a New Light: With an Address to Both Parties; Suggested by the Signs of the Times, and Suited to the Present Momentous Crisis; Containing also an Easy and Practicable Plan for the Effectual Security of the Church* (Newcastle: W. Fordyce, 1829), 20.

4 Heinz Schilling, *Die neue Zeit: Vom Christenheitseuropa zum Europa der Staaten: 1250 bis 1750* (Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 1999); Heiko A. Oberman, *The Two Reformations: The Journey from the Last Days to the New World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Brian

Cummings and James Simpson, introduction to *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History*, eds. Brian Cummins and James Simpson (2010; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1-9, esp. 1-5.

5 Alastair Armstrong, *The European Reformation 1500-1610* (Oxford: Heinemann, 2002), 74-75; Rudolph W. Heinze, *Reform and Conflict: From the Medieval World to the Wars of Religion A.D. 1350-1648* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2006), 256-57.

6 Shaffern, *The Penitents' Treasury*, 5-17.

7 Recent publications consider Wevel the author of *Vanden twaelf dogheden*, for instance, Jean-Marie Gueullette, *Eckhart en France: la lecture des Institutions spirituelles attribuées à Tauler 1548-1699* (Grenoble: Éditions Jérôme Millon, 2012), 14-15; and Bernard McGinn, *The Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism 1350-1550* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2012), 76. Scheepsma believes that Wevel authored *Vanden twaelf dogheden*, however, he also mentions the objections to this hypothesis. Wybren Scheepsma, "Das Mittelniederländische Nachleben der Erfurter 'Reden' Meister Eckharts," in: *Meister*

rules and restoring the established order was perceived in the transition from the late Middle Ages to the early modern epoch. Studying this tradition offers insights into how Protestant reformers refuted Catholic explanations of the penitential process and whether a clear rupture between the two periods can be distinguished. A short introduction to the tradition of the *Twelve Virtues* is followed by a discussion of how this description of rule breaking and restoring order evolved depending on the context of its use. Furthermore, reviewing the text's sources sheds light on the establishment of the concepts of sin, repentance, and penance in the tradition of the *Twelve Virtues* by focusing not on the rupture between, but rather on the transition from the late medieval to the early modern period.

### THE TWELVE VIRTUES: A FIRST ACQUAINTANCE

Although the anonymous *Vanden twaelf dogheden* was long attributed to the famous mystic Jan van Ruusbroec (d. 1381), scholars now agree that Godfried Wevel (d. 1396) wrote the text.<sup>7</sup> Wevel was procurator, confessor, and scribe at the Brussels monastery of Groenendaal during Ruusbroec's priorate.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, *Vanden twaelf dogheden* was probably not intended for the canons of Groenendaal. At the beginning of the 1380s, Wevel was solicited, possibly by Geert Grote (d. 1384), founder of the *Devotio Moderna*, to educate the novices of the just-founded monastery of Eemstein near Dordrecht. It is assumed that Wevel composed his *Vanden twaelf dogheden* to instruct the newly arrived monks in spiritual virtuousness.<sup>9</sup> The treatise contains 12 chapters, each of which explains a virtue or a way to achieve virtuousness and illustrates this with concrete examples. The first chapters on humility, obedience, and patience are closely related to monastic spirituality. They are followed by explanations on typical Eckhartian themes, such as *gelâzenheit* (resignation) and *abegescheidenheit* (detachment). The last section is devoted to the different components of the penitential process: sin, repentance, and penance.

Little research has been done on the impact of the *Twelve Virtues*. Nevertheless, they were known in many monasteries in late medieval and early modern Western Europe. During the fifteenth century, *Vanden twaelf dogheden* circulated widely in monastic circles throughout the Low Countries and the western part of present-day Germany. Fifty manuscripts containing a full or partial version of the text survive, including a Latin translation of *Vanden twaelf dogheden*.<sup>10</sup> In 1543, a certain Petrus Noviomagus – sometimes identified as the Jesuit Petrus Canisius (d. 1597) – composed an *opera omnia* of the German mystic Johannes Tauler (d. 1361), in which he integrated the *Tractat vonn Tügentten*, a German adaptation of *Vanden twaelf dogheden*. In this anthology, Noviomagus defended the interests of the Catholic reformers.<sup>11</sup> In 1548, the Carthusian Laurentius Surius (d. 1578) reworked Noviomagus' adaptation into Latin for his own anthology of Tauler.<sup>12</sup> These *Institutiones Taulerianae* became the basis for nearly all other vernacular translations. In this way, the tradition of the *Twelve Virtues* spread throughout Western Europe.<sup>13</sup>

It was, however, not only through the anthology of Tauler that people became acquainted with the *Twelve Virtues*. In 1552, Surius published his *opera omnia* of Ruusbroec with a Latin translation of the original *Vanden twaelf dogheden*, the *Tractatus de praecipuis quibusdam virtutibus*, which was also translated into nearly all Western European vernaculars.<sup>14</sup> Creating those *opera omnia* with the perspective of the Catholic Reformation in mind, Surius, just like Noviomagus, wanted to ensure that everyone could benefit from the catholic belief and rousing teachings of the great medieval masters. However, not only Catholic readers found inspiration in those *opera omnia*. In 1685, the Protestant theologian Theophil Gottlieb Spizelius (d. 1738) published an anthology on penance, in which he integrated Surius' Latin translation of the chapter on penance.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, in 1701, the Protestant theologian Georg Johann Conradi (d. 1747) published a German adaptation of Surius' anthology of Ruusbroec.<sup>16</sup> Both Spizelius and Conradi spread those teachings in the spirit of the Protestant Reformation.<sup>17</sup>

*Eckharts Erfurter 'Reden' in ihrem Kontext*, eds. Dagmar Gottschall and Dietmar Mieth (Mainz: W. Kohlhammer, 2013), 131-52.

8 *Obituaire du Monastère de Groenendael dans la forêt de Soignes, publié avec une introduction et des notes*, ed. Marc Dykmans (Brussels: Paleis der Academieën, 1940), 328; Jozef van Mierlo, "Uit de uitgave van het obituarium van Groenendaal," *Verslagen en Mededelingen van de Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Taal- en Letterkunde* 53 (1941), 432-34, 436.

9 Van Mierlo, "Uit de uitgave," 432-36; Geert Warnar, *Ruusbroec. Literatuur en Mystiek in de Veertiende Eeuw* (Amsterdam: Athenaeum – Polak & Van Gennep, 2003), 292.

10 In the context of my dissertation I compiled an updated inventory of the textual witnesses of *Vanden twaelf dogheden*. The Latin translation of *Vanden twaelf dogheden* was probably done by Geert Grote; see Jan Deschamps, "De handschriftelijke overlevering van Ruusbroecs werken," *Verslagen en mededelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde. Nieuwe Reeks* 19 (1982), 192-93.

11 Petrus Noviomagus, *Des Erleüchten D. Johannis Tauleri, von eym waren evangelischen Leben, Göttliche Predig, Leren, Epistolen, Cantilenen, Prophetien* (Cologne: Jaspar von Genep, 1543), <http://objects.library.uu.nl/reader/index.php?obj=1874-21182&lan=n#page//14/43/52/144352763374190552904892351364212223165.jpg/mode/1up>. On the figure of Petrus Noviomagus and his identification with Petrus Canisius, see Rob J. M. van de Schoor, "Canisius als Herausgeber. Die Ausgaben van Tauler (1543), Kyrill (1546) und Leo dem Grossen (1546)," *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 82 (2011), 161-86. John M. Frymire unproblematically identifies Canisius with Noviomagus in *The Primacy of the Postils: Catholics, Protestants and the Dissemination of Ideas in Early Modern Germany* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 259.

12 Laurentius Surius, *D. Ioannis Thauleri, sublimis et illuminati theologi, saluberrimae ac plane divinae institutiones aut doctrinae, recens inventae, quibus instruimur, uti per spirituales exercitationes virtutesque, ad amabilem Dei unionem pertingatur* (Cologne: Johann Quentel, 1548). About the activities of Surius, see Carlos M. N. Eire, "Early Modern

## THE PENITENTIAL PROCESS IN THE MEDIEVAL TRADITION OF THE *TWELVE VIRTUES*

The third thematic section of *Vanden twaelf dogheden* is entirely dedicated to the penitential process. In Chapter 9, Wevel explains how the faithful should behave after breaking God's rules: he should not regret his sins, for they oblige him to do penance and to humiliate himself.

Indeed, he who would be right should in a certain way not wish that those sins, in which he had fallen, had not happened ... that is: as far as the sins have brought him to penance, and he, through these sins, is abased and humiliated.<sup>18</sup>

In this way, the faithful will grow closer to God. He should not regret the act of sinning itself, but he should regret having displeased God. However, by accepting penance, humiliating himself, and turning towards God, all his sins will be forgiven. In Chapter 10, which deals with repentance, Wevel repeats that the faithful should regret having displeased God. This sincere repentance will arouse God's immediate forgiveness. The eleventh and twelfth chapters concentrate on true penance, which cannot be reached by performing exterior works, such as fasting and holding vigils. Genuine penance only results from interior efforts: rejecting one's sins and turning towards God. Nevertheless, because idleness is intolerable, it is important that the faithful continues to perform works in which he finds himself in the proximity of God. However, when the faithful performs an exterior work which inhibits him in striving for true penance, he may cease this work: "And if any exterior work hinders you [in doing] that, be it fasting or heavy penance, leave it freely without any concerns. And do not suppose that you neglect any penance that way".<sup>19</sup>

As one can imagine, statements such as not regretting breaking God's rules were not always favourably received. Wevel borrowed this argument from the



German theologian Master Eckhart (d. 1328-9): “A good man ought to conform his will to the divine will in such a way that he should will whatever God wills. Since God in some way wills for me to have sinned, I should not will that I had not committed sins; and this is true penitence”.<sup>20</sup> By repeating this concept, Wevel in fact defied *In agro dominico*, the papal bull in which Pope John XXII (d. 1334) not only pronounced 28 propositions of Master Eckhart heretical or suspect of heresy, but also forbade further distribution of those ideas.<sup>21</sup> It is therefore somewhat surprising that the heretical idea of not regretting one’s sins also appears in *Vanden twaelf dogheden*. Moreover, the encouragement to leave exterior works behind, because they do not lead to true penance and can even hinder this ultimate goal, was also condemned by the Pope. It appears in the sixteenth to nineteenth of Eckhart’s propositions refuted by Pope John XXII’s bull:

16. God does not properly command an exterior act.
17. The exterior act is not properly good or divine, and God does not produce it or give birth to it in the proper sense.
18. Let us bring forth the fruit not of exterior acts, which do not make us good, but of interior acts, which the Father who abides in us makes and produces.
19. God loves souls, not the exterior work.<sup>22</sup>

It can be concluded that *Vanden twaelf dogheden* contains some extraordinary statements concerning the breaking of rules, some of which were even condemned heretical at the beginning of the fourteenth century. However, this did not hinder the further distribution of the *Twelve Virtues*. It is therefore interesting to examine how Catholic and Protestant reformers dealt with this remarkable late-medieval heritage.

Catholic Piety in Translation,” in *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Peter Burke and Ronnie Po-chia Hsia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 90-91; Kees Schepers, “Ruusbroec in Latin: Impulses and Impediments,” in *A Companion to John of Ruusbroec*, eds. John Arblaster and Rob Faesen (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 269-70.

13 I inventoried these textual witnesses in the context of my dissertation. On the distribution of this Tauler print, see Albert Ampe, “Een kritisch onderzoek van de ‘Institutiones Taulerianae,’” *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 40 (1966), 167-240; Comité-Jan van Ruusbroec, ed., *Jan van Ruusbroec 1293-1381. Toonstellingscatalogus. Met als bijlage een chronologische tabel en drie kaarten* (Brussels: Koninklijke Bibliotheek Albert I, 1981), 245-47; Jos Andriessen, “Ruusbroec’s Influence until c. 1800,” in *A Companion to John of Ruusbroec*, eds. John Arblaster and Rob Faesen (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 290; 292-96.

THE PENITENTIAL PROCESS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE CATHOLIC REFORMATION

In 1543, the Catholic Petrus Noviomagus composed his *Tractat vonn Tûgentten* with a revised version of the *Twelve Virtues*. The changed sequence of the virtues immediately catches the eye. The themes of sin, repentance, and penance discussed at the end of *Vanden twaelf dogheden* constitute the opening chapters of Noviomagus' treatise. From this alteration, it can be hypothesized that Noviomagus wanted to emphasize different topics than Wevel. The penitential process had apparently grown more important in Noviomagus' view and thus deserved a more prominent place in his work. The revised heritage of the *Twelve Virtues* is included in the first chapter of the *Tractat vonn Tûgentten*, which begins with two general ideas issued from *Vanden twaelf dogheden*: firstly, it is impossible to live without sometimes breaking the rules; and secondly, by being repentant and practising penance, the faithful will again reach God's proximity. However, in the *Tractat vonn Tûgentten* those statements are followed by the explicit proclamation that sin is above all a malicious deed evoking only negative consequences.

Sin is an adoration of the idols, a renunciation of faith, an exaltation of the enemy, a sweet poison, a beginning of damnation, a cause for more sins, a short joy, a long pain, an eternal shame, loved by the world, hated by God and by all good people.<sup>23</sup>

Probably fearing critique arising from misinterpretations, Noviomagus wants his readers to know that breaking the rules is wrong under any circumstances, even if the repentant could have his faults repaired eventually. This repentance has to result, as in *Vanden twaelf dogheden*, from the right attitude: the faithful should regret the displeasure he has caused God rather than the consequences he must face. Noviomagus explicitly mentions that those who show repentance because they are anxious about purgatory or hell will not be forgiven.

14 Laurentius Surius, *D. Joannis Rusbrochii Svmmi atqve sanctiss. Viri, quem insignis quem insignis quidam theologus alterum Dionysium Areopagitam appellat, Opera omnia* (Cologne: Johann Quentel, 1552).

For my dissertation, I inventoried the textual witnesses of this Ruusbroec print. Interesting overviews can already be found in Comité-Jan van Ruusbroec, *Jan van Ruusbroec*, 241-42; Thom Mertens, "Gescreven waerheit blivet staen": De receptie van Ruusbroecs werken," in *Een claeer verlicht man: over het leven en werk van Jan van Ruusbroec (1293-1381)*, ed. Egbert P. Bos (Hilversum: Verloren, 1993), 80-81; Schepers, "Ruusbroec in Latin," 269-74.

15 Theophil Gottlieb Spizelius, *Selecta Doctorum Veterum Scriptorumque Ecclesiasticorum, De Vera Sinceraqve ad Documenta, cum Praefaminibus Theophili Spizelii* (Augsburg: Theophil Goebel, 1685).

This you should know: that this repentance should neither come from servile fear of hell or purgatory, nor from a sensual regret with bitterness to commiserate oneself and one's own misfortune, but because one has dishonoured and angered God.<sup>24</sup>

After all, such people do not act out of love for God, but out of self-concern. By making clear that such people would not obtain God's mercy, Noviomagus probably anticipated criticism for allowing people to insincerely express sorrow only on their deathbed foreseeing purgatory or hell. Furthermore, Noviomagus states that the sinner should go to a priest and confess his sins to show real repentance.

Therefore he ought to deplore his sins with bitter repentance, and guard against this with true sorrow and true intention, acknowledge guilt in confession before the priest in God's place (who has the power over [the sinner] to bind and unbind), and receive penance according to the ordinance of the holy church.<sup>25</sup>

*Vanden twaelf dogheden* and the *Tractat vonn Tügentten* also differ in the importance they place on certain expressions of penitence. Wevel declares that exterior works will not lead to penance and that interior efforts are most important. The *Tractat vonn Tügentten* contains the same idea, but Noviomagus is more cautious and asserts that performing exterior works will effectively lead to penance.

Out of this reason flows the exterior works of penance, such as fasting, keeping vigil, praying, almsgiving and the like, which are much more pleasant to God as they imply a more loving turn towards God. That is why you should follow those works in which you experience God's goodness more closely, and become more ready to feel sorry for your sins, and to weigh [them] more heavily, and to put more trust in God.<sup>26</sup>

16 Georg Johannes Conradi, *Des Ehrwürdigen Vaters D. Johannis Rusbrochii (...) Doctor Ecstaticus, bestehend aus allen desselben sehr gottseligen Schrifften* (Offenbach am Main: Bonaventura de Launoy, 1701). See also Comité-Jan van Ruusbroec, *Jan van Ruusbroec*, 250.

17 Peter C. Erb, "The Use of Ruusbroec among German Protestants," in *Jan van Ruusbroec: The Sources, Content and Sequels of His Mysticism*, eds. Paul Mommaers and Norbert De Paepe (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1984), 153-75; Dietrich Blaufuss, "Commercium epistolicum in der Reichsstadt: Gottlieb Spizel/Augsburg (1639-1691) und seine Briefwechselsammlung im Umkreis von Orthodoxie und Pietismus," in *Stadt und Literatur im deutschen Sprachraum der frühen Neuzeit 1*, ed. Klaus Garber (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1998), 411-24; Dietrich Blaufuss, "Gottlieb Spizel (1639-1691) – dreissig Jahre Pfarrer an St. Jakob," in *St. Jakob – 650 Jahre. Ein Kirche und ihr Stadtteil* (Augsburg: Wissner, 2005), 36-39.

18 "Ja, die recht waer, hi en soude niet willen na eenre wijs die sonde, daer hi in ghefallen was, dat die niet gheschiet en waeren ... mer also verre

als hem die sonde ghebrocht hebben ter penitencien, ende hi overmids die sonden, ghenedert ende gheoetmoedicht is". Jozef van Mierlo, *Werken: 1. Vanden XII Beghinen. 2. Vanden XII Dogheden* (Mechelen: Het Kompas, 1932), 294 (trans. Guido de Baere and Ine Kiekens).

19 "Ende ist dat uu enich uutwendich werc hier-toe hindert, het si vasten of grote penitencie, dat laet vrilic sonder alle sorghe. Ende en waent niet, dat ghi daer-mede versumet enighe penitencie". Ibid., 303 (trans. de Baere and Kiekens).

20 "Bonus homo debet sic conformare voluntatem suam voluntati divine, quod ipse velit quicquid deus vult. Quia deus vult aliquo modo me pecasse, nollem ego quod ego peccata non commissem". Satoshi Kikuchi, *From Eckhart to Ruusbroec: A Critical Inheritance of Mystical Themes in the Fourteenth Century* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2014), 43. This edition includes both the original Latin and the English translation.

21 Interesting studies on In agro dominico and its influence include Josef, Koch, "Kritische Studien zum Leben Meister Eckharts. Zweiter Teil – Die Kölner Jahre, der Prozess und die Verurteilung," *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 39

According to Noviomagus, God appreciates exterior works when they permit the repentant to ponder his sins and to turn towards God. Nevertheless, both Wevel and Noviomagus consider penance in the same way: works conducted from the right interior attitude are primary. However, Wevel's statement can lead to the assumption that some people do not need to perform any penance at all. Possibly, Noviomagus wanted to avoid such misinterpretations by accentuating the importance of exterior works.

For the *opera omnia* of Tauler, Surius reworked Noviomagus' *Tractat vonn Tügentten* into Latin. The passages concerning the penitential process were faithfully integrated into the first chapter of the *Institutiones Taulerianae*: breaking the rules is considered reprehensible although unavoidable, true repentance only emanates from true love for God, and exterior works are encouraged in the striving for penance. For his edition of the oeuvre of Ruusbroec, Surius must have consulted a version of *Vanden twaelf dogheden* itself. Surius repeats that sins cannot be avoided and that the faithful should not regret them. Nevertheless, the first part of the new title of this chapter shows a shift in emphasis. "That the gifts of grace must be referred to God, who has not only forgiven us the sins but also preserved us for many mistakes" encourages the faithful to be thankful since God has also saved him from sins he has not committed.<sup>27</sup> Although this idea also appears in *Vanden twaelf dogheden*, it occupies a more prominent place in Surius' work. The descriptions of repentance and penance are precisely copied from *Vanden twaelf dogheden*. Again it is stated that the repentant should reject his sinful behaviour and turn towards God. The faithful can perform works as acts of penance, but they have to arise from the right attitude in order to not distract him from his love for God.

Both Noviomagus and Surius wanted to spread the Catholic faith by making useful teachings of the past available to a broad audience. Nevertheless, the descriptions of the penitential process in their *opera omnia* suggest different attitudes in their distribution strategies. Noviomagus probably worried about

the content of the *Twelve Virtues*. In the turbid times of the sixteenth century, he must have feared that his readers would misunderstand his explanations. This was not peculiar considering the condemnation of the same ideas in Eckhart's oeuvre by the papal bull *In agro dominico*, two centuries before Noviomagus composed his anthology of Tauler. Noviomagus was in any case very careful in adapting his source text on the *Twelve Virtues* by adding qualifications and changing some passages so as not to mislead his readership. Concerning exterior works, for instance, he made his message very clear: God expects both interior and exterior efforts of the repentant. Noviomagus' contemporary, Surius, seemed less worried about possible misinterpretations by his readers. From his perspective, respecting the authority of his sources must have been the most important element to reckon with. Although he made shortened versions of his source texts, his main concern in the editions of Tauler and Ruusbroec was to transmit the teachings of the great masters faithfully.

## THE PENITENTIAL PROCESS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

In 1685, Spizelius created a Latin thematic anthology on penance, based on the teachings of great religious authorities. He considered Ruusbroec as one of the eminent teachers and used the Ruusbroec edition of 1552 for his chapter 'De Vera Poenitentia'. Interestingly, Spizelius did not hide the fact that he was using Surius' edition, which was initially distributed in the spirit of the Catholic Reformation. Although Spizelius does not mention Surius' name, he refers in his introduction to the corresponding pages of the edition of 1552 and copied the whole chapter precisely.<sup>28</sup>

So, this true displeasure is the serious will to never commit sins, and the true trust together with the true love for God [is] the true penance. From this, the exterior signs of penance originate, such as confession, keeping vigil, fasting, praying, almsgiving, and other

(1960): 5-52; Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn, *Meister Eckhart. The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense* (Toronto: Paulist Press, 1981); Rob Faesen, "Ruusbroec at the Charterhouse of Herne. How Did the Carthusians React to the Eckhart Shock?" in *A Fish Out of Water? From Contemplative Solitude to Carthusian Involvement in Pastoral Care and Reform Activity*, eds. Stephen J. Molvarec and Tom Gaens, (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 107-25; Kikuchi, *From Eckhart to Ruusbroec*, 37-47.

22 "16. Deus proprie non precipit actum exteriorem. 17. Actus exterior non est proprie bonus nec divinus, nec operatur ipsum Deus proprie nec parit. 18. Afferamus fructum actuum non exteriorum, qui nos bonos non faciunt, sed actuum interiorum, quos pater in nobis manens facit et operatur. 19. Deus animas amat, non opus extra". Kikuchi, *From Eckhart to Ruusbroec*, 43-44.

23 "Die sunde ist ein anbettung der abgötter / eyn verleugnung des glaubens / eyn erhebung des feyends / ein suss vergifft eyn anfang der verdamnuss / eyn vrsach zu mer sunden / ein kurz freud / ein lange pein / ein ewige schande / geliebt vonn der welt / gehass von got / vnd von allen guten menschenn". Petrus

Noviomagus, *Des Erleüchten D. Johannis Tauleri*, r.cclxxix (trans. de Baere and Kiekens).

24 “Dis ist zu wissen / das diser reuw sol niet kommen vs knechtlichem forchten fur die hel oder fegfeur / noch aus einem sinlichen leitwesen mitt bitterheit / vmb sich selber vnd seinen eygen schaden zu beklagen / mer / dann das er got enteret vnd verzornet hat”. Ibid., r.cclxxix (trans. de Baere and Kiekens).

25 “Da fur muss er mit bitteren reuwen sein sund beweinen vnde mitt warem leitwesen vnd warem auffsatz sich for der zu hutenn für den priester in gottes stat (der macht hat über in zu binden vnde entbinden) in der beicht schuldig geben / vnd buss entfangen nach insetzung der heiligenn kirchenn”. Ibid., r.cclxxix (trans. de Baere and Kiekens).

26 “Aus disem grunde fliessen die auswendige werck der penitentz / als vasten / wachenn / betten / aelmoesen geben / vnd der geleich / die gott so vill angenemer seyn / so sey diss lieblichen zuckerens in gott mer haben. Darumb in woelchen wercken du die gütigkeit gottes naeher beyndes / vnde du geschickter werdes deyn sunden zu beklagen / vnd grosser zu wygen / vnd gott mer zu betrauenn / soelche werck folge”. Ibid., r.cclxxx (trans. de Baere and Kiekens).

similar godly works which please God much more insofar as they are more vigorous and accurate and more united to love.<sup>29</sup>

Although all chapters are modelled on the 1552 edition, the chapter on penance is changed and completed with descriptions from the adaptation of 1548. It is clear that Conradi knew both versions and considered it necessary to emphasize the importance of exterior works.

Both Spizelius and Conradi were part of the Protestant tradition, but followed different distribution strategies. Spizelius wanted to adhere to the letter of the teachings of the past’s virtuous masters. By rendering his source text precisely, he probably wanted to avoid making mistakes or encouraging misinterpretations concerning Ruusbroec’s authority and spirituality. Conradi, on the contrary, must have been more worried about the right interpretation of the texts he spread. Concerning his descriptions of the penitential process, he was not satisfied with one source, but compiled two versions of the *Twelve Virtues*, to make the exact content clear. It can be assumed that he was, just like Noviomagus, cautious not to actuate wrong interpretations of his sources.

### CONCLUSION

In this article, I investigated the penitential process – a *leitmotiv* in late medieval and early modern thinking – in the long tradition of the *Twelve Virtues*. Versions of this treatise on virtues were read and copied in the sixteenth to the eighteenth century for both Catholic and Protestant purposes. While previous scholarship has emphasized a dramatic rift between the Middle Ages and early modern period, and between Catholic and Protestant perspectives, none of the four early modern compilers of the *Twelve Virtues* – two Catholics and two Protestants – reflected such division in their work. They all valued the late medieval works of Tauler and Ruusbroec as stirring teachings for the faithful. Furthermore, this case study shows that neither Spizelius nor Conradi found it problematic to

use Catholic editions to compose their writings for a Protestant audience. The compilers did not see ruptures nor drew borders between the Catholic and Protestant ways of thinking. Concerning the penitential process, their objective was to spread clear explanations on how to behave after breaking God's rules. For Surius and Spizelius, the correct explanation must be loyal to the words of earlier theologians. They respected the masters' authority by faithfully rendering the contents of their texts. Noviomagus and Conradi were more concerned with their own readers. By adding differentiations and alterations or by using different versions of one and the same textual tradition, they wanted to ensure that their readers would grasp the right meaning of their expositions. It can be concluded that the pursuit of virtuousness was above all the main aim of the *Twelve Virtues*, for which both Catholic and Protestant compilers relied on the late medieval tradition on how to deal with breaking the rules.<sup>30</sup>

27 "Ut Deo gratiae referendae sint, qui nobis non solum peccata dimiserit, sed etiam à multis nos praeseruarit vitijis". Laurentius Surius, *D. Ioannis Tauleri*, 245 (trans. de Baere).

28 Ibid., 303.

29 "So ist nun dieses wahre misbehagen der ernste wille niemahlen zu suendigen / und das wahre zutrauen sambt der wahren liebe zu Gott / die wahre busse. Hieraus aber entstehen die aeuserlichen bussmercke / als da sind beichten / wachen / fasten / baeten / allmosen geben und andere den gleichen Gottselige wercke / welche Gott so vielmehr gefallen als kraefftiger / genauer und mehr sie mit liebe verknuepffet sind". Ibid., 100 (trans. de Baere and Kiekens).

30 The findings presented in this article emanate from my research project 'Vanden twaelf dogheden: An Exemplary Study of the Sources, Functions, Distribution and Impact of Middle Dutch Spiritual Writings' (Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO), 2012-2016). I would like to thank Lieke Smits (Leiden University) for her useful comments and suggestions and Professor Emeritus Guido de Baere (Ruuwbroec Institute, University of Antwerp) for his help with the translations.

Ine Kiekens has a Bachelor and Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature (Dutch-French) and a Master of Arts in Literary Studies. She is currently working on a joint PhD in Literature and History at Ghent University and the Ruwbroec Institute at the University of Antwerp. In her research project "*Vanden twaelf dogheden: An Exemplary Study of the Sources, Functions, Distribution and Impact of Middle Dutch Spiritual Writings*", she studies the evolution of spiritual themes in the long and widespread tradition of the *Twelve Virtues*.

# RESTRICTED MOVEMENT

## DANCING FROM LATE ANTIQUITY THROUGH THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

Donatella Tronca

University of Bologna, Ravenna, Italy

*ABSTRACT – Analysis of various sources from Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages, with a focus on texts by Church Fathers and conciliar norms intended to regulate the dancing practices, enables examination of the formation of Christian prejudice against dancing. A connection can be established between the choreia (choral dance) of the Ideal City described by Plato and the ideal of harmony that the early medieval Church attempted to impose as a form of social control. Such reflections, on dancing as well as on harmony – or the lack thereof – thus facilitate an in-depth reflection on the choreutic aspects of demonic possession.*

### INTRODUCTION

During a charity event held in Rome in April 2014, two young American priests made a small spectacle: one did a tap dance and the other an Irish jig. As their performance took place in front of a crucifix and a portrait of Pope Francis, much of its excitement was received as brusque impropriety. Yet, facing criticism, they responded, “we’ll just say to those that criticize us that they



should look at the Bible, where the Lord tells us to live with joy”.<sup>1</sup> Such an argument, in which both parties claim to act in the interest of reinforcing the authoritative norm, is hardly a friction between ‘modern’ enthusiasm and ‘conservative’ preoccupations; it is in fact age-old, and, instead of a simple disagreement about dancing, always the result of diversified philosophical, religious, and social priorities.

The role of dance in Christian religious observation and celebration has a somewhat complicated and controversial history. It has long been held, and little challenged, that the early medieval decline of dancing in religious ceremonies resulted from the Church’s outright condemnation of dancing as a diabolical act. This reductive interpretation offers no adequate accommodation for Christian promotions of dancing; more problematic still, it necessitates blindness towards comparable rationales of ancient philosophers and Church Fathers, one of the most dynamic and influential aspects of the dispute over the manifestation of spiritual structure. This article re-approaches Greek, Latin, and Jewish sources from Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages, including both denunciations and endorsements of dancing, and uncovers in them a common thread. While images of diabolical dancers do arise, the central concern of those who wrote about dancing at a holy time or place is the body’s alignment with spiritual harmony. This is demonstrated by reanalysing what various sources tell us of dancing in religious contexts, and the spiritual, philosophical, and cultural reasons for treating dancing as an act of transgression.

#### ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY AND THE PLATONIC *CHOREIA*

At the beginning of the Christian era, the most positive approaches to dance were those derived from Judaism and polytheistic cults. Indeed, dance had always been an essential devotional tool of Jewish religious practice. In the first few centuries CE, Christians shared the idea that dancing was an act of worship and an expression of joy; such views are demonstrated in numerous literary remarks that martyrs as

1 “Ci limiteremo a dire a coloro che ci criticano di consultare la Bibbia, dove il Signore ci dice di vivere con gioia” (trans. Donatella Tronca). “Tip-tap e danza iralndese [sic], i preti ballerini si sfidano davanti a vescovi e cardinali,” *Caffeina Magazine*. <http://www.caffeinamagazine.it/2014-10-20-12-41-28/il-video/4035-tip-tap-e-danza-iralndese-i-preti-ballerini-si-sfidano-davanti-a-vescovi-e-cardinali> (Accessed 29 September 2015).

2 “Τί οὖν μακαριώτερου τοῦ τήν ἀγγέλων χορείαν ἐν γῆ μιμεῖσθαι;” (What state can be more blessed than to imitate on earth the choruses of angels?).

Basil the Great, *Epistola II*, in *Basilii Gregorio*, ed. J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 32 (Paris, 1857), 225-26 (trans. Tronca).

3 Steven H. Lonsdale, *Dance and Ritual Play in Greek Religion* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), 8.

4 *Ibid.*, 20.

5 *Ibid.*, 21-23.

6 Plato, *Laws* 7.816a, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, trans. Robert Gregg Bury, vols. 10 and 11, Loeb Classical Library 187 and 192 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967-1968).

7 Plato, *Laws* 2.654ab; Lonsdale, *Dance and Ritual Play*, 24-29.

8 Leslie Kurke, “Imagining Chorality: Wonder, Plato’s Puppets, and Moving Statues,” in *Performance and Culture in Plato’s Laws*, ed. Anastasia-Erasmia Peponi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 132.

9 Lonsdale, *Dance and Ritual Play*, 32.

well as angels danced in heaven. For example, in the fourth century CE, Bishop Basil of Caesarea endorsed dancing by asking who would be more blessed on earth than those who could imitate the χορεία (*choreia*, choral dance) of the angels.<sup>2</sup>

The ancient Greeks also considered dance a supreme art form and, for this reason, associated it with the spiritual realm. It is moreover important to underline the social role dancing played for them as a collective ritual act. In *Laws*, especially Books 2 and 7, Plato systematically delineates what Steven H. Lonsdale calls an “ancient anthropology of dance”.<sup>3</sup> Ritual dance was an instrument of *paideia* (education) and, in Platonic thought, moral and civic virtues could be acquired by learning to dance in the right way. As Lonsdale puts it, “Plato’s legislation for musical activity in the *Laws* indicates the power of choral song and dance as an organ of social control for the transmission and maintenance of sentiments among citizens”.<sup>4</sup> After all, the term νόμος (*nomos*, law) also means melody and musical mode: just as *nomos*, in the sense of ‘law’, is the basis of social order, it is by following the musical *nomos* that the collective *choreia* can guide the social body harmoniously.<sup>5</sup>

The term *choreia* indicates combined acts of singing and dancing, and, according to Plato, the link between the two derives from the body’s rhythm and movement. In choral performances, voice and body must move in harmony or, to quote Plato, “when the representation of things spoken by means of gestures arose, it produced the whole art of dancing”.<sup>6</sup> Only those who are trained to follow this harmony can live in the Platonic City. Those who cannot dance are described as *achoreutoi* and are rejected by the Ideal State, for they will not be able to socialize with the others or move in harmony with the rest of the civic *choreia*.<sup>7</sup> Leslie Kurke summarizes *choreia* as “the perfect coordination or orchestration of movement and song, so that many voices sing as one voice and many bodies move as a single organism”.<sup>8</sup> *Choreia* therefore plays a civic role in Plato’s work, to the point where the failure to move one’s body in harmony with the others is seen as immoral and depraved.<sup>9</sup> It is thus probable that the angelic *choreia* described by Basil of Caesarea used the harmonious *choreia* from the Platonic Ideal State as a model.

## THERAPEUTHAE AND KORYBANTES

The passage in the Gospel of Luke in which Christ criticizes the Pharisees' behaviour towards John the Baptist, saying "we played the flute for you, and you did not dance",<sup>10</sup> seems to indicate that Christ also understood dancing as a manifestation of joy. The apocryphal Acts of John, dated between the mid-second and end of the third century CE, mentions that Christ himself danced and sang a hymn at the Last Supper while the Apostles danced around him in a circle.<sup>11</sup>

Additionally, in *The Contemplative Life* from the first century CE, Philo of Alexandria describes the rites of singing and dancing at Pentecost celebrations performed by the Therapeutae, ascetics living in poverty and chastity. During the gathering, which was held every fifty days and included a vigil, two choirs – one male and the other female – moved around by dancing. Moreover, they were inebriated like the Bacchae, but their state of drunkenness was holy.<sup>12</sup> The importance that Philo places on the concept of *χαρά* (*chara*, joy) is noteworthy. He used the term to indicate the pleasure that fills the soul by making it smile and rejoice to the point where it is prompted to dance, thus appearing delirious and possessed (*βεβάκχευται*) to those not participating in the worship.<sup>13</sup> Remo Cacitti has identified a pertinent connection, in terms of therapeutic mediation, between the Christological hymn and dance in the Acts of John and the liturgical dancing of the Jewish ascetic community described by Philo.<sup>14</sup>

The ancient Greek verb *βακχεύω*, meaning 'to be possessed by a Bacchic frenzy' and always associated with the Dionysian world, was used by Philo to denote a state of divine possession. The term later took on a different, negative connotation in early medieval Latin sources, where the pejorative form obtained from the calque *bacchari* and its associated gestures was instead used to indicate a state of demonic possession.<sup>15</sup>

10 Lk 7:32, in *The Holy Bible*, New Revised Standard Version (New York: Harper Collins, 1989).

11 Acts of John 94, in *Acta Iohannis. Praefatio – Textus*, eds. Éric Junod and Jean-Daniel Kaestli, Corpus Christianorum Series Apocryphorum 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1983), 199. On the fortunes of the Acts of John and the complex question of dating it, see Éric Junod and Jean-Daniel Kaestli, *L'histoire des actes apocryphes des apôtres du IIIe au IXe siècle: le cas des Actes de Jean* (Geneva: Faculté de Théologie de Lausanne, 1982); Arthur J. Dewey, "The Hymn in the Acts of John: Dance as Hermeneutic," *Semeia* 38 (1986), 67-80; Jean-Daniel Kaestli, "Response," *Semeia* 38 (1986), 81-88; Melody Gabrielle Beard-Shouse, "The Circle Dance of the Cross in the Acts of John: An Early Christian Ritual" (Master's thesis, University of Kansas, 2009), [kuscholarworks.ku.edu/handle/1808/6462](http://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/handle/1808/6462).

12 Philo of Alexandria, *La vita contemplativa* 83-90, ed. Paola Graffigna (Genova: Il Melangolo, 1992), 87-91.

13 Remo Cacitti, *Furiosa Turba: i fondamenti religiosi dell'eversione sociale, della*

*dissidenza politica e della contestazione ecclesiale dei Circoncellioni d'Africa* (Milan: Edizioni Biblioteca Francescana, 2006), 129. Philo says again in *De ebrietate* 1: "But whatever soul is filled with grace is at once in a state of exultation, and delight, and dancing; for it becomes full of triumph, so that it would appear to be intoxicated, and agitated, and to be beside itself. [...] For in the case of those who are under the influence of divine inspiration, not only in the soul accustomed to be excited, and as it were to become frenzied, but also the body is accustomed to become reddish and of a fiery complexion, the joy which is internally diffused and which is exulting, secretly spreading its affections even to the exterior parts, by which many foolish people are deceived, and have fancied that sober persons were intoxicated. And yet indeed those sober people are in a manner intoxicated, having drunk deep of all good things, and having received pledges from perfect virtue." *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged, New Updated Version*, trans. Charles Duke Yonge, with a foreword by David M. Scholer (1854-55; Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 146-48. See also Cristina

In terms of musical instruments, the *aulos* (a pipe or a flute) was the most popular accompaniment to Dionysian rituals in ancient Greece. During such gatherings, Korybantes and Bacchae customarily abandoned themselves to a form of mania, which Gilbert Rouget defines as a possession trance.<sup>16</sup> Plato often describes the *aulos* as a typical instrument of mania and precludes it from the Ideal City, along with Bacchic dancing and the dances of Nymphs and Satyrs.<sup>17</sup> Yet, as Simonetta Grandolini has explained, Plato's disapproval of the *aulos* does not target the instrument itself; in keeping with his traditionalist nature, it is part of a condemnation of all instruments that subverted musical traditions and relinquished ancient austerity.<sup>18</sup>

As Rouget's studies on the relationship between music and trance show, there is no consequential link between the onset of trance and a certain type of music, or sound of a particular instrument: music cannot trigger trance by itself through its intrinsic virtues. Instead, trance is a state of consciousness where the most important roles are played by psychological and cultural components.<sup>19</sup> In *Symposium*, Plato associates the *aulos* with Marsyas, a character originally from Asia Minor – and therefore a foreigner – which is also where the cult of Dionysus originated. Adopting psychoanalytic terminology, Rouget explains that such an association is perfectly compatible with the general logic of possession, which always involves a form of invasion by the Other; in the case of rituals of Dionysian possession, the Other and Elsewhere are represented by Dionysus, the 'foreigner' *par excellence*.<sup>21</sup>

### DIRTY DANCING

In his commentary on Matthew at the end of the fourth century CE, John Chrysostom states that "where dance is, there is the devil".<sup>22</sup> This expression re-emerges in later works, such as the thirteenth-century texts by the Dominican Guillaume Peyrot and the Canon Regular Jacques de Vitry.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the statement has almost always been used – even in some contemporary scholarship – to summarize indiscriminately

the Christian concept of dance, as if it has never changed, regardless of time and context, since the dawn of the religion.<sup>24</sup> In my opinion, the Church Fathers' negative convictions about dancing do not seem far removed from the attitudes of many earlier pagan philosophers towards theatre, mimes, and the acting profession in general. After all, Cicero also associates dancing with madness and drunkenness – characteristics that do not belong to a respectable person – in his oration *Pro Murena* to defend Lucius Licinius Murena against Cato's accusation that he had danced in Asia. This classical text had an enormous influence on censors of dancing in the West, partly because Ambrose of Milan quoted it in *De virginibus*.<sup>25</sup> This example alone cautions us not to reduce the Church Fathers' disapproval of dancing to opposition between Christianity and paganism, lest we mistakenly claim that dancing was excluded from churches because it was seen as a pagan practice.

Scripture provides various examples of dancing, some of which are treated negatively, such as the idolatrous dance by the Jews before the Golden Calf, or Salome's provocative dance.<sup>26</sup> More often, however, they are celebratory dances in moments of joy or in praise of God.<sup>27</sup> Other Christian sources often refer to biblical models to endorse, or oppose, dancing inside or near places of worship, cemeteries, and martyrs' graves. For example, in *De paenitentia*, Ambrose of Milan maintains that one should not copy the hysterical movements of indecent dancing, but rather David's dance before the Ark of the Covenant, as the latter can bring one closer to true faith.<sup>28</sup>

The first testimony regarding the Christian custom of dancing on martyrs' graves in the presence of relics is provided by the anonymous text of a homily spoken in a church in the Orient, probably between 363 and 365 CE. This sermon was delivered during a celebration in honour of the martyr Polyeuctes, and it went as follows: "Through which acts of thanks shall we recognize the love that he had for God? We shall dance for him, if you should so desire, our usual dances".<sup>29</sup> In one of his sermons, Augustine condemns the insolence of certain believers who have danced and sung for an entire night on the grave of the martyr Cyprian in Carthage:

Bermond, *La danza negli scritti di Filone, Clemente Alessandrino e Origene: storia e simbologia* (Frankfurt am Main: Domus Editoria Europaea, 2001).

14 Remo Cacitti, "Οι εις ἔτι νῦν καί εις ἡμᾶς κάνονες. I Terapeuti di Alessandria nella vita spirituale protocristiana," in *Origene maestro di vita spirituale. Origen: Master of Spiritual Life*, eds. Luigi F. Pizzolato and Marco Rizzi (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2001), 86.

15 Luigi Canetti, "La danza dei posseduti: mappe concettuali e strategie di ricerca," in *Il diavolo nel Medioevo: atti del XLIX Convegno storico internazionale, Todi, 14-17 ottobre 2012*, ed. Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 2013), 577.

16 Gilbert Rouget, *Musica e trance: I rapporti fra la musica e i fenomeni di possessione*, trans. Giuseppe Mongelli, rev. ed. (Turin: Einaudi, 1986), 256-309.

17 Plato, *Republic* 3.399c-e, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, ed. and trans. Chris Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy, vol. 5, Loeb Classical Library 237 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); Plato, *Laws* 7.814d ff.

18 Simonetta Grandolini, “A proposito di armonia frigia, Dioniso e ditirambo in Platone,” *Giornale Italiano di Filologia* 53 (2001), 289.

19 Rouget, *Musica e trance*, 3-11.

20 Plato, *Symposium* 215c, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, trans. W. R. M. Lamb, vol. 3, Loeb Classical Library 166 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925).

21 Rouget, *Musica e trance*, 129-131.

22 “ἔνθα γάρ ὄρχησις, ἐκεῖ διάβολος”. John Chrysostom, *In Matthaem homiliae* 48.3, ed. J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 58 (Paris, 1889), 491.

23 Jacques de Vitry: “Chorea est circulus, cuius centrum est diabolus” (Dance is the circle in whose centre stands the devil). Alessandro Arcangeli, “La Chiesa e la danza tra tardo Medioevo e prima età moderna,” in *Ludica: Annali di storia e civiltà del gioco* 13-14 (2007-8), 203 (trans. Tronca).

24 See, for example, Ottorino Pasquato, *Gli spettacoli in S. Giovanni Crisostomo: Paganesimo e Cristianesimo ad Antiochia e Costantinopoli nel IV secolo* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1976), 113.

Once, not many years ago, the effrontery of dancers infested this extremely holy place, where the body of such a holy martyr lies; the pestilent vice and the effrontery of dancers – I repeat – infested such a holy place. All through the night, they sang impiously and danced to the rhythm of the song.<sup>30</sup>

Augustine also expresses disapproval of the celebration of a feast known as *Laetitia* in Thagast. In 395 CE, in a letter to his friend Alypius, he argued that those who dismissed the ban on the feast known as *Laetitia* were simply looking for an excuse to get drunk.<sup>31</sup> As *laetitia* is the Latin equivalent of the Greek term χαρά, it is worth asking whether the feast that Augustine criticized was associated with the same joy and pleasure that had previously been celebrated by Philo as virtually the best religious experience. This evidence warrants the hypothesis that dancing was not condemned in Christian contexts and excluded from churches because it was seen as evil itself; rather, negative conclusions almost always derived from specific situations of disorder and were often characterized by drunkenness and lust. Basil of Caesarea, for example, denounced the custom of certain women who danced drunkenly near the basilicas of martyrs on the night of Easter,<sup>32</sup> while Augustine spoke out against the Donatists, who danced near martyrs’ graves, ran around, and blessed their cups through contact with the tomb while celebrating the memory of the martyr Lawrence.<sup>33</sup>

An association between dancing and disorder is also present in conciliar texts. In the fourth century CE, two canons of the Council of Laodicea addressed these practices directly by imposing a ban on disorderly dancing and jumping at weddings.<sup>34</sup> The council texts that banned dancing and singing “cantica turpia” (depraved songs), even those ratified by the Gallic Councils of Vannes (461-491 CE)<sup>35</sup> and Agde (10 September 506),<sup>36</sup> were upheld in different geographical contexts and met practically no challenge throughout the Middle Ages. In sixth-century Gaul, Bishop Caesarius of Arles also frequently preached against the speaking of “cantica turpia vel luxuriosa” (depraved or lascivious songs) and dancing in a diabolical manner

while uttering obscenities. Caesarius specifically condemned dancing in front of basilicas, a much more improper practice, thus a serious offence.<sup>37</sup> The Councils of Auxerre (c. 573-c. 603)<sup>38</sup> and Châlons (639-654) revisited the condemnation of dancing and obscene singing, which demonstrated a tendency to take more offence against women, as groups of dancers were almost always “foemineis” (feminine, effeminate).<sup>39</sup>

In Visigothic Spain in the sixth and seventh centuries, Bishop Isidore of Seville castigated celebrations and immodest dancing during the calends of January, the ancient *Saturnalia*.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, in Rome in the mid-eighth century, Saint Boniface wrote a letter to Pope Zachary, complaining that people celebrated the calends in an extremely noisy manner in front of Saint Peter’s church.<sup>41</sup> As the ninth canon of the Roman Council of 743 (summoned by the same Pope Zachary) demonstrates, a ban on celebrating the calends of January was promptly implemented.<sup>42</sup> Returning to Visigothic Spain, we find Valerio of Bierzo, a monk who recounted a curious episode of a cleric dancing, which he describes as almost theatrical and lascivious. Valerio’s use of “bacchabundus” is suggestive because of its explicit Bacchic associations.<sup>43</sup> Ties between dancing and drunkenness, madness, and excess are central to these accounts of celebration.

The Roman Councils of 826 and 847 banned celebrations with banquets on feast days, as some, “et maxime mulieres” (and especially women), instead of praying, danced, sang obscene songs, and played “ioca turpia” (depraved games) in a manner reminiscent of pagans. In the 847 Council, it was stressed that this type of celebration was done “super mortuos” (on the graves of the dead).<sup>44</sup>

With regard to the latter practice, a ninth-century source relates what happened during the transfer of Saint Vitus’ relics. After founding a monastery at Corvey in Saxony in 822, the monks of Corbie obtained the relics of Saint Vitus in 837. During the transfer, choruses of men and women danced around the church all night long, singing the *Kyrie Eleison*. These choruses are somewhat similar to

25 Cicero, *Pro Murena* 13, in *Cicero in Twenty-Eight Volumes*, trans. Coll Macdonald, vol. 10, Loeb Classical Library 324 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976); Ambrose of Milan, *De virginibus* 3.5, in *Verginità et vedovanza: tutte le opere di Sant’Ambrogio*, ed. and trans. Franco Gori, vol. 1 (Milan: Biblioteca Ambrosiana, 1989). See also Alessandro Arcangeli,  *Davide o Salomè? Il dibattito europeo sulla danza nella prima età moderna* (Rome: Viella, 2000), 108.

26 Ex 32:19; Mt 14:6-8; Mk 6:22-25.

27 2 Sm 6:14-16; Ps 149:2-3; Ps 150:4-5; Jgs 15:12-13; Jer 31:13; Eccl 3:4.

28 Ambrose of Milan, *De paenitentia* 2.6, in *Ambrosius, Explanatio symboli, De sacramentis, De mysteriis, De paenitentia, De excessu fratris Satyri, De obitu Valentiani, De obitu Theodosii*, ed. Otto Faller, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 73 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1955), 117.

29 “Ποῖα δὲ χαριστήρια τῆς πρὸς Θεὸν ἀγάπης προσάγοντες, εὐγνώμονες ἂν νομισθεῖημεν; Χορεύσωμεν αὐτῷ, εἰ δοκεῖ, τὰ συνήθη”.



Louis Gougaud, “La danse dans les églises,” *Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique* 15 (1914), 10, quoting Benjamin Aubé, “Homélie inédite,” in the appendix of *Polyeucte dans l’histoire* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1882), 79 (trans. Tronca). See also Remo Cacitti, “*Sepulcrorum et picturarum adoratores: un’iconografia della Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis nel culto martiriale donatista*,” in *L’ara dipinta di Thaenae. Indagine sul culto martiriale nell’Africa paleocristiana*, ed. Remo Cacitti et al. (Rome: Viella, 2011), 113; E. Louis Backman, *Religious Dances in the Christian Church and in Popular Medicine* (London: George Allena & Unwin, 1952), 23-24.

30 “Aliquando ante annos non ualde multos etiam istum locum inuaserat petulantia saltatorum. istum tam sanctum locum, ubi iacet tam sancti martyris corpus, sicut meminerunt multi qui habent aetatem; locum, inquam, tam sanctum inuaserat pestilentia et petulantia saltatorum. per totam noctem cantabantur hic nefaria, et cantantibus saltabatur”.

Augustine of Hippo, *Sermo In natali Cypriani martyris* 311.5, ed. J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 38 (Paris, 1841), 1415 (trans. Tronca).

31 Augustine of Hippo, *Epistola* 29.2, in *S. Aurelii Augustini*

those performed by the Therapeutae in first-century Alexandria, where the latter celebrated the *chara*. Further, in *Historia translationis Sancti Viti*, a monk from Corbie affirms that the dancing devoted to Saint Vitus’ relics was harmonious; there was no swearing. Instead, they prayed and sang the *Kyrie* while they were dancing.<sup>45</sup> The purpose of such clarification was probably to highlight the opposition to a form of dancing that had been prohibited. The case of Saint Vitus is particularly interesting because the saint was worshipped mainly for healing people who had demonstrated demonic possession. In the tenth century, his relics were taken to Prague, from whence his cult spread throughout Central Europe, and his name was subsequently associated with a type of encephalitis – now Sydenham’s Chorea – known as “Saint Vitus’ Dance”.

In approximately the same period, Hincmar of Reims wrote a list of rules for the priests in his diocese. One of these rules banned them from dancing and even making the faithful laugh on commemorative days of the dead or during any other holy occasions.<sup>46</sup> The difference between this ninth-century source and earlier reproaches such as Augustine’s sermon against celebrating the *Laetitia* is that Hincmar mainly addressed priests. He managed a diocese in the Carolingian age, while Augustine preached directly to the faithful. Yet, the textual evidence raises doubts whether there was indeed much of a difference, in terms of religious awareness, between a ninth-century canon and a fourth-century convert: the first of Hincmar’s rules was that his priests learn fundamental prayers such as the *Credo* and *Our Father*. In this respect, the texts by Augustine and Hincmar share a common ground against dancing and “cantica turpia” (depraved songs). Therefore, though produced in different contexts and times, they both expressed disapproval of similar practices.

In the following centuries, similar bans were also included in penitential books, a sign that all of the prohibitions expressed by the councils continued to be transgressed by the faithful. For example, the *Paenitentiale pseudo-Theodori*, initially attributed to Theodore of Tarsus or of Canterbury (602-609), but probably of Frankish origin



and datable to the ninth century, bans “ballationes et saltationes” and “cantica turpia et luxoria”. This text is seen as a combination of rules selected from other penitential books, as well as biblical and patristic quotes.<sup>47</sup> Yet, it is important to emphasize that such books were produced for a specific reason – in this case, to ban dancing in church, singing obscene songs, and playing diabolical games – and were not simply repeated formulas or quotations from the Fathers. Therefore, if dancing was banned, it is because the practice was still alive and continued despite the bans throughout the Middle Ages and beyond.

## CONCLUSION

Dancing was dismissed in Christian discourses not because it was seen as devious or a remnant of pre-Christian traditions, but because it was regarded as a practice that kindled the fear of losing control, potentially leading to disorder. Disorder, to begin with, is removed from the Platonic harmony established through the *χορεία* of the Ideal City, an idea that the Church hierarchy also aspired to and deemed accordingly an equilibrium in which every element had to be coordinated into a harmonious symphony. This is the reason why approval was granted to the harmonious dancing around the relics of Saint Vitus, but not to frenetic dancing, which was at times considered a manifestation of demonic possession. The presence and behaviour of disharmonious dancers interrupting the symphony were treated as immoral and depraved. In physical terms, moreover, the body of a disjointed dancer or a supposed victim of demonic possession indicated a form of invasion and was thus considered incompatible with the harmony that the Church strove to create. Just like the Platonic *χορεία*, the Church’s chastisement of dancing from Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages was essentially a form of social control.

*Hipponensis Episcopi Epistulae*, ed. Alois Goldbacher, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 34.1 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1895), 114. See also Cacitti, “*Sepulcrorum et picturarum adoratores*,” 112.

32 “By performing their choral dances in the basilicas of martyrs outside the city, they have made holy places the workshop of their indecency”. Basil the Great, *Homilia* 14.1 *in ebriosos*, ed. J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 31 (Paris, 1857), 445 (trans. Tronca).

33 Augustine of Hippo, *Sermo* 305/A, in *Sermones de Vetere Testamento: id est sermones 1-50 secundum ordinem vulgatum insertis etiam 9 sermonibus post Maurinos repertis*, ed. Cyrillus Lambot, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* 41 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1961), 58.

34 Canon 39, *De Christianis celebrantibus festa gentilium*, and canon 53, *Ut in Christianorum non saltetur nuptiis* (571-574). Both in *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, ed. Giovanni Domenico Mansi, vol. 2 (Florence: Antonio Zatta, 1759), 581.

- 35 *Concilium Veneticum*, in *Concilia Galliae, a. 314-a. 506*, ed. Charles Munier, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 148 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1963), 154.
- 36 *Concilium Agathense*, in Munier, *Concilia Galliae*, 209-10.
- 37 Caesarius of Arles, Sermones 1, 33, and 113, in *Sermones ex integro a Caesario compositi vel ex aliis fontibus hausti*, ed. Germain Morin, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 103 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1953).
- 38 *Concilium Autissiodoreense*, ed. Friedrich Maassen, *MGH Concilia aevi merovingici 1* (Hannover: Hahn, 1893), 180.
- 39 *Concilium Cabilonense*, in Maassen, *MGH Conc. 1*, 212.
- 40 Isidore of Seville, *De ecclesiasticis officiis* XLI (XL): *De ieiunio kalendarum ianuariarum, in Sancti Isidori Hispalensis De ecclesiasticis officiis*, ed. Christopher M. Lawson, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 113 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1989).
- 41 Boniface, *Epistle* 50, in *S. Bonifatii et Lulli epistolae*, ed. Ernst Dümmler, *MGH Epistolae Merovingici et Carolini Aevi 1* (Berlin: Weidemann, 1892), 301.
- 42 Canon 9, *Concilium Romanum I congregatum a Zacharia Papa*, a. 743, in *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, ed. Giovanni Domenico Mansi, vol. 12 (Florence: Antonio Zatta, 1766), 384.
- 43 “In tanta exarsit freneticae insaniae dementia truculentus, atque inexplicabile ebrietatis temulentia irretitus, ut nec etiam nocturnis temporibus me permitteret esse quietum. Nam dum vel nocturno silentio me ejus considerem evadere pestem, petulanti importunitate impudicus semper prorumpens, et mendicitatis meae hospitium hora refectionis impudenter adiens, pro charitate consolationis mihi furibundus intulus jurgium atrocitatis, et nobis in charitate convescentibus, ille superbia vesaniae suae atque ebrietate vexatus, velut canis invidens, rabidus super nefanda convicia, frendens stridore dentium, spumansque ore lymphatico bacchabundus, propriis me lacerare manibus nitebatur. In tanta exarsit odii caecitate frustratus, atque invidiosae nequitiae flamma succensus, ut nec ante sacrosanctum pepercere altarium. Ibiq[ue] me gravissimis injuriis irritate confusum, nisi fratris intercessione fuissem exceptus, ferro me in conspectu multorum rabiens jugulare conabatur. Post tanti furoris insaniam tandem sedata, sic denique in amentia versus, injustae susceptionis ordinem oblitus, vulgari ritu in obscena theatrae luxuriae vertigine rotabatur; dum circumductis huc illucque brachiis, alio in loco lascivos conglobans pedes, vestigiis ludibricantibus circueus tripudio compositis, et tremulis gressibus subsiliens, nefaria cantilena mortiferare ballimatae dira carmina canens, diabolicae pestis exercebat luxuriam. Sic quippe exaestuans mersus vino, temulentia sepultus, ut ebrius patiebatur sitim et esuriem vomens; qui somno deditus, desidiosque torpore obvolutus, non erat inter crebro psallentibus hymnis Dei ducentibus noctes. Nunquam tales pestes Christus habere dignatus est servos”. Valerius of Bierzo, *Opuscula, Ordo querimonie* 34, ed. J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 87 (Paris, 1851), 443-44.
- 44 *Concilium Romanum* a. 826, in Maassen, *MGH Conc. 1*, 581-82; canon 39, *Concilium Romanum* a. 847, in *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, ed. Giovanni Domenico Mansi, vol. 14 (Florence: Antonio Zatta, 1769), 895.
- 45 *Historia translationis Sancti Viti auctore monacho Corbeie* (BHL 8718-8719), ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz, *MGH Scriptores 2* (Hannover: Hahn, 1829), 584.

46 Hincmar of Reims, *Capitula Synodica. 710 capitula presbyteris data, anno 852*, Chapter 14, ed. J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 125 (Paris, 1852), 776. Maria Caterina Jacobelli considers this source the first testimony of what later became known as *risus paschalis* (Easter laughter): sometimes during the Easter Mass homily (as well as other holy festivals), the priest made the believers laugh by telling them funny stories that usually had sexual overtones. *Il Risus paschalis e il fondamento teologico del piacere sessuale* (1990; repr., Brescia: Editrice Queriniana, 2004), 40.

47 *Paenitentiale pseudo-Theodori*, ed. Carine van Rhijn, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* 156B (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009); Carine van Rhijn and Marjolijn Saan, "Correcting Sinners, Correcting Texts: A Context for the *Paenitentiale pseudo-Theodori*," *Early Medieval Europe* 14 (2006), 23-40.

Donatella Tronca is based at the University of Bologna (Ravenna Campus), where she is currently preparing a PhD dissertation on the relationship between dancing and Christianity from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages.

# BEYOND THE *FLAMMANTIA* *MOENIA MUNDI*

## THE TRANSGRESSIVE NOTION OF THE SUBLIME IN LUCRETIUS' *DE RERUM NATURA*

Giulia Bonasio

Columbia University, New York, United States

**ABSTRACT** – *Lucretius' De rerum natura evokes a unique and unprecedented form of the sublime, the 'scientific-poetic sublime'. Lucretius, the architect of Roman Epicureanism, proposes an investigation of the universe through the combined eyes of the scientist and sensibility of the poet. Through rational investigation of nature, Lucretius aims to dispel superstition and fear of the unknown. The scientific-poetic sublime is Lucretius' way of transgressing traditional ways of thinking; in his poem, he offers a space for freedom of thought and reaffirms the power of the individual before the cosmos. Additionally, he suggests a vision of nature as full of wonder and amazement. This article shows that the scientific-poetic sublime departs from both Burke's and Kant's eighteenth-century analyses of the sublime and constitutes a revolutionary way to approach science with creativity and the aid of the poetic form. In De rerum natura, Lucretius proposes both what Conte defines as a genus scribendi to scientifically explain natural phenomena, and a genus vivendi for understanding and experiencing what, to him, are the marvels of the universe.*

### INTRODUCTION

Lucretius' *De rerum natura*, likely written in the mid-first century BCE,<sup>1</sup> is a revolutionary poem, breaking conventions in both content and style. Lucretius

crafts the hexameter and moulds the Latin language in a particular way to present Epicurus' philosophy to the Roman world, and to describe a universe made of atoms where everything happens by necessity. Moreover, in Lucretius' *De rerum natura* a further, lesser-known aspect of its innovative nature is detectable, namely a particular form of the sublime that I call the 'scientific-poetic sublime'. The scientific-poetic sublime is a way of thinking and writing characterized by an approach to nature and the cosmos that combines the meticulous and curious eye of the scientist with the sensibility of the poet to interpret and describe what Lucretius considers to be the marvels of the universe. The scientific approach is characterized by efforts to find rational explanations for natural phenomena through investigation of their causes. The poetic approach is defined by creativity, imagination, and by an evocative use of language. The scientific-poetic sublime, as Lucretius conceives it, combines these two approaches. While he proposes to his readers an investigation of the universe and complex natural phenomena, his project goes far beyond a bare explanation of how the cosmos works. For Lucretius, exploration of the universe offers opportunities to affirm the power of the individual within the cosmos. His work aims at liberating frightened minds from superstition and passivity in the face of the grandiosity of natural phenomena, and at dispelling fear in favour of the power of knowledge. Lucretius' concept of the sublime differs from our contemporary understanding of the sublime, shaped for the most part by the eighteenth-century analyses of Kant and Burke.

First, investigations of the sublime in Antiquity and in the eighteenth century, which include elements of continuity and of rupture with the Lucretian notion of the sublime, are briefly explored. These investigations shed light on the fact that, despite some similarities, the scientific-poetic sublime remains a peculiarity of Lucretius' work. An overview of the particular historical and political context in which Lucretius wrote is then offered, with a contextual discussion of the features of the scientific-poetic sublime presented and developed by his work.

1 It is not clear when exactly Lucretius wrote. One support to dating the poem around the first century BCE is Cicero's letter to Quintus in February 54 BCE which mentions the *Lucretii poemata*. Another hint is given by the dedication of the poem to Memmius who was praetor in 58 and consular candidate in 54.

2 For a diachronic study of the sublime, see Peter Shaw, *The Sublime: The New Critical Idiom* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).

3 James I. Porter, *The Origin of Aesthetic Thought in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). A similar view is shared by Lisa Piazzi, *Lucrezio e i Presocratici. Un commento a De rerum natura 1, 635-890* (Pisa: Edizioni della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, 2005).

4 Arturo de Vivo, *Le parole della scienza. Sul tratto De terrae motu di Seneca* (Salerno: P. Laveglia edizioni, 1992); Giancarlo Mazzoli, *Seneca e la poesia* (Milan: Ceschina, 1970); Luciano Canfora, "Morale, natura, e storia in Seneca," in *Seneca: lettere a Lucilio*, trans. Caterina Barone (1989; repr., Milan: Garzanti, 2001), xlv-li.

5 Harry M. Hine, "Seismology and Vulcanology in Antiquity," in *Science and Mathematics in Ancient Greek Culture*, eds. Christopher J. Tuplin, Tracey E. Rihll, and Lewis Wolpert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 56-75; Gerhard H. Waldherr, *Erdbeben, das aussergewöhnliche Normale: zur Rezeption seismischer Aktivitäten in literarischen Quellen vom 4. Jahrhundert v. Chr. bis zum 4. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1997).

## A HISTORY OF THE SUBLIME: FROM ANTIQUITY TO BURKE AND KANT

The roots of the philosophical concept of the sublime can be traced back to the Presocratics (sixth to fifth century BCE).<sup>2</sup> The Presocratics' investigation is characterized by a passion for natural phenomena and for searching out their causes, combined with a poetic mode of presenting their theories. Their approach is defined by creativity and imagination, and their cosmological intuition is often sketched with mysterious colourations. James Porter identifies this Presocratic investigation as involving the sublime because it elaborates a specific notion of matter that is central to their interests.<sup>3</sup> According to Porter, the sublime arises precisely from this notion of matter, which prioritizes it above form; the Presocratics focus on how matter pervades and generates the universe. In this sense, they share the materialistic approach of Epicurean philosophy. In particular, they explore matter and the various modes of matter that permeate an infinite space. Additionally, they privilege poetry for presenting their scientific intuitions of the cosmos. Three key similarities between the Presocratics' approach and Lucretius' way of investigating nature should be stressed: firstly, the poetic language with which they both propose their insights; secondly, the centrality of matter over form in both methods; and finally, their shared awareness of unexplored and obscured phenomena in the universe that simultaneously attract and frighten humankind.

Another approach to the sublime presents elements of continuity with Lucretian investigation, namely Seneca's view as it emerges from the *Naturales quaestiones*, written around 64 CE.<sup>4</sup> At that time in Rome, Emperor Nero expressed a dominant and oppressive power, which dictated to the intellectual what and how to write. Although living in the century after Lucretius, due to their similar historical contexts, Seneca shares with Lucretius an impelling need for freedom. Seneca's work also investigates natural phenomena by trying to find their causes. He discusses a variety of natural phenomena for which there were no clear explanations at the time, and which were often regarded

as mysterious and frightening. For example, Seneca shows how scientific investigation can dispel fear of earthquakes by exploring what causes them, thus opening a path for rational understanding.<sup>5</sup> Conte's analysis of Lucretius' work can be accurately applied to describe Seneca's approach; for him the sublime is a *genus vivendi*,<sup>6</sup> and scientific investigation is a way of approaching life and looking at the world. In the *Naturales quaestiones*, Seneca combines scientific reasoning with a study in the fields of ethics and human behaviour. He pairs an explanation of natural phenomena with an analysis of human vices and techniques to avoid them. For Seneca, the scientific sublime includes not only the cosmos but also human psychology; scientific investigation allows both an understanding of the universe and of human nature.<sup>7</sup> In this sense, the sublime is a *genus vivendi* because it pertains to how the subject approaches the world and how she relates to other people. Despite similarities with the Lucretian scientific notion of the sublime however, Seneca's investigation is not poetic. Moreover, Seneca's choice of prose instead of poetry is emblematic of how differently Lucretius and Seneca conceive the sublime.

From the Roman world, the only surviving systematic analysis of the sublime is Longinus' *Peri hupsos*. Likely written in or near the first century CE,<sup>8</sup> the treatise understands the sublime as a rhetorical mode of writing, while for Lucretius the sublime is not only a mode of writing, but also a philosophical mode of thinking and approaching nature. Despite this fundamental difference, there is a particular connection between Longinus and Lucretius: the sublime, both as a rhetorical and a philosophical mode, reveals in these authors a transgressive nature, since for them it was a vehicle to express freedom of thought and speech. This particular characteristic of the sublime for both Longinus and Lucretius emphasizes that oppression is often a precondition for its existence. The sublime is born of the necessity of intellectuals to express their thoughts and creativity, and thus to reaffirm their power as free individuals against the constrictions imposed upon them. Longinus wrote in a historical period characterized by transformations in the conditions of the intellectual elite and

6 Gian Biagio Conte, *Genres and Readers*, trans. Glenn W. Most (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994).

7 For detailed studies, see Gareth Williams, *The Cosmic Viewpoint* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Gareth Williams, "Interactions: Physics, Morality and Narrative in Seneca, *Natural Questions* 1," *Classical Philology* 100 (2005), 142–65; Francesca Berno, *Lo specchio, il vizio e la virtù* (Bologna: Patron Editore, 2003); Michael Lapidge, "Stoic Cosmology and Roman Literature, First to Third Centuries A.D.," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II.36.3 (1989), 1379–1429; Ricardo Salles, *God and Cosmos in Stoicism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

8 The dates of Longinus' birth and death are controversial. Some scholars believe that he was born around 213 CE. Even the attribution of the treatise *On the Sublime* to Longinus is uncertain. The treatise seems to criticize the work of Caecilius of Calacte who wrote during the time of Augustus (27 BCE–14 CE), but the manuscript evidence shows that there were doubts regarding the authorship and the period in which the treatise was written from an early period. For recent discussion on this and further bibliography, see Reinhard Haussier, "Zur Datierung der Schrift

vom Erhabenen,” in *Prinzipat und Kultur im 1. und 2. Jahrhundert*, eds. Barbara Kühnert, Volker Riedel, and Rismag Gordesiani (Bonn: Habelt 1995), 141-63.

9 I believe, as many scholars do, that Longinus wrote during the first century CE. My argument does not depend on the dating of Longinus, thus it would remain valid even if Longinus wrote in the third century CE, as some scholars argue (see note 8). If this were indeed the case, other elements may be considered causes of oppression: the so-called Military Anarchy that started with the assassination of Severus Alexander in 235 CE, and the period preceding it, are characterized by the concentration of power in the hands of military leaders, increased localism, and a general atmosphere of economic depression and civil war.

10 With ‘great mind’, I understand here the ability to think rationally about problems and to have the expertise to express one’s thinking in a written form. For a different account of the meaning of ‘great mind’ in Longinus, see Michel Deguy, “The Discourse of Exaltation: Contribution to a Rereading of Pseudo-Longinus,” in Jean-François Courtine et al., *Of the Sublime: Presence in Question*, trans. Jeffrey S. Librett (Albany: State University of New York, 1993), 5-24.

their freedoms.<sup>9</sup> According to Longinus, the sublime is a product of a great mind (*megalopsuchia*).<sup>10</sup> The last chapter of Longinus’ treatise is dedicated to describing the lack of great minds and the general moral decadence of his time. If we assume that Longinus wrote during the first century CE, the Roman Republic and the freedom of speech that characterized the period in which it flourished were already distant memories. Longinus begins the last part of his work with an observation by an unidentified philosopher that “the growth of highly exalted and wide-reaching genius has with a few rare exceptions almost entirely ceased”.<sup>11</sup> Through this philosopher, Longinus recounts the lack of freedom that characterizes his time, calling democracy “the kind nurse of genius”<sup>12</sup> and despotism a “cage of the soul”.<sup>13</sup> According to his analysis, lack of political freedom and the consequent moral decadence, especially indulgence in ‘bad passions’, and a love of gain and pleasure, created a situation in which there was no freedom of thought, and caused the disappearance of the great minds able to produce the sublime. Therefore, the sublime, even as a form of writing, is conceived as strongly connected to freedom of speech and democracy. For Longinus, the sublime is a way to express intellectual freedom. His treatise laments the drastic need for great minds that could keep this dimension of free speech and thought alive even under oppressive conditions.

Longinus’ treatise is a fundamental example of the connection between political oppression and the rise of the sublime. However, there is a distinction to be made between Longinus’ notion of the sublime and its modern understanding. The sublime understood in Longinus’ terms, namely as a rhetorical mode of thinking and writing, has lost ground in favour of other meanings of the sublime, shaped in many cases by eighteenth-century analyses of the sublime by Burke and Kant. Burke approaches the concept of the sublime in his work, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and of the Beautiful* (1756). He contrasts the beautiful and the sublime, both understood as properties of objects. While the beautiful is defined by an intrinsically positive character, associated with light and harmony, and inspiring feelings of pleasure



and relaxation, darkness and a rupture of harmony identify the sublime. The sublime brings about a mixed feeling of pleasure and terror. According to Burke, the sublime speaks the language of domination and forces the individual to feel subjugated; it overwhelms and surpasses the subject. At the same time, the sublime evokes a deep fascination in the subject, who cannot help being attracted by it. The subject feels a negative pleasure, originating from the awareness of the danger of the sublime but also from its allure.

Similarly, this mixed character of the sublime is detected by Kant, who distinguished two kinds of sublime in his *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790): a mathematical sublime that comes from the perception of the grandiosity of the universe, and a dynamic sublime that derives from the feeling of being dominated by the overwhelming power of nature. For Kant, the sublime is generated by the perception of objects in the world. Kant argues that the sublime is in the mind of the subject because no object in the world can contain its grandiosity. According to Kant, the sublime is boundless and it inhibits our imagination and perception; humans are unable to grasp it. At the same time, it produces a sense of superiority of our reason over nature that inspires a negative pleasure. The pleasure is negative because on the one hand, while it is a true pleasure because it is generated by the sense that reason could overcome nature, on the other hand, an awareness of our inferiority before the power of nature, and of the inadequacy of our imagination to grasp the mathematical sublime, makes it negative. In the case of the dynamic sublime, nature is experienced as powerful, but simultaneously less frightening – as in the case of the mathematical sublime – since the subject observes nature from a safe position.

From this brief discussion of the sublime in Antiquity and the eighteenth century it is evident that the sublime has not remained a coherent concept throughout its long history, but rather that its features change and acquire different connotations. For this reason, the scientific-poetic sublime is singled out as a

11 Longinus, *On the Sublime*, 44.1, trans. H. L. Havell (London: Macmillan, 1890).

12 Ibid., 44.2.

13 Ibid., 44.5.

particular form of the sublime specific to Lucretius, which shares elements with investigations of the sublime by the Presocratics, Seneca, and Longinus. There is no mention of this particular form of the sublime in the literature on *De rerum natura* to date. Instead, the Lucretian sublime is often considered similar to Longinus', or to Kant's and Burke's conceptions of the sublime. Hardie, Porter, and Conte explore the connections between Lucretius and the history of the sublime, and their interpretations reflect the sublime as understood by Kant. A brief summary of their views helps situate this interpretation *vis-à-vis* these analyses of the Lucretian sublime within contemporary discourse.

14 Philip Hardie, *Lucretian Receptions: History, The Sublime, Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

15 Porter, *The Origin of Aesthetic Thought in Ancient Greece*.

16 Conte, *Genres and Readers*, 19. Another influential interpretation of Lucretius is proposed by Luca Canali, *Lucrezio poeta della ragione* (Rome: Riuniti, 1986). Canali does not mention the sublime in relation to Lucretius, but stresses that scientific investigation in Lucretius' project functions as a way of freeing the subject's mind from traditions and myths. He claims that for Lucretius the search for the truth acquires the character of a combat against religion and myth.

17 See Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, comps., *Greek-English Lexicon* (1843; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), s.v. "ὑψος".

Hardie's approach to the sublime is shaped by Kant's conceptualization. Hardie classifies the sublime as a property of objects, such as Mount Etna in Lucretius' poem or abstract figures such as *Fama* or *Religio*, and as the effect that these objects elicit in the subject.<sup>14</sup> Porter stresses the continuity of the idea of the sublime between Lucretius and Kant. He argues that the images offered by Lucretius in Book 6 of *De rerum natura* are also iconic of the sublime in the works of Longinus and Kant. Porter argues that Longinus did not likely take these images from Lucretius, but that both Lucretius and Longinus drew from a common tradition of writing about cosmological matters that is now lost to us.<sup>15</sup> Conte proposes a different understanding of the sublime in relation to Lucretius. According to Conte, Lucretius promotes an understanding of the sublime that he describes as *genus vivendi*; the sublime, in his reading, is for Lucretius a way of behaving and marvelling at the mysteries of the universe which is not confined to the scientific investigation, but involves the life of the subject in its totality.<sup>16</sup>

#### THE SUBLIME AS THE SEARCH FOR A SPACE OF FREEDOM

In Antiquity, the concept of the sublime was expressed with the Greek word ὑψος and with the Latin *sublimis*. The Greek ὑψος means 'high, above, upwards' and metaphorically 'summit or crown';<sup>17</sup> the Latin *sublimis* denotes

‘high up, elevated, tall, aloft’ and is often used with reference to the sky or to celestial bodies.<sup>18</sup> Lucretius mostly uses the term as an adjective to qualify natural phenomena. However, he does not engage with the sublime only when he specifically uses the term *sublimis*. Passages in which the content or style of *De rerum natura* evoke the notion of the sublime are equally relevant. Lucretius holds a unique perspective on nature. For him the cosmos is grandiose, and atoms – at the other end of a scale from miniscule to vast – are mysterious and massive in their wonder-value. What modern science may consider objects of empirical research are for him objects of amazement and wonder. He strives to understand nature, but without dispelling these attitudes. For this reason, the sublime is almost omnipresent in his poem; by this definition, the sublime finds its place precisely within this blend of scientific-poetic approach towards nature. The sublime in Lucretius’ *De rerum natura* is discussed here in two ways: firstly, the object of Lucretius’ analysis is sublime because he deals with what is exceptionally grandiose – the cosmos – and massively small and mysterious – atoms; and secondly, the way in which Lucretius approaches, thinks, and ultimately writes about the universe is what I call the scientific-poetic sublime.

As discussed above, oppression is often a precondition of the sublime, and further comparison with Longinus’ work and historical context provides an additional argument and a new insight in the understanding of this aspect of the Lucretian sublime. Like Longinus, Lucretius wrote in an era characterized by political turmoil. During his time, in the first century BCE, Rome witnessed civil war and the consequent end of the Republic. As Sean McConnell and Don Fowler stress, *De rerum natura* contains ample references to this political situation throughout.<sup>19</sup> The poem begins with an invocation to Venus, goddess of love and pleasure.<sup>20</sup> This invocation constitutes a reference to Lucretius’ and the poem’s Epicurean background, but also to the political situation of civil strife. Lucretius asks Venus to beseech Mars, the god of war, for *placidam pacem* (quiet peace) for the Romans because in this *tempore iniquo* (troubled time) it is impossible for the poet to do his job with *aequo animo* (an untroubled mind).<sup>21</sup> This is the

18 Peter G. W. Glare, ed., *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), s.v. “sublimis”. For etymology, see Jan Cohn and Thomas H. Miles, “The Sublime: In Alchemy, Aesthetics and Psychoanalysis,” *Modern Philology* 74 (1977), 289-304. Cohn and Miles argue that the sublime originally indicates the quality of the object that elicits a particular reaction in the subject and then comes to designate this reaction itself.

19 Sean McConnell, “Lucretius and Civil Strife,” *Phoenix* 66 (2012), 97-121; Don P. Fowler, “Lucretius and Politics”, in *Philosophia Togata: Essays on Philosophy and Roman Society*, eds. Miriam Griffin and Jonathan Barnes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 120-49.

20 See Robert D. Brown, *Lucretius on Love and Sex: A Commentary on De rerum natura IV, 1030–1287 with Prolegomena, Text and Translation* (Leiden: Brill, 1987).

21 Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 1.40-42, trans. William H. D. Rouse, Loeb Classical Library 181 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924).

first reference that Lucretius makes in the poem to the political situation in his time. Further on in the poem, Lucretius describes how political corruption and the degradation of morals and customs became the norm in Rome.<sup>22</sup>

Denique avarities et honorum caeca cupido,  
quae miseros homines cogunt transcendere fines  
iuris et interdum socios scelerum atque ministros  
noctes atque dies niti praestante labore  
ad summas emergere opes, haec vulnera vitae  
non minimam partem mortis formidine aluntur.<sup>23</sup>

22 McConnell interprets this reference as Lucretius' message to the Roman aristocrats, in which he denounces their love of greed and desire for honour. McConnell, "Lucretius and Civil Strife", 114.

23 Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 3.59-64, trans. Rouse: "Moreover, avarice and the blind lust of distinction, which drive wretched men to transgress the bounds of law, and sometimes by sharing and scheming crime to strive night and day with exceeding toil to climb the pinnacle of power, these sores of life in no small degree are fed by the fear of death".

24 For an historical introduction to *De rerum natura*: Luca Canali, *Lucrezio poeta della ragione* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1986); Stuart Gillespie and Philip Hardie, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Luca Canali, *Il tridente latino* (Rome: Gaffi, 2007).

In Lucretius' analysis, moral corruption is both due to the political situation and also to a plague directly affecting Roman minds, namely a fear of the unknown increased by superstition and caused by lack of knowledge. In this context, the sublime is a way for Lucretius to overcome this fear and replace it with rational tranquillity acquired through scientific investigation. For Lucretius, scientific investigation aims at freeing minds from superstition and making nature our 'friend', which can be approached not as a subject of fear that dominates us, but as an opportunity for our cognitive powers to explore the cosmos. As in the case of Longinus' understanding of the sublime, the sublime here is a tool for the philosopher to reaffirm his liberty and the power of thought against oppression.

The Roman aristocracy, and especially the intellectual circle patronized by Scipio, considered Stoicism to be representative of their value system. In opposition to this philosophical model, Lucretius appears as the Roman Epicurus who could make new values available to a new social class who were different from the aristocracy.<sup>24</sup> According to Epicurean philosophy, a wise person should not participate in politics and should instead aim to live in tranquillity in order to dedicate herself to study. Lucretius' position is in line with Epicurean philosophy in being materialistic and atomistic. As intellectualist as it may sound, Lucretius

responds to the calamities of his time through science, namely by proposing the investigation of the universe as a therapy against fear, superstition, and dangerous passions. It has often been argued that the Epicurean wise person acts only in an emergency,<sup>25</sup> but to Lucretius, this does not mean that she passively accepts circumstances except in exceptional situations. On the contrary, Lucretius' task is a constant effort to replace dangerous passions such as fear and anger with *doctrina* and rational investigation into causes, even though he is aware of the difficulties of this process.<sup>26</sup> According to Lucretius, the wise person must replace fear and superstition with scientific investigation and the power of knowledge. In his description of Epicurus in Book 1, Lucretius creates an image of a revolutionary philosopher who looks up at the sky from a terrestrial perspective,<sup>27</sup> which contrasts with the traditional image of the philosopher, such as the one described in Plato's *Sophist*, who instead looks down from above.<sup>28</sup>

#### THE SCIENTIFIC-POETIC SUBLIME IN LUCRETIUS' *DE RERUM NATURA*

For Lucretius, the sublime is a way to transgress boundaries and create a space for freedom of thought. Nevertheless, the sublime is not conceived as a *locus amoenus* to which one can escape from the present situation and find the tranquillity for writing. On the contrary, the sublime has transgressive force in that it aims to overturn and denounce, although in a philosophical way, any form of oppression. This transgressive force of the sublime pervades his entire poem. From the start, the description of Epicurus strikes the reader as a depiction of a revolutionary man:

Humana ante oculos foede cum vita iaceret  
 in terris oppressa gravi sub religione,  
 quae caput a caeli regionibus ostendebat  
 horribili super aspectu mortalibus instans,  
 primum Graius homo mortalis tollere contra

25 Cicero and Seneca claim that a wise person takes part in politics only under certain extreme circumstances: "extra quam si eum tempus et necessitas cogerit" (Cicero, *Republic* 1.10), "nisi si quid intervenerit" (Seneca, *De Otio* 3.2). Cicero and Seneca do not explicitly refer to the Epicurean wise person and it is possible that they refer to the Stoic sage. However, in that case it would be unusual to claim that the Stoic sage takes part in politics only in extreme circumstances.

26 Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 3.307-322.

27 See also Lee Fratantuono, *A Reading of Lucretius' De rerum natura* (London: Lexington Books, 2015), 23.

28 Plato, *Sophist* 216c.

29 Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 1.62-79, trans. Rouse: "When man's life lay for all to see foully grovelling upon the ground, crushed beneath the weight of superstition, which displayed her head from the regions of heaven, lowering over mortals with horrible aspect, a man of Greece was the first that dared to uplift mortal eyes against her, the first to make stand against her; for neither fables of the gods could quell him, nor thunderbolts, nor heaven with menacing roar, but all the more they goaded the eager courage of his soul, so that he should desire, first of all men, to shatter the confining bars of nature's gates. Therefore the lively power of his mind prevailed, and forth he marched far beyond the flaming walls of the world, as he traversed the immeasurable universe in thought and imagination; whence victorious he returns bearing his prize, the knowledge of what can come into being, what cannot, in a word, how each thing has its powers limited and its deep-set boundary marked. Therefore superstition is now in her turn cast down and trampled underfoot, whilst we by the victory are exalted high as heaven".

30 A separate analysis should be made on the use of language and metre and on the sublime character of language in Lucretius. For a linguistic study, see David West, *The Imagery and Poetry of*

est oculos ausus primusque obsistere contra,  
 quem neque fama deum nec fulmina nec minitanti  
 murmure compressit caelum, sed eo magis acrem  
 inritat animi virtutem, effringere ut arcta  
 naturae primus portarum claustra cupire.  
 Ergo vivida vis animi pervicit, et extra  
 processit longe flammantia moenia mundi  
 atque omne immensum peragravit mente animoque,  
 unde refert nobis victor quid possit oriri,  
 quid nequeat, finita potestas denique cuique  
 quanam sit ratione atque alte terminus haerens.  
 Quare religio pedibus subiecta vicissim  
 obteritur, nos exaequat victoria caelo.<sup>29</sup>

In this passage, Lucretius describes the oppression under which humankind lived before the transgressive act of Epicurus in triumphing over superstition by the power of free thought.<sup>30</sup> Human lives were characterized by being *oppressa* (crushed) under the weight of superstition, personified as a terrible being that bears down on the terrestrial world from above. In the passage there are many terms indicating oppression and weight. Opposing superstition's pressure from the sky onto the ground, Epicurus' gaze creates an opposite force from ground to sky, toward liberation from oppression. In this regard, he is the first to dare raise his eyes against superstition; his unafraid upward gaze confronts it directly, and in doing so, overcomes it. Lucretius lists all those conditions that traditionally impeded men from confronting superstition because they provoke fear of the unknown: stories of the gods, thunderbolts, roars from heaven. Superstition originates from a mixture of these fears and a sense of the smallness and frailty of humanity before the power of nature. The mechanism that feeds superstition is the inability to go beyond fear and replace it with scientific investigation of natural phenomena. Scientific investigation allows humans to be unafraid, and provides a framework to find rational explanations

for that which seems overwhelming and incomprehensible.<sup>31</sup> Epicurus is thus characterized by his courage in going beyond the *flammanitia moenia mundi*. His powers of mind prevail against fear and superstition, and his imagination and thought traverse the universe. Thus, Lucretius describes in this passage a transgressive act in Epicurus breaking the boundaries of what seemed precluded to humans before. From this journey beyond ‘nature’s gates’ Epicurus brings the prize of knowledge that dispels superstition from humankind.<sup>32</sup>

Lucretius uses his own ‘prize of knowledge’, scientific investigation, to explain natural phenomena. Conceiving the universe as full of atoms and understanding natural phenomena as collisions and interactions among atoms allows the philosopher to look at the cosmos with a scientific eye. In order to explain the universe, Lucretius creates a model based on atomic motion in which nothing is left to passions.<sup>33</sup> The method he uses to support his theory of the movement of the atoms is described by analogy with what we can see when the rays of the sun bring light into a dark room:

Contemplator enim, cum solis lumina cumque  
 inserti fundunt radii per opaca domorum:  
 multa minuta modis multis per inane videbis  
 corpora misceri radiorum lumine in ipso  
 et vel ut aeterno certamine proelia pugnas  
 edere turmatim certantia nec dare pausam,  
 conciliis et discidiis exercita crebris;  
 conicere ut possis ex hoc, primordia rerum  
 quale sit in magno iactari semper inani.  
 Dum taxat rerum magnarum parve potest res  
 exemplare dare et vestigia notitiae.<sup>34</sup>

By analogy with the sun’s rays, Lucretius indicates how he proceeds in his investigation of the universe. The first step is to observe a phenomenon, and

*Lucretius* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1969); Ivano Dionigi, *Lucrezio: le parole e le cose* (Bologna: Patron Editore, 1988).

31 See Giusto Traina, “Terremoti e società romana: problemi di mentalità e uso delle informazioni”, *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore de Pisa* 15 (1985), 867-87.

32 See also Elizabeth Asmis, *Epicurus’ Scientific Method* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

33 There is an apparent contradiction between how Lucretius presents a materialistic universe in which there is no space for passions (according to the Epicurean philosophy, passions are caused by fine atoms in the soul) and the fact that he proposes a ‘passionate’ investigation, by using many expressions of passion.

34 Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 2.112-124, trans. Rouse: “Do but apply your scrutiny whenever the sun’s rays are let in and pour their light through a dark room: you will see many minute particles mingling in many ways throughout the void in the light itself of the rays, and as it were in everlasting conflict struggling, fighting, battling in troops without any pause, driven about with frequent meetings and partings; so that you may conjecture from this what it

is for the first-beginnings of things to be ever tossed about in the great void. So far as it goes, a small thing may give an analogy of great things, and show the tracks of knowledge”.

35 On atomic motion in Lucretius, see: Don P. Fowler, *Lucretius on Atomic Motion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); on atomism in Antiquity, see John R. Milton, “The Limitations of Ancient Atomism”, in Tuplin et al., *Science and Mathematics*, 178-95.

36 For an introduction to the method of science and on the history of science in Antiquity, see Tracey E. Rihll, “Greek Science in Context”, in Tuplin et al., *Science and Mathematics*, 2-21.

37 Gian Biagio Conte distinguishes between *genus vivendi* and *genus scribendi* as different ways of approaching the sublime: the sphere of action of the sublime shifts from the object to the subject. Conte, *Genres and Readers*, 19.

38 Petrus Hermanus Schrijvers, *Horror ac divina voluptas: études sur la poétique et la poésie de Lucrèce* (Amsterdam: A. M. Hakkert, 1970).

the second step is to consider how it reveals the workings of the universe. Thus, this is an inductive method that presupposes a similarity between microcosm and macrocosm: namely, what one observes on a smaller scale can happen on a larger scale. From the observation of particles illuminated by the rays of the sun, Lucretius infers that atoms work analogously to these particles and collide and struggle in the void.<sup>35</sup> His method of scientific investigation can thus be described as a method based on two steps: observation and conjecture.<sup>36</sup> In Lucretius’ time, the lack of advanced instruments prevented measurable proofs beyond what one could plainly observe. Despite this problem, he employs the creativity of the poet to offer a coherent and compelling system to explain nature. He crafts his language in such a way as to make his scientific proposal more appealing to his reader, and enters the arena of competitive scientific theories with the powerful instrument of poetic language.

For Lucretius, the scientific-poetic sublime is what Conte defines as not only a *genus scribendi* but also a *genus vivendi*.<sup>37</sup> Namely, the sublime is a way of crafting the hexameter in order to appealingly explain how the universe works. Moreover, it is a mode of thinking about and living in the universe. In Lucretius’ universe there is no space for superstition and fear; the philosopher looks at the most frightening phenomena as if they were atoms swirling and fighting in the void. He reacts to these phenomena by observing them and formulating an explanation. This process is characterized by *divina voluptas atque horror* (divine delight and a shuddering),<sup>38</sup> which Lucretius felt in response to Epicurus traversing the *moenia mundi*: “His ibi me rebus quaedam divina voluptas / percipit atque horror, quod sic natura tua vi / tam manifesta patens ex omni parte resecta est”.<sup>39</sup> Through his scientific exploration however, Lucretius is the ‘new Epicurus’ who dispels the darkness of superstition with the light of reason in the Roman world.

In *De rerum natura* investigation of the universe produces a feeling of simultaneous pleasure and terror. These are the same reactions that Kant



describes in relation to the sublime: the sublime generates terror because of the grandiosity of natural phenomena that the subject perceives, but at the same time brings pleasure because the subject is aware of the power of reason over nature. Pleasure and terror are elements of the sublime described by Kant, and are understood as something that happens in the mind of the subject. They are also part of the scientific-poetic sublime as presented by Lucretius' mode of investigation of the universe. For Lucretius, however, pleasure has a different connotation than it does for Kant. To Lucretius, the pleasure of the scientific-poetic sublime is induced by not seeing nature as a mighty and frightening force. Through scientific investigation, by searching out rational explanations for what happens in the cosmos, nature is successfully brought to rational terms. One experiences a different feeling in relation to the Lucretian sublime than that elicited by the sublime described by Kant or by Burke. Firstly, one tries to formulate a scientific explanation of natural phenomena by looking for their causes. Secondly, she enjoys this scientific exercise of reducing nature to a rational frame. But even in this rationalistic view of the universe, she feels terror because she is aware of the impossibility of explaining everything and finding a scientific explanation for every phenomenon in the world.

## CONCLUSION

Lucretius' *De rerum natura* presents an unprecedented and unparalleled form of the sublime called the scientific-poetic sublime. In Lucretius' work, the scientific-poetic sublime is a way of investigating and thinking about the universe. The scientific-poetic sublime has the peculiarity of originating from a scientific investigation that combines rational analysis and the search for causes of phenomena with creativity and poetry. In this particular form, the sublime is very different from the eighteenth-century descriptions of the phenomenon by Burke and Kant, which often shape the modern notion of the sublime. Further, some traces of the scientific-poetic sublime can be found in Presocratic philosophy, and Lucretius' approach is in some ways also similar to that of

39 Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 3.28-30, trans. Rouse: "Therefore from all these things a sort of divine delight gets hold upon me and a shuddering, because nature thus by your power has been so manifestly laid open and uncovered in every part".

Seneca. Via comparison with Longinus' treatise on the sublime, it is possible to single out a precondition of it, namely oppression. In this sense, the sublime is a way of conceiving nature that goes beyond superstition and conventional ways of thinking, and it creates a space of individual freedom.

Beyond the poetic fascination that the scientific-poetic sublime exercises, this way of thinking about cosmic matters has the advantage of combining poetry with science, two approaches that are often considered contrasting. The scientific-poetic sublime demonstrates how Lucretius investigated the universe and how he conceived nature as full of wonder. Additionally, it shows how two fundamental approaches to nature can be fused together. In modern study of scientific phenomena these two approaches – scientific and poetic – have parted from one another. Thus, *De rerum natura* is a unique occasion to admire the sublimity of language and the poet's expertise in moulding hexameter to discuss scientific matter. Lucretius' double approach allows him to establish a relationship with nature that leaves superstition and fear behind, and emphasizes creativity and freedom of thought.

Giulia Bonasio is a PhD candidate at Columbia University (New York), where she is preparing a dissertation on Aristotle's *Eudemian Ethics*. Her interests lie at the intersection of ancient philosophy, especially Plato and Aristotle, and Classics. She specializes in ancient ethics, and she is also particularly interested in aesthetics and psychology. She has worked on the notions of the sublime, the beautiful, and pleasure.



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