ACUITY OF WIT: WONDER, PARADOX AND COOPERATION
IN EARLY MODERN SPANISH AND ITALIAN POETIC THEORY (1548-1648)

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**ABSTRACT**

*Acuity of Wit* aims at illuminating the role that the notion of “wonder” played in early modern poetic theory, starting with the reception of Aristotle’s *Poetics* in the mid-sixteenth century. By delving into debates and controversies taking place between the Italian and the Iberian peninsulas, it demonstrates that scholars from Lodovico Castelvetro to Francesco Patrizi to Alonso López Pinciano developed a theoretical framework able to account for the transition from a feeling of wonder aroused by the unexpectedness of plot twists, paradoxical statements and far-fetched metaphors to a feeling of marvel towards the “subtlety” or “acuity” of the wit responsible for any of these. In doing so, I propose a series of often-neglected continuities between sixteenth-century Aristotelianism and the interest in ingenuity generally associated with seventeenth-century Jesuit theorists of “acutezza” or “agudeza”, such as Matteo Peregrini and Baltasar Gracián. For the latter, the ability to market wonders became the main criterion by which to judge the value of a poet and the path to conceive aesthetic values in a poem or a speech. I further show that the taste for wonder and acuity of wit eventually colonized spaces as apparently alien to it as history. Historians influenced by the renewed popularity of Tacitus saw themselves as making use of “acuity of wit” to decipher intentions that the agents had cunningly dissimulated. By doing so, they entered a space halfway between reciprocity and challenge, in which writing was experienced as a contest to outwit princes and courtiers in a game of unveiling inner thoughts and secrets. Finally, I explore how early modern writers and theorists conceived of acuity of wit as a virtue that can be noticed only through the active cooperation of the reader in the process of decoding and unfolding arguments. In a series of highly controversial debates touching on contemporary literary fashions such as the so-called “laconic style” or Luis de Góngora’s “new poetry”, scholars such as Virgilio Malvezzi or Francisco Fernández de Córdoba
reversed principles inherited from ancient rhetoric to relocate aesthetic pleasure in the interdependence and competition between author and reader.
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INTRODUCTION

It has become widely accepted that the notions of “wonder” and “marvel” are at the roots of many of the transformations which took place as sixteenth- and seventeenth-century men and women perceived, understood, and reacted to the world around them. “Wonder”, it has been said, “followed the early modern period everywhere –into redefinitions of the mind, the body, art, literature, the known world. Often called the age of discovery, the Renaissance should also be seen as the age of the marvelous”.¹ With “wonder” usually defined as a feeling that takes place at the encounter with the new, one might contend that the contrast is only apparent, for then, as now, wonder is witness to the ability to be aware of and sympathetic towards novelty, and to welcome it with the blend of curiosity and awe that characterizes human behavior in the face of the varied manifestations of otherness.

As avid readers of Aristotle’s Rhetoric since the early days of George of Trebizond (1395-c.1472) and Ermolao Barbaro (1454-1493), early modern scholars were sharply aware of the link between wonder and everything alien and remote –as with the foreigners who come to town and excite the curiosity of everyone, and whom Aristotle evoked in connection with loan words and metaphors.² The implications of a link between wonder and curiosity are not surprising. Described in the beginning of Aristotle’s Metaphysics at the foundations of philosophical inquiry, wonder appeared to many early modern scholars as a feeling that oriented

the intellect to the knowledge of causes, in turn making the process pleasurable. As the philosopher Giovanni Talentoni would explain to a select crowd gathered at the Accademia degli Inquieti of Milan on the evening of November 25, 1596, wonder always takes a point of departure in ignorance. As a matter of fact, men wonder at something or someone insofar as they fail to understand why it is so. Aware of the debate sustained several decades earlier between Girolamo Cardano and Giulio Cesare Scaligero in connection with the boundaries of various feelings, Talentoni sided with the latter in distinguishing between astonishment (“stupor”) and wonder (“mirum”). In the former, according to Talentoni, awe keeps the subject aghast and unable to move forward; the latter, conversely, results in a desire to know what caused a thing to be as it is. Pleasure ensues as wonder ceases, once the process of cognition reaches a state of completeness.

Regardless of genres and disciplines, writers since the early sixteenth century and well into 1700 eagerly exploited the connection between wonder and desire. It was the trope through which territories overseas entered the eyes of confused and bewildered Europeans. Wonder seemed to appropriate and make digestible to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century men and


5 Talentoni, *Discorso*, 60. The polemic dated back to the moment when Scaligero had turned his treatise *Exotericarum exercitationum* (1557) into a contestation, by no means friendly, of Cardano’s *De subtilitate rerum* (1552).

6 The power of wonder over the feelings of the audience was so strong, and ultimately dangerous, as to induce scholars to promote caution across different fields of knowledge. This was the case, for example, in the censure that the antiquarian Antonio Agustín cast against the habit of Fray Antonio de Guevara to forge ancient inscriptions and other remnants of the past. While Agustín himself joined other scholars in the effort to set the basis for a science capable of obtaining knowledge from antiques, he accused Guevara of inventing for the study of the past sources that lacked any foundation in truth – and, more importantly, of doing so only to awaken wonder in his readers, thrilled as they learned about the unearthing of a past which appeared new after centuries of oblivion. See Antonio Agustín, *Diálogos de medallas, inscripciones y otras antigüedades* (En Tarragona: por Felipe Mey, 1587), 447-449.
women everything that tasted slightly unfamiliar to them, making the monstrous attractive, transforming everything into a spectacle worthy of curiosity: marvels of nature, works of art, magnificence, deeds, tricks, and even the horror involved in *autos de fe*. “Relaciones” of festivities, poetic tournaments, and religious ceremonies make evident that there is no better way to extol the importance of a thing than to express the wonder it awakes on those who are witnesses to it. As a thermometer of novelty and noteworthiness, wonder would often perform as evidence, granting any quality or virtue a simulacrum of objectivity through the mirror of the spectator.

*From wonder to acuity of wit: defining the object of study*

Wonder permeated tales of geographical exploration, religion and sainthood much earlier than it did the theory of poetry. While still rare in 1540, it gained momentum by the end of the decade in connection with the interpretations that various scholars offered of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, in the wake of the commentaries prepared by Francesco Robortello and Vincenzo Maggi, to become, around 1580, a central ingredient to the discipline.

Baxter Hathaway’s 1968 book on marvel in early modern poetics and poetry remains a classic in the field, along with countless contributions that address the role of wonder in certain genres, from late sixteen-century discussions on Italian “romanzi” between partisans of Ariosto and those of Tasso, to tragicomedy, to works on specific authors like Cervantes. Among recent

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attempts to address the question of wonder’s place in poetic treatises, and especially in the commentaries of Aristotle’s Poetics, Kirsti Minsaas’ 2001 chapter on the topic provides a summary of the main issues at stake.\(^8\)

Building upon the work of scholars like those mentioned, I approach the role of wonder in sixteenth-century poetics by following a thread that connects it with the development of a taste—which permeates poetics, and modes of sociability in general— that seventeenth-century poets and readers identified as “acuity of wit” or “ingenium”. “Acuity” was defined in Baltasar Gracián’s 1648 treatise *Agudeza y arte de ingenio* as the act of the intellect that connects terms in a way that the audience perceives as both difficult and unexpected, yet simultaneously plausible, and such as would make apparent to everyone a link between terms or things that had so far escaped the notice of the average and common mind.

While scholarship on “acuity of wit” and that on wonder have generally remained separate fields of inquiry, I develop in what follows the suggestion that sixteenth-century theories that increasingly conceived of poetics as a way to inspire wonder in the audience lie at the roots of the process that culminated in the promotion of “acuity of wit” to a characteristic necessary to speech in general, and poetry in particular, as theorized by Gracián and other contemporaries, many of them Jesuits.

I will advance evidence for the notion that, as authors like Lodovico Castelvetro—and others who followed his example—built a framework for wonder to play a role in poetry, they were also explaining the way in which the wit of the author, insofar as it is responsible for awaking marvel, becomes marvelous too. As a result, it becomes the object of wonder much like the product that it is accountable for.

In doing so, I follow the line opened by Cesc Esteve’s article on Italian poetics of wonder published in 2009. Esteve made explicit the connection that brings together the interest in marvelous and wonderful plots that manifests itself in many late sixteenth-century treatises and poetics, and the obsession with “acuity of wit” that characterizes much of seventeenth-century poetic and –especially– rhetorical treatises. In addition to this, I am indebted more than I can acknowledge here to Mercedes Blanco’s panoramic study on acuity of wit, published in 1992 and unrivaled to date.

In outline, one may say that early modernity re-encountered wonder after centuries of oblivion only to embrace it with enthusiasm. The following is a brief history of the meeting between poetics and wonder, and of the development out of the latter of the notion of “acuity of wit.”

Even if, as mentioned earlier, Aristotle had made of it a catalyst for philosophical inquiry, it would take a long time for this to be fully acknowledged. For one thing, twelfth- and thirteenth-century interpreters of Aristotle were likely to overlook the assertion contained at the beginning of *Metaphysics*. In general, they tended to see wonder as a moment of ignorance rather than as the platform for a transition to knowledge.

In the case of poetry, the shift in perspective was to take even longer. To start with, as is suggested by the lack of interest in the issue displayed by as learned a scholar as Daniel Heinsius

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11 In a chapter devoted to wonder in medieval philosophy, Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park show that scholars from Adelard of Bath –flourishing in the first half of the twelfth century– to Roger Bacon, Albertus Magnus, or Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) tended to be unaware of, or to downplay (depending on the case) Aristotle’s valorization of wonder as the drive towards philosophical inquiry. They tend to identify wonder with “stupor” –as in the case of Albertus Magnus, inspired by a typology of fear in John Damascene. Wonder, as inflicted by novelty, was something to be fled from rather than the source of curiosity that brings knowledge into existence. Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1998), 109-113.
well into the seventeenth century, it was far from clear that Aristotle had granted wonder pride of place in the architecture of the poem.

There was little doubt, however, that his mention of wonder (“τὸ θαυμαστὸν”) in connection with features such as reversals (“περιπέτεια”) and recognitions (“ἀναγνώρισεις”) pointed to a feature that it was important to recognize. As the number of scholars interested in the *Poetics* grew increasingly high around 1540, wonder permeated little by little into treatises, lectures, and commentaries. Intimately linked to cognition, it would instill new life in the debates that tackled the connection between poetry and learning, reaching a peak in the discussions about tragedy’s ability to purge emotions. A scholar like Giason Denores would make wonder a tool for poetry to instruct men to be better citizens in the community. For others, following a trend that Castelvetro started, wonder would be the ingredient that made the audience perceive poetry as beautiful, and as a source of pleasure.

The transformations that established wonder as central to the ends of poetry would span one hundred years. As generally happens, here too it is difficult to avoid arbitrariness when it comes to positing beginnings or ends. The publication of the first printed commentary on Aristotle’s *Poetics* in 1548 by Francesco Robortello offers an adequate starting point. It was a work that would be read across the continent, and moreover, the first to put together the text of Aristotle and a commentary that inquired about the meaning of the text paragraph after

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12 It is no coincidence that in the chapter devoted to the theoreticians of recognition in the sixteenth century, Terence Cave focuses on wonder. See Terence Cave, *Recognitions: A Study in Poetics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988). “By means of the term wonder, European literary theory describes—since the sixteenth century through Romanticism—everything that lies on the conceptual margins of the poetics of imitation” (“con el término maravilla, la teoría literaria europea designa—desde el siglo XVI hasta el romanticismo—todo aquello que está en los márgenes conceptuales de la poética de la imitación”). María José Vega Ramos, “El azar y la maravilla en la teoría neoaristotélica de la tragedia: la estatua de Mitis en el renacimiento”, *Theatralia* 3 (2000): 123. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

13 For the ideas of Denores on wonder, see Chapter One, *passim* and especially section three.

14 Scholarship on Aristotle’s *Poetics* took practically every conceivable form. “The character of these writings is very diverse. Literal translation into Latin or Italian, brief philological commentary, paraphrase, copious commentary, independent treatises in which the themes of the *Poetics* are rephrased, reorganized and extended”. Cave, *Recognitions*, 55.
paragraph. In fact, the method of commentary would kindle the spark that encouraged scholars everywhere to closely read and discuss passages that, as it would immediately become apparent, were all but clear within the expectations of early modern individuals.

Conversely, the decision to close the trajectory with Gracián’s treatise on “acuity of wit,” published exactly one century later in 1648, results from the argument, summarized earlier, that I try to advance as follows—namely that seventeenth-century theories of wit such as the one explicated by Gracián led to the logical conclusion of a set of ideas that were present, although sometimes in latency or at least not emphasized, in earlier considerations of the place of wonder in poetry, especially after the time of Castelvetro’s 1570 commentary on Aristotle’s Poetics. Castelvetro, much like seventeenth-century Jesuit theorists of wit such as Maciej K. Sarbiewski, Matteo Peregrini, or Gracián himself, was aware that whenever a poet presents some accident of plot, or some metaphor that awakens wonder in the audience, they cause the latter to marvel at the craftsmanship of he or she who was able to produce something wonder-inspiring.

I suggest that sixteenth-century theoreticians of marvel such as Giovanni Talentoni did much to explain the displacement of the focus of wonder from the events of the plot to the ingenuity of the poet. Talentoni accomplished a crucial step as he indicated that notions such as ignorance and knowledge, when considered in connection with the feeling of wonder, mean otherwise than they might in other contexts. To illustrate, he offers the example of the painter Nicostratus looking with amazement at Zeuxis’ portrait of Helen of Troy. As a painter,

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15 To give just an example, Lope de Vega quoted Robortello as the authority par excellence on Aristotle’s Poetics in his Arte nuevo, and referred, in addition to his commentary, to the treatise De comedia, published as an appendix to the latter: “If you are asking for an art, I beg you, wits, that you read the most learned Robortello from Udine. There you will see, in connection with Aristotle (and also in his treatise On comedy, everything that used to lie scattered)” (“Si pedís arte, yo os suplico, ingenios, / que leáis al doctísimo utinense / Robortelio y veréis sobre Aristóteles / (y, aparte, en lo que escribe De comedia), / cuanto por muchos libros hay difuso”). Félix Lope de Vega Carpio, Arte nuevo de hacer comedias, ed. Evangelina Rodríguez (Madrid: Castalia, AC/E Acción Cultural Española, 2011), 308-309, ll. 141-145.
Nicostratus is not ignorant of the art he sees at work in the table of Zeuxis, yet he marvels at it.\textsuperscript{16} This foreshadows a similar argument found in Sarbiewski’s theory of wit, performing in a context that otherwise seems to bear no relation to Tal entoni’s. In a book intended for students of rhetoric, Sarbiewski declares that audiences wonder at a maxim full of paradox – therefore wonder inspiring, and denoting “acuity of wit” in the speaker – even when they hear it for a second time. This seems to contradict the principle that wonder requires ignorance, considering that the content of novelty and surprise disappear when the listener grasps the meaning of the maxim the first time s/he hears it. Both scholars pioneered a transition from the study of “wonder” and “acuity of wit” to that of what would be called “aesthetics,” starting in the eighteenth century. They did so by making actual ignorance unnecessary for wonder, perceived from then on in terms of a feeling rather than as a process of learning. By bringing this to the fore, I hope that the study here presented might call attention to the connections, generally disregarded so far, between early modern theories of “wonder” and “acuity of wit” and what eventually became the discipline of philosophical aesthetics.

*The notion of wit or “ingenium”: some preliminary notions*

Scholars from Castelvetro to seventeenth-century theorists like Sarbiewski, Peregrini, or Gracián assigned the ability to inspire wonder in the audience to a faculty of the intellect that they called “wit” or “ingenium”.\textsuperscript{17} Sebastián de Covarrubias Horozco would define “ingenio” in 1611 in

\textsuperscript{16} Talentoni, *Discorso*, 53-54.

\textsuperscript{17} Early modern “ingenium”, “wit”, and “ingenuity” have become extremely fashionable in recent scholarship. Evidence for this is the project “Genius before Romanticism: Ingenuity in Early Modern Art and Science”, directed
terms of “a natural force of the intellect that investigates into everything that can be attained by reason and argumentation in every kind of science and discipline, in liberal and mechanic arts, and in subtleties, inventions and deceit”. Arguing and inferring from cause to effect, always finding a means to link terms that look unrelated or irreconcilable to others, wit serves purposes that, in Covarrubias’ development, range ambiguously from the achievements of Juanelo’s artifice –through which, as a new Archimedes, men were able to pump water from the river Tagus up to the city of Toledo– to the less easily commendable trickeries of “pícaros” and other figures of the underworld.

Around 1560, Ambrosio de Morales had already referred to the dangers of wit, in view of the disparity of ends to which it brings humans. Moreover, Morales explained that “ingenium” sometimes referred to what is inborn in individuals –a notion Gracián would speak of as “genius”– but was more properly used in reference to the faculty that grasps a thing and investigates into the depths of it. This is how he starts his “Discurso V”:

Both in Latin and Castilian, we sometimes mean by this word [sc. wit] man’s natural condition. However, it means more properly a faculty of the intellect with which we comprehend things, and inspect them until we penetrate everything that is to be found in them.

by Alexander Marr under the auspices of the Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities at Cambridge University (http://www.crassh.cam.ac.uk/programmes/genius-before-romanticism).

18 “INGENIO […] Una fuerça natural del entendimiento investigadora de lo que por razón y discurso se puede alcançar en todo género de ciencias, disciplinas, artes liberales y mecánicas, sutilezas, invenciones y engaños”. Sebastián de Covarrubias y Orozco, Tesoro de la lengua castellana, o española (En Madrid: por Luis Sánchez, Impresor del Rey N. S., 1611), 504v.


Morales goes on to explain that wit has to do with “penetrating in the thing as far as it is possible, up to the last thing that may be object of consideration”. It is according to this, he writes, that we speak of “acute”, “lively” and “penetrating” wits. 

Outline of the contents

Chapters One and Two develop the intuition, partially originating in Castelvetro’s 1570 commentary and then informing works appearing as late as Gracián’s 1648 Agudeza y arte de ingenio, that poetics provides the poet with a chance to turn his wit into a subject of wonder through the exercise of invention. A wit appears “acute” or “penetrative” when it shapes a plot in which the poet demonstrates a deep grasp of the forms of causality that are operative in the world of men by building a plot in which unexpectedness takes place to the highest degree while complying with what is probable or necessary. This means that the poet works with the possibilities that nature offers to him, forcing them to reach extremes, without ever breaking the rules of causality.

In Chapter One I track the presence of the notions of “wonder” –and, in connection with it, of “acuity of wit”– in sixteenth-century commentaries on Aristotle’s Poetics. Beginning in 1548, these laid the foundations for wonder to gain autonomy and appear as a relevant topic in treatises on general or specific aspects of poetic theory published from the decade of 1580 onward. Works like these form the object of Chapter Two, in which I study the connection between the notion of wonder as it is conceived in late sixteenth-century poetics and the theories

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21 “Penetrar en ello todo lo posible, hasta llegar a lo último que se puede considerar. Así solemos decir conforme a esto agudo, y vivo ingenio, y penetrativo ingenio, que es lo que los latinos llaman acre” [italics in the original]. Morales, “Discurso V”, 178.
on “acuity of wit” that became popular starting in the first half of the seventeenth century, and which I study in the works of three Jesuit scholars: Sarbiewski, Peregrini, and Gracián.

Chapter Three is a corrective on some of the conclusions reached by theorists studied in chapters one and two. As a matter of fact, scholars such as Castelvetro, Denores and Pinciano shared the conviction that the historian – understood as the reverse of the poet – was essentially banned from the exercise of any kind of invention. Insofar as s/he was bound to reproduce events as they actually happened, s/he remained unable to show “acuity of wit”. Against this, Gracián codified and rendered meaningful within his theory of “agudeza” a trend that had become popular by the late sixteenth century. According to it, the historian, not allowed to transform events, is expected instead to show his ability to “penetrate” the actions he narrates in order to grasp the intentions leading to them. In the wake of certain readings of Tacitus, connected with the belief that the prince needs to dissimulate his ends in order to rule according to “prudence” and “reason of state”, Gracián would describe historians awaking wonder in the audience by disclosing the secrets that rulers had been “ingenious” enough to conceal from everyone. In doing so, Gracián invited seventeenth-century readers to consider a link between history and wit that others had severed perhaps too prematurely, and to render to “acuity of wit” a value that appears pertinent within the ethical and political theories current at the time.

Chapter four seeks to answer a question that has somehow loomed over the discussions sketched so far. In fact, as the poet – or, for that matter, the historian – has his wit extolled on account of the feat that it accomplishes by presenting something surprising and contrary to expectation, one may ask how the audience is able to follow a path of reasoning that stands allegedly above the average – let alone appraise it and proffer a judgment of value thereupon. In order to understand the psychological mechanism that theorists of “wonder” and “acuity of wit”
contemplated on the side of the receptor, I will show that sixteenth-century scholars came to terms with the pleasure involved in wonder-based mechanisms by incorporating and adapting warnings advanced by ancient Greek and Roman rhetoricians—especially Quintilian in the eighth book of *Institutio oratoria*—about the pleasure drawn by audiences whenever the difficulty of enthymemes or metaphors caused them to feel involved in the process of decoding. Through cooperation, Quintilian wrote, they would perceive themselves as creators rather than mere listeners or readers. Cooperation appeared therefore implied in the definition of the kind of pleasure that “wonder” and “acuity of wit” were supposed to afford to any reader or spectator. This implied, as I will describe for the late sixteenth and the early seventeenth centuries, that a relationship is established between producer and consumer of language-based products that focuses on the relation of competition and measurement between two wits—those of the one who speaks or writes, and the other who listens or reads—that somehow need each other to make aesthetic and emotional response a possibility.

*Itinerant bodies and ideas: between Italy and Spain*

The story about to unfold takes place on a stage where multiple languages resound against one another, while people from varied origins coalesce. It is a play with characters often suspicious of each other, who generally find themselves on the point of negotiating ideas, stealing insights, arguing over the preeminence of each one’s approach to a subject, and unceasingly debating more or less relevant nuances.
With Spain at the height of political and military influence on the continent, and Italy still prevailing as a mirror in which to look for major scientific and humanistic inquiries—not to speak of the rule of the former over Naples, or Milan—, it seems idle to even attempt to contextualize the need for or usefulness of a study that, as I have tried to do, considers notions such as wonder and “acuity of wit” as the product of intersections and exchanges that take place halfway between the Italian and the Iberian peninsulas in a process contemplating the circulation of books no less than that of private or public subjects.

More than a few of the episodes that advance the plot introduced here almost always occur in relation to scholars transplanted to, or at least well connected with, a space that was somehow alien to them: libraries full of imports, and excessively zealous diplomats are the stock characters that recur most in the play.

This is so because reading across borders and languages provides, more often than not, the only reasonable explanation to what otherwise seems absurd. It would be in vain, for instance, to ask why a low nobleman from Galicia such as Alonso Ordóñez das Seyjas y Tovar introduced wonder and “acuity of wit”—in the first translation of Aristotle’s *Poetics* to ever be published in Spanish—in passages where Aristotle made no mention of either, if this were to be done without mentioning the influence of Castelvetro’s commentary—a reading that seems to have dictated Ordóñez’s choice, and which was only one among those to which he seems to have had access, thanks to the generosity of his patron the Count of Monterrey.

Relations of contact and power pervade the world in which wonder’s contours evolve and become increasingly relevant to understanding how a poem works. To wit, Giulio Cortese’s revolutionary ideas on imitation and wonder resounded within the walls of the academy that he had founded in Naples just before orders from the crown closed the space in response to rumors
that the group somehow opposed Spanish rule. At the other end of the territory, the Constable of Castile Juan Fernández de Velasco –himself the author of a ferocious text against Fernando de Herrera’s *Anotaciones* on Garcilaso’s poetry– was, as Viceroy of Milan, part of the audience that in 1596 would listen to Talentoni’s ideas on wonder. The contagion within the court of Madrid of the style popularized by Virgilio Malvezzi –which would set a paradigm for the imbrication of history writing and “acuity of wit”– was almost immediate, and eventually went so far that Malvezzi was called to the capital in person to serve as court historian at the side of Olivares. The move was, in turn, the culmination of a campaign characteristically started by a diplomat, Juan Antonio de Vera y Zúñiga, a character somehow oscillating between nobility and picaresque.

The preceding are just a few examples to illustrate the extent to which scholarly and literary activities taking place on the Italian and the Iberian peninsulas belong to a world that was often one and the same –a space in which it is not surprising for Gracián’s patron Lastanosa to accuse Matteo Peregrini of having plagiarized *Agudeza y arte de ingenio* when the latter wrote *Delle acuzze*.²² Lastanosa, mistaking Peregrini for a citizen of Genoa, would suggest that ideas were no lesser subject than gold to become the prey of ambition in the ever-present relations between the republic of the sea and Habsburg Spain.

Disciples or spies, the scholars who are the object of the present study lived in contact with and were aware of each other across languages and in translation. While the interpretation of Aristotle’s *Poetics* generally proceeded from Greek to Latin and to Italian, and only then to Spanish, the transfer would become, from a certain moment, far from unidirectional. Attesting to this, one may cite the fact that when late eighteenth-century scholars decried the fashion of being

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ingenious and were looking everywhere for wonder as a plague of bad taste that had infamously infested the poetry of the past, Girolamo Tiraboschi, in his *Storia della letteratura italiana* (1772-1783), would trace the roots of it to the influence of Spain. In doing so, Tiraboschi followed a similar accusation advanced in 1773 by Saverio Bettinelli. Exiled Jesuits – Jesuits once again – who had proceeded to Italy, such as Saverio Lampillas or Juan Andrés, would contest the charges in a polemic that remained well alive into 1800. Tiraboschi would trace the origins of Spanish “contamination” of Italian letters back to the exercise of “acuity of wit” for which Seneca and Martial were held accountable, which had allegedly corrupted the purity of the style practiced in ancient Rome.

It is within that fluid conception of spatial, temporal, and cultural relations that I enter the analysis that follows.
Aristotle’s Poetics sowed the seeds of more than a few of the ideas that early modern scholars conceived, shared and debated in connection with the task of the poet. The treatise made itself heard first with hesitation, then, after 1540, with strength and passion, in ways that often bordered on dogmatism.

Manuscripts containing the work had already reached the hands of scholars and court libraries of Northern Italy in the 15th century. They were copied widely and eventually both printed in Greek and translated into Latin. Yet the work would be more efficiently disseminated, creating a school of readers engaged in discussion of the novelties therein proposed in close alliance with a genre that characteristically bears the mark of scholarly communication and endeavors: the commentary.

Between 1548 and 1585—years signaled by the contributions of Francesco Robortello and Antonio Riccoboni—a handful of editions accompanied by glosses of varied nature appeared both in Latin and Italian. Soon they would be read and discussed in every corner of the continent, becoming an object of debate among scholars, who hesitated between endorsement and perplexity. The problem lay in the fact that Aristotle talked poetry in terms that, for sixteenth-century scholars and poets, accustomed to Horace’s Ars poetica and works originating in the tradition of rhetoric, were simply never heard of before. However, as readers started assimilating what they could infer and grasp from the text, the latter provided them with a language rendering attempts at theoretical or critical inquiry on poetics a task more easily communicable across
peoples, traditions and languages. This, to the extent that it was greatly due to the work of commentators such as Robortello and those who followed suit, was not negligible as a result, especially in light of the lack of interest shown by some among the scholars of earlier generations, as was the case of Luis Vives, who in *De disciplinis* (1536) had qualified the work as being of little fruit.  

In what follows, I discuss the role of “wonder” and “marvel” in the commentaries of Aristotle’s *Poetics* published in Italy during the second half of the sixteenth century. “Wonder” (“τὸ θαυμαστόν”) was mentioned in the text of Aristotle, but scholars disagreed as to the role it played. Moreover, the interpreters carried with them a set of expectations—fed by contemporary practice, taste and fashion, all of them far removed from those of Aristotle’s time—that granted wonder a contour and a role that, when it came to interpreting the text, often weighed heavier than the evidence, generally scarce, provided by the latter.

None of the commentators failed to raise questions about the task of wonder in poetry. As they delved into the subject, they pointed to unavoidable contradictions and obstacles that later on would lie at the core of the debates on the marvelous and on the marvel experienced at the wit of the poets as they built plots and metaphors, which somehow would revolutionize the

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23 Quoted in Daniel Javitch, “The assimilation of Aristotle’s *Poetics* in sixteenth-century Italy”, in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, ed. Glyn P. Norton, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 55. It is worth mentioning that, despite the enthusiasm with which scholars writing after Robortello’s commentary tended to embrace the approach to poetics that passed through Aristotle, there remained some who would voice skepticism to a certain degree. In 1560, Bernardino Partenio would confess that Aristotle had provided scholars with a method to fashion tragic and epic plots, but also if necessary to look elsewhere to fashion “the style of a poet”. Bernardino Partenio, *Della imitazione poetica*... (In Vinegia: appresso Gabriel Giolito de’ Ferrari, MDLX [1560]), 6. In a manuscript prepared around 1572 that would have to wait until 1790 to appear in print, the scholar from Modena Gian Maria Barbieri was outspoken in his rejection of literature derived from Aristotle’s *Poetics* or Horace, dismissed as speculations unrelated to the actual practice of poetry. Giannaria Barbieri, *Dell’origine della poesia rimata. Opera di Giannaria Barbieri modenese Pubblicata ora per la prima volta e con Annotazioni illustrata dal cav. ab. Girolamo Tiraboschi*... (In Modena: presso la società tipografica, 1790), 29. In either case, however, it is important to bear in mind that the dismissal of Aristotle’s ideas happens in connection with lyric poetry, conspicuously absent from the *Poetics*, and a genre for which the scarceness of attention that Aristotle lends to elocution or style seemed particularly upsetting.
perception of how poetry works and how it is pleasant to a reader. These, among others, are subjects that, as I will study in Chapter Two, caused scholars to spill large amounts of ink from the decade of 1570 until the days of Giambattista Vico, well into the 18th century.

To reflect upon the circulation of ideas either advanced or rejected by commentators, I will incorporate into the discussion that follows the reactions—productive, in turn, of new and often more radical ideas—of Italian and Spanish scholars exposed to the translations and glosses of the text produced by Robortello and those who followed in the task. These crystallized in texts of various nature, concerned with poetics in general, or, at times, with specific aspects of the discipline. The inclusion of those may occasionally entail a discussion in parallel with works dating from as late as 1600, but this is done only as long as it is clear that these are echoing or discussing commentaries from the wave that, at least in Italy, ends somehow with Riccoboni.²⁴

That earlier approaches to Aristotle’s Poetics happened mostly in the form of line-by-line gloss was not without consequence. It is a genre in which everything awaits explanation. Sidestepping of obstacles seldom goes unnoticed, a constraint that led commentators to speculate and even become fanciful where prudence would advise silence. Confronting a treatise that deserved to be called, in the title of Robortello’s commentary, “most difficult and obscure” (“difficillimus ac obscurissimus”), scholars reconstructed gaps that the centuries had made almost insurmountable. It is only natural if they construed meanings that were less in the text of the Poetics than in other authors and texts of the tradition, which they somehow thought would be helpful to understand Aristotle. At other times, they granted general validity to statements that the philosopher had perhaps intended for a case in particular. Perceived as dubious and opaque,

²⁴ Needless to say, the activity of commentary would be reactivated more than once in the following decades, but in terms of mutual influence, discussion and readership, the works appearing between Robortello’s commentary (1548) and Riccoboni’s (1585) belong to a group with great internal coherence. For a history and analysis of the commentaries, see Bernard Weinberg, A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance, vol. 1, ([Chicago]: University of Chicago Press, [1961]), 349-423.
suggestive rather than conclusive, Aristotle’s text often invited sixteenth-century scholars to favor any reading as well as its opposite. On the whole, one may conclude that the process of making sense of the Poetics was invested with a great dose of creativity, with scholars more often than not supporting claims of their own with the help of Aristotle’s authority and words. Wonder and the marvelous were victims, so to speak, of circumstances such as those delineated.

In this chapter, I will first introduce the set of translations and commentaries that act, somehow, as main characters of the plot. Afterwards, I will address the glosses that they propose for three sets of passages in the Poetics. In some of them, I will study the reactions of the commentators to Aristotle’s mention of wonder. In others, I look into the reasons why a commentator, or many others would have felt that it was appropriate to refer to wonder even though Aristotle had not mentioned it at all, as well as the consequences of the introduction of marvel in a context where it was initially absent. The conclusions resulting from a close and contextual reading of a

25 Of course, scholars had the choice of staying “safe” by just translating word-by-word and not caring much about the unintelligibility of the whole, a practice targeted by Alessandro Piccolomini, when he attacked those who did not translate, but simply “painted the text” (“depingere”). See Alessandro Piccolomini, “Il proemio”, in Copiosissima parafrase... nel primo libro della retorica d’Aristotele... (In Venetia: per Giovanni Varisco, e compagni, MDLV [1565]), n.p.

26 “Because romantic and post-romantic biases have made us perceive neo-Aristotelian rules of art as designed to inhibit poetic innovation we have mistakenly emphasized the restrictive use and function of these rules. But what […] needs to be reaffirmed, is how effectively modernists could enlist Aristotle to support their claims and to justify the opening up of generic canons”. Javitch, “The assimilation of Aristotle’s Poetics”, 64; also 56-57); see also Weinberg, A History of Literary Criticism, vol. 1, 349; and also Bernard Weinberg, “The Accademia degli Alterati and Literary Taste from 1570 to 1600”, Italica 31, no. 4 (Dec.,1954): 210. Scholars studying the reception of Aristotle’s Poetics in the sixteenth century have often singled out Horace’s Ars poetica or Epistula ad Pisonem as the work that weighed more heavily in the horizon of expectations that humanists put to work when interpreting the text. Aristotle’s Poetics would have been read through Horace’s lens concerning a number of points, the most conspicuous of which would be the notion that poetry has learning as a goal. This is likely to be a trace of Horace’s injunction for poets to simultaneously teach and delight (“docere et delectare”), which Aristotle never mentioned in spite of claims for the opposite advanced by interpreters of the Poetics as late as the seventeenth century. For Horace as a sort of interference in sixteenth-century readings of Aristotle, see Weinberg, A History of Literary Criticism, vol. 1, 111-155; and Marvin T. Herrick, The fusion of Horatian and Aristotelian literary criticism, 1531-1555 (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1946); for the influence of Horace in the understanding of marvel, see Minsaas, “Poetic Marvels”, 146-152.
segment of the commentaries, such as the one delimited above, will serve as evidence for a series of claims that I advance as part of the argument that directs the dissertation.

First, I suggest that Lodovico Castelvetro’s commentary on Aristotle’s *Poetics* (1570) was of paramount importance in crucially informing the perception of wonder as something that plays centrally to a poem and which is accountable for any kind of pleasure that audiences may obtain from it. Contesting a notion upheld by a majority of contemporaries, Castelvetro provided a way to understand wonder and with it the purpose of poetry, without any reference to learning or didacticism. Lastly, and crucially for the connection with Chapter Two and with the argument here advanced, Castelvetro championed a notion of wonder according to which the object that inspires wonder in the audience—as in the reversal of a plot, perhaps a metaphor—is wonderful also inasmuch as it makes the audience marvel at the acuity of wit and the artifice displaced by him who is responsible for it. Wonder implies, according to this, a transition from the quality of the object to that of the artificer, a point that sets Castelvetro’s position—variously echoed by Italian and Spanish scholars such as Giasone Denores, Alonso López Pinciano, or Alonso Ordóñez das Seyjas y Tovar—in a frame of thought that stands remarkably close to what seventeenth-century Jesuit theoreticians explored under the name of acuity of wit, a trend by then enormously famous, explored by scholars such as Maciej K. Sarbiewski or Baltasar Gracián between the decades of 1620 and 1640.

In a second step, I show that the commentaries also brought to the attention of the readers a kind of wonder that was different from, and even conflicted with, the one championed by Castelvetro. As a matter of fact, Pietro Vettori’s 1560 commentary would propose to emend a

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27 To some, Castelvetro’s emphasis on wonder might appear exaggerated in light of the evidence available in Aristotle’s text. However, it contemplates Aristotle’s assertion that tragedy operates the purification of pity and fear as a response that is emotional, rather than—as many in his day would suggest—one involving instruction of a moral kind. For Aristotle’s catharsis or purification as a process touching on the emotions, see Malcolm Heath, “Aristotle and the Value of Tragedy”, *British Journal of Aesthetics* 54, no. 2 (2014).
passage of the Poetics, resulting in the assertion that the irrational is the main source for the marvelous. Vettori’s emendation would open up alternative perspectives concerning the link between marvel and poetry, placing at the core of the poet’s task the need to reconcile in the poem two kinds of constituents –the absurd and the verisimilar– that seemed to directly contradict one another. Often drawing inspiration from Aristotle, scholars proposed solutions that aimed to dissimulate in the plot any portion of irrationality, which nonetheless could not be erased if the marvelous was expected to take place. The interplay in such fragile equilibrium of absurdity, dissimulation and marvel would serve as a basis for developments that would become crucial from the late sixteenth century on, as found in authors from Jacopo Mazzoni to Torquato Tasso to Miguel de Cervantes. It would result in the association between poetry and sophistry, with the former largely conceived in terms of deceit. This, no less than the kind of wonder emphasized by Castelvetro –more transparently oriented to the appreciation of the craft of the plot– would feature prominently in the debates on poetic theory that were produced once new and different approaches replaced the commentaries, which I will study later in Chapter Two.

1. Making sense of Aristotle’s Poetics: translation, paraphrase and commentary

The translation of Aristotle’s Poetics into Spanish seems to have been a belated event, postponed until the decade of 1620.28

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28 This is so unless we trust the assertion advanced by Luis José Velázquez well into the eighteenth century that Juan Páez de Castro would have translated the treatise around 1550—a fact that, were it true, would align him with contemporary endeavors in circles of Northern Italy with which he established contact as a participant in the Council of Trent. Luis José Velázquez de Velasco, Orígenes de la poesía castellana, ed. Jesús Alejandro Rodríguez Ayllón (Málaga: Universidad de Málaga, 2013), 197. In the decade of 1880, Menéndez Pelayo was famously skeptical about the existence of a translation by Páez, arguing that the latter made no mention of it across his correspondence; neither did Tomás Tamayo de Vargas, nor Nicolás Antonio, both of them active in the seventeenth century, then nearer to Páez. Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo, Historia de las ideas estéticas en España, vol. 1.2 (Santander: Editorial de la Universidad de Cantabria, 2012), 514. For a survey of the presumed, or actual, early modern Spanish translations of the Poetics, see Luis Sánchez Lailla, “La ciencia literaria”, in Jusepe Antonio González de Salas, Nueva idea de la tragedia antigua, ed. Luis Sánchez Lailla, vol. 1 (Kassel: Reichenberger, 2003), 161-187
The start, albeit a false one, points to July 17 1623, when Juan Pablo Mártir Rizo signed the dedication of his *Poética de Aristóteles, traducida de latín, ilustrada y comentada*.29 Echoing the title, Rizo would introduce a series of red herrings that aimed to have the reader believe that he was translating Daniel Heinsius’ greatly authoritative version of the *Poetics*, which had been published in Leyden in 1611.30 Actually, Rizo was adapting—and, to a great extent, translating and plagiarizing—from Giason Denores’s *Poetica* (1588). Despite what he may have claimed, therefore, Rizo was translating Denores from Italian rather than a version in Latin of Aristotle’s treatise.31 Rizo’s choice was far from irrelevant to the consideration of wonder—a subject for which Heinsius shows little interest, as he barely glossed Aristotle’s references to it. Unlike him, in the wake of Denores—who was influenced, in turn, by Castelvetro’s commentary—Rizo would make of wonder a component essential to the plot.

Rizo’s text was probably meant as a sort of antidote against the innovations of Lope de Vega’s theatre, which he famously opposed.32 The author defined his contribution as containing the *Poetics* “reduced by means of definition and division, adapted to be easily taught and learnt”

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29 The manuscript of Rizo’s work is preserved in Madrid at the Biblioteca Nacional de España, Ms. 602. On February 14 1623 it was approved for printing, as the manuscript attests. However, this would never materialize.

30 Daniel Heinsius, *Aristotelis de poetica liber. Daniel Heinsius recensuit, ordini suo restituit, Latine vertit, notas addidit. Accedit eiusdem de tragica constitutione liber. In quo praeter caetera, tota de hac Aristotelis sententia dilucide explicatur* (Lugduni Batavorum: apud Ioannem Balduinum, prostat in bibliopolio Ludovici Elzevirij, anno MDCXI [1611]). As suggested by the title, Heinsius supplemented his translation into Latin with a treatise on tragedy, which comments on Aristotle’s *Poetics*, and a summary (“Ordo Aristotelis”) in which he explained how he had reorganized Aristotle’s text. By acknowledging that he was translating from Latin and then appending a version of Heinsius’s “Ordo Aristotelis”, Rizo seemed to imply that he was translating from the volume of 1611, thus deceiving, among others, Menéndez Pelayo. See Menéndez Pelayo, *Historia de las ideas estéticas*, vol. 1.2, 515-516.


32 See Margarete Newels, “Einleitung”, in Juan Pablo Mártir Rizo, *Poética de Aristóteles traducida del latín* (Köln und Opladen: Westdeutcher Verlag, 1965). Newels was the first to ever publish Rizo’s text, preserved in Madrid at the Biblioteca Nacional, Ms. 602. She discusses similarities between Rizo’s position and the group of anti-Lope scholars and poets usually associated with Torres Rámila. A comment on the title page of Ms. 602 suggests that the latter, not Rizo, was responsible for the text.
evidence that Aristotle’s treatise had attained a status in which it aspired to be made into a
textbook, digested for a wider public who lacked the patience to cut through the obscurity that
had made it famous.\footnote{33}{"Reducida por vía de diffiniçión y división con disposicióñ acomodada para enseñarla y aprenderla con brevedad y facilidad". Mártir Rizo, Poética de Aristóteles, 27. I always quote Rizo by the printed edition of 1965. Cf. the same idea in Denores, “All’illustissimo sig. Conte Hieronimo Abbate Martinengo…”, in Denores, Poetica, n.p. Reduction to order and method was often a priority for treatises from the late sixteenth century onwards. For the case of Spain, see Pinciano’s “orden resolutivo”. López Pinciano, Obras completas, vol. 1, 171-172.}

Only one year later, on August 28 1624 in Madrid, Alonso Ordóñez das Seyjas y Tovar
would sign the dedication of a translation of the Poetics to the Count Duke of Olivares. In 1626
the book was eventually printed, inscribed now to don Manuel de Zúñiga Fonseca y Acevedo,
Count of Monterrey.\footnote{34}{Alonso Ordóñez das Seyjas y Tovar, La poética de Aristóteles dada a nuestra lengua castellana… (En Madrid: por la viuda de Alonso Martín, año 1626). I cite it as Ordóñez das Seyjas y Tovar, La poética (1626). The manuscript, containing differences that I will gloss later, is preserved in Madrid at the Biblioteca Nacional, Ms. 2624. It bears the title La poética de Aristóteles traducida en nuestra lengua castellana. I cite it as Ordóñez das Seyjas y Tovar, La poética (MS). Ordóñez’s translation was the only one available in print for a long time. It would be reprinted with alterations in 1778, in a volume with the Greek text and Heinsius’ Latin translation: Casimiro Flórez Canseco, ed., La poética de Aristóteles dada a nuestra lengua castellana por don Alonso Ordóñez das Seyjas y Tobar, Señor de San Payo. Añádense nuevamente el texto griego, la versión latina y notas de Daniel Heinsio, y las del Abad Batteux traducidas del francés; y se ha suplido y corregido la traducción castellana (En Madrid: por Don Antonio de Sancha, año de 1778). Sancha would print González de Salas’ Nueva idea in the same year of 1778.} Among the preliminaries we find the epigram “Multi nomen habent
vatum”, by Vicente Mariner, who was going to be second—and, apparently, last—to translate the
Poetics in seventeenth-century Spain. Mariner completed the task on April 12 1630, but the text
never appeared in print.\footnote{35}{The date appears at the end of Mariner’s translation, bound together with that of Aristotle’s Rhetoric and of the pseudo-Aristotelian rhetoric Ad Alexandrum. They are preserved in Madrid at the Biblioteca Nacional, Ms. 9809. The translation of the Poetics is contained within pp. 505-581, with the title: El libro de la poética de Aristóteles, vertido a la verdad de la letra del texto griego por el maestro Vicente Marinerio valentino (p. 505).}

Later on, Jusepe Antonio González de Salas’ Nueva idea de la tragedia antigua would
take as reference Heinsius’ version of Aristotle’s Poetics, as Rizo had claimed and did not. Part
translation, part paraphrase and commentary, Salas’ work would put a closure in 1633 to the
brief romance of Spanish scholars with versioning the text of Aristotle.\footnote{36}{Jusepe Antonio González de Salas, Nueva idea de la tragedia antigua o ilustración última al libro singular de poética de Aristóteles Stagirita… (En Madrid: lo imprimió Francisco Martínez, [1633]). For the influence of...}
I will focus briefly on Ordóñez’s inscription to Monterrey, which provides a window into eight decades of scholarship on the Poetics. Ordóñez’s case proved true that belatedness may afford perspective and that leaning on the shoulders of earlier scholars helps root on solid ground the challenge of interpretation. In addition to a list of names—some Spanish, but most of them Italian—Ordóñez scattered a series of comments that allow us to weigh the perception that a scholar in seventeenth-century Spain might have of a tradition that was mostly past and, in many cases, originated in Italy. This is a segment of the list:

The first who successfully transferred the text from the Greek into the Latin language was Alessandro de’ Pazzi from Florence […] After [Averroes], those who wrote commentaries were, first of all, Francesco Robortello; for, if others have reached further in the discovery of the difficulties it contains, it is to him that we owe the first, and largest illustration of the subject. After him came Bernardo Segni, Pietro Vettori, Vincenzo Maggi, Lodovico Castelvetro—highly esteemed by the Italians—[and] Alessandro Piccolomini, to whom, if it cannot be denied that he added to that already invented, it would be unfair to deny him praise for his skill to judge the opinions of those coming before him.37

To those, Ordóñez adds the names of Giulio Cesare Scaligero, Antonio Minturno—which he considers to have attained the closest to Aristotle’s opinion—and, “in our tongue”, Alonso López Pinciano.38 The inscription to Olivares that opens the manuscript of 1624 has Ordóñez

Heinsius’ version of the Poetics on González de Salas, especially in the order of the text, see Sánchez Lailla, “La ciencia literaria”, 170-172. It has become commonplace to assume that the renewed and belated interest in Aristotle’s Poetics between 1623 and 1633 is closely related to the debates sparked by Lope de Vega’s successful theatrical formula. Even in Flórez Canseco’s re-edition of Ordóñez’s translation, published in 1778, the latter appeared as an antidote (with no effect) to what the editor considered the bad taste of the time. Casimiro Flórez Canseco, “Prólogo”, in Ordóñez das Seyjas y Tovar, La poética (1778), n.p.

37 “El primero que le passó felizmente de su idioma griego al latino, fue Alexandro Paccio florentín […] Comentáronle después [de Averroes], el primero, Francisco Robortello, que si otros han estendido las riendas del discurso en el descubrimiento de sus dificultades, a él se le deve la primera, y mayor ilustración desta materia. Siguiéronse Bernardo Segni, Pedro Victorio, Vicencio Madío, Ludovico Castelvetro, estimadíssimo de los italianos, Alexandre Piccolomini, a quien, aunque no se le puede negar la ventaja de añadir a lo inventado, tampoco puededexar de concedersele un preeminente grado en juzgar de las opiniones de los de antes”. Ordóñez das Seyjas y Tovar, La poética (1626), n.p.

38 Ordóñez das Seyjas y Tovar, La poética (1626), n.p. Minturno published a treatise in Latin in 1559, followed by a substantially different work in 1563: Antonio Minturno, De poeta ad Hectorem Pignatellum Vibonensium ducem libri VI (Venetiis: apud Franciscum Rampazetum, ann. MDLIX [1559]); and L’arte poetica del sig. Antonio
mention Girolamo Vida and Girolamo Fracastoro, both predating the fever of scholarship on Aristotle that started around 1540. The dedication of the manuscript, in fact, shows Ordóñez more aware of the literature on the subject available in Italy. He even refers there to Giorgio Valla as the first translator into Latin of Aristotle’s *Poetics* – in a book, by then more than a century old, which he describes as flawed with “prodigious errors”.

*Minturno, nella quale si contengono i precetti heroici, tragici, comici, satyrici, e d’ogni altra poesia...* (In Venetia: per Gio. Andrea Valvassori, MDLXIII [1563]). Scaligero’s treatise appeared as Giulio Cesare Scaligero, *Poeticæ libri septem...* ([Lugduni]: apud Antonium Vincentium, MDLXI [1561]). Rather than commentaries, the treatises by Minturno and Scaligero are works on poetics generally concerned with the issues touched by Aristotle, but also with aspects absent in the latter.

He incorporates, for example, authors involved in the debate about the pre-eminence of Ludovico Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso* against Torquato Tasso’s *Gerusalemme liberata* as models of epic poetry (with authors such as Tasso himself, or Orazio Lombardelli); moreover, he mentions cases such as that of Girolamo Frachetta, responsible for a dialogue *Del furore poetico* (1581). Ordóñez das Seyjas y Tovar, *La poética (MS)*, 2v-3r.

“Giorgio Bala le abía traducido pero con portemptos de errores”. Ordóñez das Seyjas y Tovar, *La poética (MS)*, 2r. In the dedication of the printed version, Ordóñez erroneously cites Lilio Gregorio Giraldi (the author of a book on the history of poetry published in 1545) as the first translator of the *Poetics* into Latin. Generally speaking, the canon and opinions contained in the two dedications differ only on a superficial level. Yet Averroes becomes the object of opposite judgments, to such an extent that it prompts doubts about the relation between the two texts, the order in which they were written and the circumstances behind each of them. In fact, the inscription to Olivares in the manuscript says that “Averroes, in his Arabic version, differed from Aristotle in many points” (“Aberroyes en su arábigo fue en muchas cossas muy diverso de la mente del autor”). Ordóñez das Seyjas y Tovar, *La poética (MS)*, 2r.

This seems to have been expected in 1624. Averroes’ paraphrase of Aristotle, written in the 12th century, had been a gateway to Aristotle’s *Poetics* well into the days of Robortello. The latter still quoted Averroes as a great authority on the text as late as 1548. He must have used Hermannus Alemannus’ 1256 translation into Latin. Hermann, a monk from Germany working in Toledo under the patronage of John, Bishop of Burgos, ended his life as Bishop of Astorga. Hermann’s translation of the *Poetics* was printed together with that of the *Rhetoric* by Philippus Venetus in Venice in 1481. Re-edited at least five times (1515, 1525, 1556, 1572, 1600), it surpasses in number any of the sixteenth-century versions that claimed to feature, with the text, the most recent scholarship on the topic. For Hermann, see Maurilio Pérez González, “Herman el alemán, traductor de la Escuela de Toledo: estado de la cuestión”, *Minerva: Revista de filología clásica* 6 (1992). O. B. Hardison has argued that, while the Bishop of Corinth, William of Moerbecke, had translated Aristotle’s *Poetics* in 1278, the difference in the quantity of extant manuscripts (twenty-three for Hermann’s Averroes, for only two of Moerbecke’s Aristotle) attests to a connection between the success of the paraphrase and a higher degree of intelligibility. This might have remained so until strenuous scholarship and frequent discussion on Aristotle’s text starting in the decade of 1540 made the original text understandable to sixteenth-century audiences. As if Hermann’s version were not enough, the physician Abraham of Balmes translated in Naples in 1523 a version into Hebrew prepared near Arles in 1337 by Todros Todrosi –the text used also for a new translation by Jacob Mantinus, physician to Paul III. Mantinus’ version was published within the Giunta editions of Aristotle of 1552 and 1562, whereas the printer decided to resort to Balmes’s in the edition of Aristotle with Averroes published in 1574. The circulation of Averroes’ paraphrase accounts for part of the apparently odd developments of Aristotle’s ideas across the sixteenth century. It was especially marked by the incomprehension of the notion of imitation, as well as by the reduction of comedy and tragedy to the opposition (common in rhetoric for the demonstrative or epideictic genre) between praise and blame. O. B. Hardison, “Aristotle and Averroes”, *in Poetics and Praxis, Understanding and Imagination. The Collected Essays of O. B. Hardison Jr.* (Athens & London: The University of Georgia Press, 1997). It might seem normal for Ordóñez to be aware as late as 1624 that Averroes was immensely distant from Aristotle’s ideas of what poetry is. In fact, it is precisely the conviction he shows in the dedication of 1624 that renders particularly suspicious the judgment, found in the printed text of 1626, that “Averroes paraphrased [Aristotle’s *Poetics*] beautifully, and with precision in the
Ordóñez pictures the wave of Aristotelianism that had informed poetic theory for more than a century in a way that, without aiming at exhaustiveness, remains fairly accurate. A nobleman—“señor de San Paio”—living between his estate in Galicia and the court in Madrid, Ordóñez seems representative of a scholar who is well informed about past and more or less recent developments in Spain and especially in Italy. He may perhaps lack the kind of first-hand experience that some years earlier had allowed Francisco Fernández de Córdoba to track contemporary debates with great precision after a stay in Rome. Yet Ordóñez seems to be acquainted with the works of the participants in the process of translating and making sense of Aristotle’s Poetics from the mid-sixteenth century until the time, around 1580, when wonder—thanks to the authority of the interpreters—had eventually become, so to speak, implanted within the text itself. His prologue, therefore, may serve as dramatis personae to introduce the actors who have a say in the present chapter.

Ordóñez’s dismissal, referred to above, of Giorgio Valla’s unsuccessful Latin translation of the Poetics—first published in 1498—was commonplace. His diagnosis of Alessandro de’ Pazzi likewise reflected the state of things. Published posthumously in 1536, Pazzi’s version became a reference and was used, for example, as the version of reference for Francesco Robortello’s commentary of 1548. In the time between the translations by Valla and Pazzi, Aldo Manuzio had made available the Greek text in the first of two volumes of Greek Rhetoricians, examples of what the text has to teach. In doing this he showed to what extent he had penetrated the meaning” (“Averroes le parafraseó excelentemente, y con particularidades en los exemplos de su doctrina, que muestran quán bien la avía penetrado”). Ordóñez das Seyjas y Tovar, La poética (1626), n.p. If the survival of such encomiastic opinion about Averroes’ understanding of the Poetics is understandable in view of the context in which it took place, it is the regressive change of mind displayed by Ordóñez that remains inexplicable.

41 Francisco Fernández de Córdoba, Abad de Rute, published poetics within his Didascalia multiplex (1615). He was familiar with polemics, which was thriving in Italy—a result of his stay in Rome under the patronage of Luis Fernández de Córdoba y Aragón, VI Duke of Sessa, his relative and Lope de Vega’s protector. For Rute’s life, see Dámaso Alonso, “Sobre el Abad de Rute: algunas noticias biográficas”, in Studia Hispanica in honorem Rafael Lapesa, vol. 1 (Madrid: Gredos, 1972); for his take on Italian debates and especially Denores, see Marta Albalá Pelegrín, “El Arte nuevo de Lope de Vega a la luz de la teoría dramática italiana contemporánea: Poliziano, Robortello, Guarini y el Abad de Rute”, eHumanista 24 (2013): 11-13.

published in 1508.\textsuperscript{43} One decade earlier, the \textit{Poetics} missed the chance to be included in Aldo’s publication of Aristotle’s \textit{Complete Works}, which appeared between November 1495 and June 1498, and represents a milestone in the consolidation of the philosopher’s work in the age of print.\textsuperscript{44}

Also present in Ordóñez’s list, Bernardo Segni had pioneered translation of the \textit{Poetics} into the vernacular in 1549.\textsuperscript{45} After the model of Daniele Barbaro’s commentary on the version of Aristotle’s \textit{Rhetoric} prepared in Latin by his father Ermolao,\textsuperscript{46} Segni would append explanations separately to each chapter.

Yet, at the turn of the decade, two commentaries would appear in Latin that simultaneously eclipsed Segni’s work and became representative of the truth about Aristotle’s text, as well as exemplar for the kind of scholarship on the \textit{Poetics} to flourish afterwards. These were Francesco Robortello’s \textit{Explicationes} (1548) and Vincenzo Maggi’s \textit{Communes}.


\textsuperscript{44} The only two extant manuscripts considered to be primary witnesses for the Greek original arrived in Italy in the course of the fifteenth century. Among other factors, the presence there of Byzantine scholars, educated in ancient Greek language and culture in a way unrivalled in Western Europe, fostered the interest in a legacy which then became available little by little, through the copy, translation and discussion of works long deemed lost, or even unheard of. The \textit{Poetics} was copied at least thirty-two times in fifteenth-century Italy, making available a text that had been practically unknown in that part of the continent. The only exception to this seems to be William of Moerbecke’s thirteenth-century Latin translation; for the rest, as mentioned above, Averroes’ paraphrase occupied the void of Aristotle’s text. Leonardo Tarán, “History of the Text of the Poetics”, in Aristotle, \textit{Poetics. Editio Maior of the Greek Text with Historical Introductions and Philological Commentaries}, ed. Leonardo Tarán and Dimitri Gutas (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2012), 39-40. Giorgio Valla’s Latin translation of the \textit{Poetics} appeared for the first time in a miscellaneous volume printed by Simon Bevilaqua (Venice, 1498); for Pazzi’s version, see Alessandro de’ Pazzi, \textit{Aristotelis Poetica. per Alexandrum Paccium, Patricium Florentinum, in Latinum conversa} (Venetiis: in aedibus haeredum Aldi et Andreae Asulani Soceri, 1536). Pazzi had prepared his translation in Rome around 1524, but it would be published only after his death by his son Guglielmo. The latter prepared Aristotle’s Greek text as well, printed with his father’s Latin version. Tarán, “History of the Text”, 48. For the reception of Aristotle’s \textit{Poetics} in Italy, the text of reference remains Weinberg, \textit{A History of Literary Criticism}; for alleged limitations or inaccuracies in Weinberg’s analysis, see Javitch, “The assimilation of Aristotle’s \textit{Poetics}”. A recent study of the commentaries on the \textit{Poetics} is found in Brigitte Kappl, \textit{Die Poetik des Aristoteles in der Dichtungstheorie des Cinquecento} (Berlin; New York: W. de Gruyter, 2006).

\textsuperscript{45} Bernardo Segni, \textit{Rettorica, et Poetica d’Aristotele} (In Firenze: appresso Lorenzo Torrentino, impressor’ ducale, 1549). It was re-edited in Venice in 1551.

\textsuperscript{46} Ermolao Barbaro and Daniele Barbaro, \textit{Rhetoricorum Aristotelis libri tres, interprete Hermolaao Barbaro P. V. Commentaria in eosdem Danielis Barbari} (Venetiis: apud Cominum de Tridino Montis Ferrati, Anno Domini MDXXXIII [1544]).
Maggi’s work resulted partly from collaboration with Bartolomeo Lombardi, held responsible for what seems to have been the first public lecture on Aristotle’s Poetics in modern times, which took place sometime in 1541 at Padua’s Accademia degli Infiammati. A disciple of Lombardi, Maggi would also teach the work at the university in Ferrara from 1543. In 1548, as Robortello became a pioneer in the field by being the first to publish his commentary, Maggi complained bitterly that his rival had opportunistically profited from the work of others.

Robortello and Maggi were only the point of departure for a series of commentaries in the decades to follow, but they certainly established a precedent. Not only did they offer plausible interpretations for a text that had so far usually thrown readers into a state of perplexity; more importantly, they were extremely effective in dispelling any doubts about the pertinence that the work might have for sixteenth-century learned communities.

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48 It was the same Alessandro Piccolomini who one day would publish a commentary of the Poetics, who called Bartolomeo Lombardi to the task of delivering a lecture at the Accademia degli Infiammati, of which he was currently in charge. See Florindo Cerreta, Alessandro Piccolomini, letterato e filosofo senese del Cinquecento (Siena: Accademia Senese degli Intronati, 1960), 27-28. For Lombardi’s ideas and his indebtedness to Averroes, see Weinberg, A History of Literary Criticism, vol. 1, 373-374.

49 Maggi’s lectures on the Poetics from the year 1546-47 left a trace in the notes taken by a student, Alessandro Sardi, preserved today in Modena, at the Biblioteca Estense universitaria, Est. lat., 88 (a.Q.6.14), cc. 1 r e 69v. Weinberg, A History of Literary Criticism, vol. 1, 373-374.

50 Elisabetta Selmi, “Maggi, Vincenzo”, in Dizionario biografico degli italiani, 67 (2006), accessed January 1 2014, http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/vincenzo-maggi_(Dizionario-Biografico): Regardless of whether Robortello or Maggi ought to be given the primacy or the merit, scholars generally agree that mid-sixteenth-century Padua—a stronghold of Aristotelianism and of Averroism—provided fertile soil for the exegesis of the Poetics to thrive, both in the university and in the surrounding scholarly community. See Weinberg, A History of Literary Criticism, vol. 1, 373; and also Cave, Recognitions, 55.

51 In the preface to his Orbecche (1541), Giraldi Cinzio had described the Poetics as cryptic and dark. Javitch, “The assimilation of Aristotle’s Poetics”, 55. Sixteenth-century scholars differed as to the reasons accounting for the difficulty of the treatise. In 1554, Alessandro Lionardi called the Poetics “obscure, and brief”. According to him, Aristotle wished to condense his system with “marvelous brevity” (“maravigliosa brevitá”), such as is usually done
A second, greatly creative stage in the process of interpreting the *Poetics* corresponds to the commentaries by Pietro Vettori, Lodovico Castelvetro and Alessandro Piccolomini.

Ordóñez barely mentions Vettori’s work, published in 1560, even though it accomplished no little merit by preparing the Greek text anew—which would circulate separately from 1564 as an alternative to Aldo’s— and re-proposing a translation. Vettori, moreover, carried out successfully a labor of emendation of dubious passages that would remain influential until modern times.52

Ordóñez had good reason to describe Castelvetro’s *Poetica*, published in 1570 and, in a revised version, in 1576, as “most esteemed among the Italians”.53 Written in the vernacular, lengthy and methodic, Castelvetro’s commentary was presented as the effort to make Aristotle “speak” where he had hardly sketched his thought.54 His text was rebellious and bold in a way by philosophers who deal with things that are above nature and under a few principles embrace the universe.

Alessandro Lionardi, “Dialoghi della inventione poetica”, in Bernard Weinberg, ed., *Trattati di poetica e retorica del Cinquecento* (Bari: Laterza, 1970-74), vol. 2, 270. The reasons provided by Giason Denores had to do rather with the materiality of the text and with the process of reception: first, there were errors in the text as it had come to sixteenth-century readers; furthermore, the *Poetics* was a treatise that Aristotle had not revised for publication and which likely had arrived incomplete; in addition, the reference to ancient authors and poems of which no one had ever heard since made things even more difficult. Denores, “All’illustrissimo sig. Conte Hieronimo Abbate Martinengo”, n.p. At any rate, the obscurity of Aristotle was considered proverbial at the time, so as to have deserved the publication by Pedro Juan Núñez of a speech explaining the reasons and the remedies to be applied, published in 1554 as *Oratio de causis obscuritatis Aristotelis et de illarum remediis*. Pinciano would see a relation between the incompleteness of the original and the insufficiency of the commentators, thus emphasizing the difficulty involved in the task. López Pinciano, *Obras completas*, vol. 1, 13. In Weinberg’s words, “the Renaissance reader […] had before him a text in many places corrupt […] which borrowed […] its illustrations from a literature still very imperfectly known, either as to content or to form, and these examples must have provided very little clarification to him. If to these circumstances are added the hazards of badly printed texts and inadequate translations, it will be seen that his difficulties were indeed almost insuperable”. Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism*, vol. 1, 350.


54 For Castelvetro’s characterization of his commentary as the completion of what had remained incomplete, see Kappl, *Die Poetik des Aristoteles*, 93-94.
that would make it greatly popular among readers of subsequent generations.\textsuperscript{55} The popularity that it enjoyed responded largely to Castelvetro’s ability to make Aristotle’s ideas come closer to topics that mattered for sixteenth-century audiences – such as wonder – and to the attempt at transforming the brevity of the original into what many contemporaries would have called “a method”. As a matter of fact, Castelvetro tended to develop each of Aristotle’s assertions into an analysis of the components and then to explore at length how different combinations have different outcomes, with the way in which they fit better or worse being the end in view.

As for Alessandro Piccolomini’s paraphrase, published in 1575, it was part of a project intended to make Aristotle’s works accessible to non-scholarly audiences.\textsuperscript{56} Ordóñez refers to Piccolomini’s analysis of Aristotle’s \textit{Poetics} with praise on more than one occasion and, as I will show later, he turned to him as authority whenever a term presented different and conflicting readings.

Ordóñez fails to mention the last great commentary published in sixteenth-century Italy by the famous professor at Padua Antonio Riccoboni. It appeared in 1585 and, in addition to the commentary, it featured a new Latin translation. Mainly intended for scholars, it was already

\textsuperscript{55} Josep Solervicens has identified three references to Castelvetro’s commentary in the notes taken by a student at the University of Barcelona attending the lectures of Pere Joan Nunyes (or Pedro Juan Núñez). Solervicens dates them at around 1587, whereas Juan Francisco Alcina Rovira had suggested c. 1573-74. The notes are preserved under the title \textit{Annotacions per a entendre alguna cita de l’arte poetica d’Aristotil, per Nunnesium}, in the \textit{Arxiu General de la Corona d’Aragó}, Ms. 69, ff. 127v-134. Another witness of the involvement of Nunyes with the \textit{Poetics} is a brief excerpt of a lecture at the University of Zaragoza from the year 1561, preserved at the \textit{Biblioteca capitular} in Zaragoza. For both documents, I rely on Josep Solervicens, “‘Il diletto della poesia’: Lodovico Castelvetro en los comentarios de Pere Joan Núñez a la Poética aristotélica (Barcelona, 1577/1597)”, \textit{eHumanista} 29 (2015); and also Juan Francisco Alcina Rovira, “El comentario a la \textit{Poética} de Aristóteles de Pedro Juan Núñez”, \textit{Excerpta philologica} 1, no. 1 (1991). The fact that a scholar such as Nunyes relied heavily on Castelvetro’s commentary proves further the reach and the influence it had in the decades following 1570.

\textsuperscript{56} Alessandro Piccolomini, \textit{Annotationi di M. Alessandro Piccolomini, nel libro della Poetica d’Aristotele; con la traduzione del medesimo libro, in lingua volgare} (Vinegia: presso Giovanni Guarisco, & Compagni, 1575).
described in the title as a contestation of Castelvetro, attesting the popularity, for better or worse, that the commentary of the latter had come to acquire.\textsuperscript{57}

Ordóñez has little to say about Spanish scholars. The books by Miguel Sánchez de Lima and Juan Díaz Rengifo, published in the late sixteenth century, may have seemed to him scarcely connected with Aristotle and this may have been also the case of the blend of Aristotelianism and Platonism, together with discussions on metrics, that informs Luis Alfonso de Carvallo’s \textit{Cisne de Apolo}.\textsuperscript{58} More intriguing is Ordóñez’s silence about Francisco Cascales’s 1617 \textit{Tablas poéticas}, a work that dialogues explicitly with Alonso López Pinciano’s \textit{Philosophia antiqua poética}, the only Spanish work mentioned by Ordóñez as being authoritative on Aristotle’s ideas.\textsuperscript{59} Pinciano’s, as I will show, was a vehicle for Castelvetro’s ideas on Aristotle’s \textit{Poetics} to permeate into late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century notions –as has been repeated \textit{ad nauseam} in the case of Cervantes– and the credit it obtains from Ordóñez only adds evidence for this.

In what follows, I will show that, through close reading and emendation of the text of Aristotle, the commentators I have just introduced granted wonder a place of privilege in the machinery of

\textsuperscript{57} Antonio Riccoboni, \textit{Poetica Antonii Riccoboni... Poeticam Aristotelis per paraphrasim explicans: et nonnullas Ludouici Casteluetriij capitones refellens} (Vicentiae: apud Perinum Bibliopolam & Georgium Græcum Socios, 1585).

\textsuperscript{58} Miguel Sánchez de Lima, \textit{El arte poética en romance castellano. Compuesta por Miguel Sánchez de Lima lusitano, natural de Viana de Lima} (Impresso en Alcalá de Henares: en casa de Juan Íñiguez de Lequerica, 1580); Juan Díaz Rengifo, \textit{Arte poetica española: con una fertillissima sylva de consonantes comunes, proprios, esdrúxulos y reflexos y un divino stimulo del amor de Dios} (Salamanca: Miguel Serrano de Vargas, 1592); and Luis Alfonso de Carvallo, \textit{Cisne de Apolo, de las excelencias y dignidad y todo lo que al arte poética y versificatoria pertenece...} (En Medina del Campo: por Juan Godínez de Millis [a costa de Pedro Osete y Antonio Cuello], 1602). I quote from Luis Alfonso de Carvallo, \textit{Cisne de Apolo}, ed. Alberto Porqueras Mayo (Kassel: Edition Reichenberger, 1997).

the poem. As I point to Castelvetro’s commentary as the main catalyst in the process, I will suggest that Pinciano’s dialogue, by partially adopting Castelvetro’s ideas on the pre-eminence of wonder, mediated between the latter and the development of poetics in Spain in the first half of the seventeenth century. At the same time, I will show that Castelvetro’s perception of the centrality of wonder had pervaded speculation and practice even before Pinciano, as one may see in Fernando de Herrera’s *Anotaciones* to the poetry of Garcilaso, published in 1580—scarcely one decade apart from Castelvetro’s *Poetica* and yet much earlier than Pinciano’s dialogue.

In order to survey the evolving role that sixteenth-century scholars ascribed to wonder, I will focus on the treatment dedicated to the plot in the various commentaries. It is there, in fact, that change and negotiation become perceptible most of the time, in harmony with Aristotle’s conviction that poetry is imitative inasmuch as it imitates plots (“μῦθοι”), sequences of events acted by human beings.\(^{60}\) As he asserts in connection with the genre that he treats more at length, “plot […] is the first principle and, as it were, soul of tragedy”.\(^{61}\) As would be expected, it is therefore in the plot that scholars tended to identify in most cases the penetration of wonder in the process of imitation and, therefore, in the way a poem works. Only secondarily—in a connection that will become more evident in the course of the argumentation—will metaphor become equally relevant to the issue of awaking and experiencing wonder.

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\(^{60}\) Weinberg goes into detail as to how each of the commentators understood the role of the plot in poetry. In doing so, he explains that, for example, Robortello took plot to be the manner in which poetry imitates, rather than the object of imitation. Conversely, Maggi and Vettori would do the latter, being perhaps more faithful to the meaning of Aristotle. Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism*, vol. 1, 394, 416 and 462. Later on, Pinciano added that, if poets imitate when they build a plot, the object of the plot, in turn, would be the events. As he wrote in 1596, “the plot is the imitation of the event” (“la fábula es imitación de la obra”). López Pinciano, *Obras completas*, vol. 1, 172.\(^{61}\) “Αρχῇ μὲν οὖν καὶ οὖν ψυχῇ ὁ μῦθος τῆς τραγῳδίας”. Aristotle, “Poetics”, in *Aristotle, Poetics. Longinus, On the sublime. Demetrius, On Style*, trans. Stephen Halliwell (London, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 52-53, §6, 1450a. The translations from Aristotle’s *Poetics* are those by Stephen Halliwell in the edition cited.
Plots imitate actions such as could take place according to probability or necessity (“κατὰ τὸ ἐικός ἢ τὸ ἄναγκαιον”). As in a knot, the events in a plot are alternately tied and untied to suspend the attention of the audience, aiming at a certain effect—which differs, in turn, according to whether the poem is tragic, or epic. The plot is alive (“ζῷον”). According to Aristotle’s De anima, the principle of life is the soul, which results from matter being arranged in a certain form. Likewise, the form of the plot such as would bring life to the raw matter of confused events that happen in the world is a relation of cause to effect that ties the events together. “Cause” means here, as a warrant of the imitation that is properly done, that events follow one another not by chance or randomly, but according to the way things usually happen (“probability”), or else need to happen (“necessity”). Events unrelated to each other, accidental to the whole and able to be subtracted without rendering the sequence incomplete, turn the plot “episodic”. Superfluous, and incapable of animating the body to make a poem become as one, they lie dead like inert limbs.

As announced earlier, I will focus on the reactions to three moments of Aristotle’s discussion of the plot. These are brief, ranging from a set of pieces of one paragraph each, to just a single term. All three, and the way they are differently read, denote and even open up entirely different conceptions of the imbrication of wonder with the creation and reading of poetry.

First, I focus on the parallels perceived, especially by Castelvetro, between Aristotle’s contrast between poetics and history and the analogy of the portrait with which he illustrates the
pleasures allegedly afforded by imitation (9, 1451a36-1451b18 and 4, 1448b1-18, respectively).
The parallels between the two passages allowed scholars to question whether what we enjoy and
wonder at in imitations is actually the recognition of the thing imitated, or the perception of skill
in the artificer; moreover, admitting that the latter were true would prompt the question as to
whether poets actually show talent in the same manner as a maker of portraits would, or if they
do so according to entirely different criteria.

The second and third moments (18, 1456a18 ff. and 24, 1460a11-6) are relevant because
both texts experienced the surgery of emendations ope ingenii at the hands of, respectively,
Castelvetro and Vettori –corrections, that is, prompted not because of alternative readings
available in manuscript sources of the Poetics, but rather because, using their knowledge of
Aristotle’s thought and weighing the context, the scholars felt that Aristotle must have meant
otherwise. As a result, while Castelvetro would erect wonder into the tool with which poets,
rather than by any other means, aim at the end of poetics, Vettori made the irrational into the
source through which the wonderful most typically happens.

Considered side by side, the emendations here announced raised embarrassing issues.
With wonder as the tool of the poet and with nothing being more wonder-inspiring than
irrationality, the need to reconcile the latter with the requirement –central to the Poetics as
sixteenth-century scholars understood it– for verisimilitude to be omnipresent in the plot, would
irremediably obsess generations of scholars and poets to come. Sections two, three and four deal,
in the same order, with the three moments sketched above.
2. Poetry, history and portraits (*Poetics* 9, 1451a36-1451b18 and 4, 1448b)

If Ordóñez’s 1626 translation of the *Poetics* may occasionally take liberties, there is certainly one passage that risks leaving the reader perplexed. It regards Aristotle’s assertion that poetry, insofar as it deals with the general instead of the particular, is “more philosophical, and serious” than history. The second adjective is a comparative form of “σπουδαῖος” – meaning “serious”, “noble”, or “elevated” – and as such had been translated, for instance, in Heinsius’ version of 1611. It was in a similar vein that Ordóñez, in the manuscript of his translation – dating from two years earlier, in 1624 – had referred to poetry as being “more involved with philosophy and the virtuous”. The presence, in Ordóñez’s earlier translation of Aristotle, of a solution as conventional as the one mentioned renders even it more striking that, in the printed version of 1626, the author radically and unexpectedly rephrased the idea, making poetry a discipline “more involved with philosophy, and *acuity*” than history (“tiene más de lo filósofo, y de *agudeza*”) [italics added].

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66 “Magis philosophica et gravis res”. Heinsius, *Aristotelis de poetica liber*, 20. For scholars familiar with Aristotle’s *Poetics*, “σπουδαῖος” is unmistakably linked to the seriousness and elevation of the characters who appear in tragedy, as opposed to comedy, where characters are “baser” (“φαυλότεροι”). See Aristotle, “Poetics”, 32-33, §2, 1448a.

67 “Tiene más de lo filósofo y de lo virtuoso”. Ordóñez das Seyjas y Tovar, *La poética* (MS), 19rv. “Virtue” is ambiguous as a term, for it means either the efficacy of a substance to accomplish the end for which it exists, or, more often, moral goodness. In either case, what Ordóñez may have meant is obscure enough to make it safe to conclude that he remained within the perspective, generally shared in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, that Aristotle was referring to poetry’s ability to improve the morality of the audience.

68 Ordóñez das Seyjas y Tovar, *La poética* (1626), 23v. Ordóñez’s translation must have seemed fairly unacceptable to Flórez Canseco, who emended the text of 1626 for the re-edition of 1778 and, quite explicitly, made poetry “more philosophical and *instructive*” (“más instructiva”) than history. Flórez Canseco, *La poética*, 45.
By stopping at Ordóñez’s mention of “acuity” in a context where translators and interpreters had seen a reference to elevation and—in connection with “the philosophical”—to some kind of depth, I expect to reconstruct a process of argumentation and a set of influences that help elucidate what at first sight looks anomalous, if not entirely whimsical.

In fact, I suggest that Ordóñez’s translation of Aristotle’s “σπουδαιότερον” for “having more of acuity” echoes the one proposed by Castelvetro in 1570. The latter wrote that, since the general is the subject of poetics, “it suits the philosopher, and him who with study has become subtle, more than history does” [italics added]. Acuity as well as subtlety—the terms mentioned, respectively, by Ordóñez and Castelvetro—are precisely the qualities that early modern scholars ascribed to the excellence of wit or “ingenium”, that is, the ability to “find” or “invent” connections, a mean between terms in order to argue something. This is so because, as hinted above in the introduction, wit acts by penetrating into the recesses of reality, leaving nothing unexplored. “Acuity” and “subtlety”, metaphors dating back to antiquity and properly meaning “sharpness” and “thinness”, appeared to be most appropriate for a faculty that needs to penetrate across the confusion of things, bringing to the surface new and previously unnoticed truths.

The connection between poetics and subtlety is further clarified in Castelvetro’s gloss to the passage, aimed at entirely dissociating history from the use of wit. As he recommends tragedians to resort to cases handed down by tradition, he adds that, for the poet to fulfill the duty that is proper to whoever may deserve the name, s/he needs to pick up stories in which there is

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69 “La poesia è cosa più da philosophante, & da assottigliato negli studi, che non è l’historia” [italics added]. Castelvetro, Poetica, 102r.
70 In a treatise explicitly concerned with wit such as Agudeza y arte de ingenio (1648), Baltasar Gracián uses “agudeza” and “sutileza” as synonymous with one another: “Acuity is the pasture of the soul […] Subtlety is the nourishment of the spirit” (“Es la agudeza pasto del alma […] Es la sutileza alimento del espíritu”). Baltasar Gracían, Agudeza y arte de ingenio, ed. Jorge M. Ayala, Ceferino Peralta, and José Mª Andreu (Zaragoza: Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza; Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 2004), 17-18.
some room for uncertainty about the way the events are connected to one another. In such conditions, whoever claims to be a maker, or “ποιητής”, may resort to his acuity of wit in the search for new and surprising ways in which events may have led from point A to point B—both of which, however, cannot be altered without incurring the contempt of a public who takes these to be true and, therefore, untouchable. According to this, Castelvetro states that the events that make the story

should not be well-known—no matter whether through histories or general opinion—other than in a summary way, and in outline, so that the poets may exert their duty, and show their wit as they find out specific paths, and manners in which the events may have taken place. For, if it would be equally well known in which way the events happened, the latter would not be adequate as a subject for the plot, nor would they pertain to the poet, but rather to the historian.71

The contours of the opposition here delineated between poetry and history appear even more distinct in light of Castelvetro’s rejection of the analogy proposed by Aristotle in Poetics 4, 1448b, between the respective pleasures afforded by painting and poetry. Moving now to Castelvetro’s criticism of the passage in question, I expect by a detour to somehow illuminate the way in which the commentator understood the role of wonder in poetics.

71 “Gli accidenti predetti non deono essere manifesti per storia o per fama se non sommariamente, & in universale accioché il poeta possa essercitare l’ufficio suo, & mostrare lo ’ngegno suo in trovare le vie e i modi particolari, per gli quali i predetti accidenti habbiano havuto il loro compimento. Percioché se le vie, & i modi particolari fossero altresì manifesti, per gli quali gli accidenti furono menati a fine, non sarebbono materia conveniente alla favola, né perterrebbono al poeta, ma all’historico”. Castelvetro, Poetica, 104v. Malcolm Heath has shown that Aristotle uses the term “universal” (“καθόλου”) with basically two different meanings. Whereas in the passage of Poetics 9 that I am discussing, “universal” characterizes poetics as building plots out of what usually or always happens and, therefore, is opposed to history’s concern with the actions actually performed by individuals, deprived of any process of abstraction, the case in 17, 1455a-b is different. In fact, Aristotle speaks there of “καθόλου” to advise poets that they start composing a plot in outline, as a sort of overarching pattern that awaits to be completed with episodes. A plot “in the universal” means in Poetics 17 not the opposite of “individual”, but only lacking in detail, much like a draft. See Heath, “The Universality of Poetry in Aristotle’s Poetics”, 390-391. I suggest that Castelvetro mixed the meaning that “καθόλου” has in the two passages of Aristotle’s Poetics. He seems to have taken it here, where one would expect plots to embody “the universal” in the form of probable or necessary events, as meaning “in outline”, or “lacking concretion”, and therefore ready to be led to completion by the wit of a poet avid to fill the voids.
In *Poetics* 4, 1448b, Aristotle sets out to explain why humans are naturally inclined to the practice of poetry. His argument, at that point, focuses on imitation in general, rather than poetry in particular. If humans engage in imitation from childhood, when they are closest to nature and practically uninfluenced by education, it must be that there is something in it that awakes a pleasure connatural to us.²² Attesting to this is the fact that even repulsive objects appear delightful when contemplated in “the most precise representations”:

Everyone enjoys imitations. A common occurrence indicates this: we enjoy contemplating the most precise images of things whose actual sight is painful to us, such as the forms of the vilest animals and of corpses. The explanation of this too is that understanding gives great pleasure [...] This is why people enjoy looking at images, because through contemplating them it comes about that they understand and infer what each element means. For instance that “this person is so-and-so”. For, if one happens not to have seen the subject before, the image will not give pleasure *qua* mimesis but because of its execution or color, or for some other such reason.²³

Aristotle refers to a pleasure involved in imitation that stems from recognition. Recognizing what is known in what is unknown entails a process of inference – “this is so-and-so”, or perhaps “he is that person” – that affords pleasure to the mind.²⁴

Sixteenth-century commentators showed different degrees of awareness that Aristotle’s conception of the link between imitative arts – such as painting, sculpture, or poetry – and

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²² Aristotle, “Poetics”, 36-37, §4, 1448b.
²⁴ The analysis I present here is exclusively aimed at sixteenth-century considerations of the issue. For a study of what Aristotle himself may have meant and a survey of different opinions among recent scholars, see Stavros Tsitsiridis, “Mimesis and understanding: An interpretation of Aristotle’s Poetics 4.1448b4–19”, *The Classical Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (2005); see also Heath, “The Universality of Poetry in Aristotle’s Poetics”, 399-400. In discussions on Aristotle’s position on recognition and pleasure, it is common to complement *Poetics*, 4 with a reference to Problemata 19.5 918a, which discusses why men find greater pleasure in listening to melodies they already know.
philosophy was summarized here; so was the link between metaphor and cognition, as some would notice. While Robortello and Maggi, for instance, accepted Aristotle’s explanation, Castelvetro would question from the bottom Aristotle’s suggestion that poetry is pleasurable because of recognition. Castelvetro starts his attack by exposing as inoperative the analogy between poetics and portrait-making.⁷⁵ According to him,

[in those aspects] in which painting delights most, poetry fails to give pleasure, and is even unpleasant […] When a painting brings about the likeness of a particular man, and well-known, like Philip of Austria, king of Spain, it delights way more than it does when it makes the likeness of a man who is undetermined and unknown, and when it does it in general. And the reason is evident, because the painter shows less labor and artifice in making the figure of the undetermined and unknown man than he does when he comes to the figure of the one who is particular and well-known, in which case for every small dissimilarity between the figure and the man represented he may be reprehended, and blamed as a bad artificer [italics added].⁷⁶

One might retort that Aristotle had only compared portraits and poetry as examples of recognition in a work of imitation, without necessarily implying that either recognition or imitation would happen in the same way for both.⁷⁷ In fact, Castelvetro’s remark that exactness is measurable only in connection to particulars is fairly in tune with the fact that also in the

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⁷⁵ To weigh Castelvetro’s rejection of the analogy of the portrait, it is useful to bear in mind that, in his effort to question Aristotle, which made his reputation among the rest of the commentators, discussing the inaccuracy of metaphors plays a role of privilege. This, moreover, is relevant due to Aristotle’s tendency to theorize from analogies. For instance, Aristotle had justified the fact that epic poems such as Homer’s Iliad narrate only a part of the war by a comparison between memory being unable to remember long stories and the eye being incapable of grasping too large a body. Castelvetro rejected the analogy, arguing that memory has ways to overcome the difficulty and thus proposed a different justification for the problem. Castelvetro, Poetica, 284v. For Castelvetro’s tendency to dispute Aristotle’s views on poetry, see Kappl, Die Poetik des Aristoteles, 93-94.

⁷⁶ “In quella [parte] dove la pittura dilettà più, & sommamente, la poesia non solamente non diletti, ma spiaccia anchora […] Quando la pittura rassomiglia uno huomo certo, & conosciuto come Philippo d’Austria re di Spagna dilettà molto più di gran lunga che non fa, quando rassomiglia huomo incerto sconosciuto, & in generale. Et la ragione è evidente perciocché minore fatica & minore industria mostra il dipintore in fare la figura dell’huomo incerto & sconosciuto che non fa nella figura dell’huomo certo & conosciuto, & per ogni picciola dissimilitudine che sia tra l’effigie e l’huomo effigiato può essere ripreso, & riprovato per reo artefice da ognuno” [italics added]. Castelvetro, Poetica, 39v-40r.

⁷⁷ This was Gerald Else’s position in his interpretation of the portrait analogy: “In the Poetics, where imitation is a representation of universals, it is doubly clear that there be no question of direct ‘images’”. Gerald Else, Aristotle’s Poetics: the argument (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 28; and: “There is no evidence that Aristotle regarded poems as images or the poet as an image-maker” (p. 27).
Poetics the term –“ἀκριβεία”– appears as a criterion for portraits, not poetry. What remains valid is Castelvetro’s rejection of Aristotle’s idea that recognition and, therefore, inference may explain the pleasure obtained both in portraits and in poetry. But what, if not this, would be the source for the pleasure obtained in either?

I suggest that Castelvetro’s answer points at his belief that, if portraits are not like poetry, they nonetheless highly resemble history. Both history and portraits aim at individuals and at including each of the accidents present in the model exactly as found in it. Conversely, Castelvetro conceives of forming the plot of a poem as a process whereby deviation from particulars and, therefore, avoiding exact repetition of the way a story has actually happened is a requirement to succeed:

when poetry imitates a precise, well-known, happened history […] it displeases to such an extent that it cannot retain the name of poetry […] But if it imitates a story of which there is neither certainty nor knowledge of particulars, it delights beyond measure. And the reason is clear, in the particular and well-known history the poet does not endure any labor, nor does he exert his wit to find anything, for the course of things puts before his eyes the whole of it. This is not the case for the uncertain and unknown story, for which it suits the poet to sharpen his intellect, and become subtle to find either the whole, or the majority of the things [italics added].

78 Some of the largest shifts in late sixteenth-century aesthetics passed through a criticism of Aristotle’s principle that learning and inference are naturally pleasant to humans. Castelvetro, as I am going to show, would contend that it is the quality of the imitation that pleases. Others, like Piccolomini, argued that the process of inference required effort on behalf of the audience. As a result, they perceived whatever they learned as being partially theirs and loved the result out of pride and satisfaction at their own wits. Piccolomini’s ideas will be central to the discussion contained in chapter four, concerning the suggestion that cooperation is a source of pleasure for the audience as they decode meaning.

79 “Quando la poesia rassomiglia una historia certa & avenuta & conosciuta […] ci dispiace tanto che non può ritenere il nome pure di poesia […] ma se la poesia rassomiglia historia incerta & non conosciuta in ispetiale ci diletta fuori di misura. Et la ragione parimente è manifesta che il poeta nell’historia certa & conosciuta particolarmente non dura fatica niuana né essercita lo’ngegno in trovare cosa niuana essendogli porto & posto davanti il tutto dal corso delle cose mondane. Il ché non aviene nell’historia incerta e sconosciuta convenendo al poeta aguzzare lo’ntelletto & sottigliare in trovare o il tutto, o la maggior parte delle cose” [italics added]. Castelvetro, Poetica, 40r.
In light of the preceding, one may argue that Castelvetro’s case for the link between poetry and wit—construed in opposition to both history and portraits, conceived of as focused on replication without a trace of inventiveness—takes place around basically two notions.

In the first place, from each of the three passages quoted above, there results a conception of the pleasure obtained from objects of imitation that looks back to the amount and quality of the work that the artificer has presumably invested. Variously glossed as “artifice” or “wit”, work (“lavoro”) refers for Castelvetro to a blend of the artificer’s expertise in the art and natural or inborn ability. Both are made responsible for the excellence of the imitation, which in turn replaces the recognition of the object being imitated as the source for pleasure in the audience.

Following Castelvetro, Fernando de Herrera had established a connection between “artifice” and “labor” and the ability of the poet to inspire wonder in the readers. In his Anotaciones to the works of Garcilaso de la Vega (1580) he writes that “the end of the poet is to speak in a certain form in order to admire; he has no goal but to speak admirably […] with that wonder, which the ancient teachers of good writing want poetry to have” [italics added] (“el poeta tiene por fin dezir compuestamente para admirar, i no intenta sino dezir admirablemente […] de aquella maravilla, que quieren los antiguos maestros de escrevir bien, que tenga la poesía”) [italics added]. Fernando de Herrera, Anotaciones a la poesía de Garcilaso, ed. Inoria Pepe y José María Reyes (Madrid: Cátedra, 2001), 564.

As he digresses about elegies, Herrera embarks on a discussion as to whether Tibullus or Propertius was a better poet. Even though he chooses Tibullus, Herrera concludes that Propertius “inspires greater admiration” because in him we perceive “more artifice and work” (“más industria i trabajo”). Herrera, Anotaciones, 568. Castelvetro’s influence on Herrera, which goes entirely unacknowledged, is perceptible also in the vocabulary. Covarrubias defines “industria” as artifice and diligence: “INDUSTRIA, es la maña, diligencia, i solercia”. Covarrubias y Orozco, Tesoro de la lengua castellana, 503r.

Whereas exactness in the imitation was for Aristotle a requirement for the spectator to adequately recognize the object being imitated, even the earliest readers were tempted to infer that the spectator somehow reflected and enjoyed exactness in itself. Witness the reference to Poetics 4 in Giovan Battista Gelli’s inscription to Agostino Calvi introducing his commentary of Petrarch’s Rerum vulgarium fragmenta 77 and 78, which he read before the Accademia Florentina in 1548. We enjoy imitations, according to him, “due to the learning that takes place while we consider the things being imitated, arguing what each of these things is, and how they are well imitated” (“per lo ‘mparare che noi facciamo in quel mentre che noi le consideriamo, facendo la conclusione di quello, che sia ciascheduna di esse cose, e come ella sia bene imitata”) [italics added]. Giovan Battista Gelli, “Zu RVF 77 und RVF 78, Per mirar Policleto a prova fiso; Quando giunse a Simon l’alto concetto”, in Lezioni sul Petrarca. Die Rerum vulgarium fragmenta in Akademievorträgen des 16. Jahrhunderts, ed. Bernard Huss, Florian Neumann and Gerhard Regn (Münster: Lit, 2004), 96. In contrast with Castelvetro’s interest in keeping exactness distinct as the true cause of the pleasure obtained from portraits, the former tended to coalesce with recognition, as the two faces of a same coin. A later example is that of Francisco Cascales, who in the decade of 1620 re-wrote Aristotle’s paradox of the imitation of unpleasant things which is itself pleasant. He imagines that someone imitates the execution of a man and writes about it: “Even though the act itself evokes pain, a well-accomplished description of it brings pleasure, and the reader is happy to read so well imitated an action” (“si bien el acto mueve a dolor, la descripción de él bien hecha causa delectación, y se halla el lector contentísimo de haver leído aquella acción tan bien imitada”). He writes about a bull and a lion dismembering and devouring a man: “Are you not infinitely pleased by the good expression and imitation of that rigorous case?” (“¿no os agrada infinito la buena expression y imitación de aquel riguroso caso?”). Cascales, Tablas poéticas, 36. For a study of the early modern reception of Aristotle’s ideas on the pleasure
While such understanding of the causes that render poetic and plastic artifacts pleasurable would become commonplace towards the turn of the century, it was not entirely new to Castelvetro’s day. It rests upon the notion that there is something gratifying in a difficulty being overcome.

Robortello must have had something similar in mind when he asserted that the delight of tragedy was related to the fact that it deals with subjects that are furthest removed from anything agreeable. Difficulty in portraits, described by Castelvetro for the case of Philip II, lies in exactness or “ἀκριβεία”—the pursuit of exhaustiveness in capturing each and every accident of a subject. However, if Castelvetro holds that there is something else, alternative to exactness, that makes poems show “labor”, “artifice”, and “wit”, this is precisely the role that he ascribes to “invention” and “finding”. These are both synonyms generally placed under the umbrella of “inventio”—Latin for “finding”—which refers, in rhetoric, to the elaboration of arguments such as would appropriately make the case for something. For the wit, there is analogy between the procedure that forms arguments leading from available premises to the conclusion being aimed at and the shaping or finding of plausible transitions from a situation of entanglement in the plot to a solution to it. Moreover, if either of these is done in such a way that strikes the audience as unheard of and difficult to have come up with, the act of wit will be called acute, or subtle, awakening wonder in those who listen. Historians, according to Castelvetro, are deprived of all this, condemned to merely narrate what, so to speak, has fallen before their eyes.

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82 Robortello, *In librum Aristotelis de Arte Poëtica Explicationes*, 146. For a study of Robortello’s position, see Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism*, vol. 1, 397. Furthermore, Robortello—who, unlike Castelvetro, never questions the analogy between painting and poetry—shared with the latter the notion that the skill of the author—here, the painter—is responsible for the pleasure of the onlookers insofar as they *wonder at or admire* that which has been accomplished there: “When we look at a splendid painting, at the same time we wonder at the artifice of the painter who made it, and receive incredible pleasure” (“cum picturam intuemur praeclaram; admiramur simul pictoris, a quo fuerit expressa, artificium, & voluptatem capimus incredibilem”). Robortello, *In librum Aristotelis*, 283.

83 It is not coincidental that the seventeenth-century theoreticians of the acuity of wit, such as Sarbiewski, Peregrini and Gracián, almost invariably wrote of being witty and ingenuous as a process of invention involving the use of the
To a certain extent, Castelvetro revolutionized the understanding of Aristotle’s Poetics by spelling out to late sixteenth-century scholars a truth that language had kept somewhat veiled, namely that—unlike for portraits, which are, in this sense, more akin to history—“imitation”, as it is used by Aristotle, actually means “invention”. The poet performs as inventor, or “finder”—as “trovatore”, writes Castelvetro, in a play on etymology—and s/he does so by using his/her wit, or “ingegno”.

The historian narrates particular events that actually took place. The poet too makes his plot out of particulars; in fact, poetry may well be “more philosophical than history”, but it is nonetheless distinct from philosophy and still concerned with individuals and actions rather than ideas. The difference with history is that the poet finds out the events s/he is going to narrate through speculation, or “lunga consideratione”. S/he builds particulars related to each other according to patterns that s/he abstracts from the way that s/he knows things actually happen, either probably or necessarily. As s/he does so, s/he makes use of “subtlety of wit” in a way that historians, as mere recorders of events, cannot lay claim to. Castelvetro writes:

places or topics of argumentation, such as rhetoricians used to “invent” or “find” arguments. These were available in varying formulations, with those found in Cicero’s Topica and Rudolf Agricola’s De inventione dialectica as perhaps the most popular. See Marc Cogan, “Agricola and the Semantic Revolutions of the History of Invention”, Rhetorica 2, no. 2 (Summer 1984).

84 Refusing to take “imitation” to mean anything but representation of particulars, Francesco Patrizi would claim to have caught Aristotle in a contradiction, as the latter made poetry simultaneously imitative and occupied with universality. Patrizi, as I will show in Chapter Two, grasped quite accurately Aristotle’s notion of the kind of work that poetry is supposed to undertake in relation to reality. However, much like Castelvetro—who, as shown above, would also find issue with the term “imitation”—Patrizi proved paradoxically to have understood more about the notion designated by that name than many would do among those who accepted the term at face value. See Francesco Patrizi, “Deca ammirabile”, in Della poetica, vol. 2, ed. Danilo Aguzzi Barbagli (Firenze: Istituto di Studi sul Rinascimento, 1969), 231-368 (pp. 280-282).

85 That poetry is still about particulars, even if it reconstructs them as they would be according to a form abstracted from the particulars actually taking place, is something generally acknowledged by scholars. “Poetry falls short of philosophy because, far from abstracting from ta kath’hekaston, it imitates events taking place in particular circumstances and enacted by individuals. It exhibits a succession of events rather than explaining them, and is in this sense closer to experience than epistêmê”. Carli, “Aristotle on the Philosophical Elements of ‘Historia’”, 324.
If actual events are the subject of history, they do not need reflection, nor subtlety of wit – since they have happened, and are presented to the historian by the course of things […] However, things that may possibly happen but have not happened, such as are the object of poetry, require speculation of wit, and great judgment – not only because it is convenient to find out or understand that which, without having happened, is nonetheless possible according to verisimilitude or necessity […] As Aristotle says this, he is considering only the difficulty, or ease and the way of finding the events.\textsuperscript{86}

In spite of Castelvetro’s statement, Aristotle’s treatment of the plot does not seem to contain any mention that difficulty in finding the events is somehow related to the pleasure as experienced by the audience of a poem, which he connects with the causality that connects the events, as it serves for the intersection of probability and necessity with wonder.

That sixteenth-century scholars other than Castelvetro perceived difficulty as a source of pleasure has been mentioned above. Moreover, it fits well among the values proposed by the latter.\textsuperscript{87} Yet, in the way here sketched, Castelvetro’s account would set a precedent for those who, in the decades to come, would gloss in the belief that the merit of the poet, opposed to that of the historian, depended somehow on the presence of “invention”.

This is what seems to have happened to Alonso López Pinciano. In a section of \textit{Philosophia antiqua poética} that presents itself as an explanation of Aristotle’s opinion –and,

\textsuperscript{86}“Se l’istoria ha per soggetto proprio le cose avenute, non fa mestiere di lunga consideratione, né di sottilità d’ingegno a ritrovarle essendo avenute, e portele dal corso del mondo […] Ma le cose possibili ad avenire, & non avenute che sono il soggetto della poesia, ricercano speculazione d’ingegno, & molto avedimento non solamente perché conviene trovare o comprendere quello che non è mai avenuto, & è possibile ad avenire a ciascuno particolare cotale secondo il verisimile o la necessità […] Aristotele in queste parole non ha rispetto se non alla difficoltà, & al modo del trovare le cose, o all’agevolezza”. Castelvetro, \textit{Poetica}, 106r.

\textsuperscript{87}The instances in which Castelvetro ascribes pleasure to work of any kind insofar as it involves difficulty are multiple. He encourages epic poets to adhere to the unity of action in the plot not so much because this is intrinsically better, but “to show excellence and singularity of wit” (“per dimostrare l’eccellenza e la singolarità dello ‘ngegno”). Castelvetro, \textit{Poetica}, 279v. Likewise, Aristotle’s preference for direct imitation instead of narration of events is given a new reason when Castelvetro attributes this to the fact that “there is greater work and acuity of wit in having characters speak frequently and at length without for that annoying the listener, than in narrating the actions and the counsels without personal speeches […] That is why the praise of Homer referred above must be great, for he chose to do what is more difficult, where the others have been satisfied with that which is easier” (“maggiore industria é & maggiore agume d’ingegno in fare favellare le persone spesso & allungo senza rincrescimento dell’ascoltatore, che non si fa in narrare le azioni & le deliberazioni senza ragionamenti personali […] Percioché achora la predetta commendatione d’Homero dee essere grande per questo che egli s’è messo a quello, che era più difficile, là dove gli altri si sono attenuti a quello che era meno difficile”). Castelvetro, \textit{Poetica}, 302v.
somewhat paradoxically, after criticism of those who trust too much the interpretations of others instead of looking at the text with their own eyes— we read that the difference between the historian and the poet lies precisely in “invention”, which accounts for the pre-eminence of the latter:

The poet writes what he invents, whereas the historian finds the meal already cooked. Poetics, therefore, creates the thing and raises it anew to the world, and this is why in Greek they named it […] “maker” [italics added].

The opposition between the historian and the poet stands out especially in connection with a question that had sixteenth-century scholars spill enormous amounts of ink—namely, how is it possible for a poem to deal with actual events without becoming “mere” history?

As one might expect, there were as many answers to it as there were scholars. Some would just affirm that, as long as events that actually took place are also possible, they qualify as the subject of a poem. This is not surprising, since it fits Aristotle’s conclusion:

88 “El poeta escribe lo que inventa y el historiador se lo halla guisado. Así que la poética hace la cosa y la cría de nuevo en el mundo y por tanto le dieron el nombre griego […] hacedora”. López Pinciano, Obras completas, vol. 1, 174. For a debate of the way in which the poet dealt “artistically” with the materials of history, see Else, Aristotle’s Poetics, 416 ff.

89 Pinciano called this a riddle: “You say that the poem has to imitate the truth, and that nonetheless it ought not to be the truth; and now you say that it can be the truth itself. We could use Oedipus to untie such enigmas” (“vos decís que el poema ha de ser imitación de la verdad, y que no ha de ser la verdad misma; y vos decís que puede ser la misma verdad. Menester es que venga Edipo a desatar estos enigmas”). López Pinciano, Obras completas, vol. 1, 173.

90 A proof that Aristotle’s formulation seemed confusing to many scholars is Pinciano’s interpretation. He affirmed that a story might be historical in the place where the events imitated actually took place, but poetic elsewhere if an author arrived at a plot of the same characteristics without being aware that everything, so to speak, was “history”. Pinciano wrote that “he who wrote [the plot in question] in Spain would be a poet, but he who did that in India, or wherever the events happened, there he would be a historian” (“una misma acción y acaecimiento puede ser fábula y historia; como lo sería la sobredicha: que el que la escribiesse en España, sería poeta, y el que en la India, o a donde aconteció, histórico”). López Pinciano, Obras completas, vol. 1, 173-174. Cascales openly refuted Pinciano: “Pinciano was wrong: because if that action which happened in India has all the elements of the one shaped by the poet according to verisimilitude, it is obvious that he is not a historian in the imitation of it, but a true poet […] Do you see how a historical action can also become poetic? But tell me now, when will such a coincidence actually happen? Never, as it seems to me” (“se engañó el Pinciano: porque si aquella acción que sucedió en la India, tiene todas las partes que la finge el poeta según el verisímil, consta que no es historiador en la imitación de ella, sino verdadero poeta […] ¿Veís cómo la acción histórica puede venir a ser poética? Mas decidme vos ahora, ¿quándo sucederá un tal caso como ese? Paréceme que nunca”). Cascales, Tablas poéticas, 51-53. It is interesting to notice
Even should [the poet’s] poetry concern actual events, he is no less a poet for that, as there is nothing to prevent some actual events being probable as well as possible, and it is because they are probable and possible that the poet is a poet [a creator] in relation to them [italics added and translation modified].

According to the interpretation proposed by Silvia Carli for the passage, the activity of the poet “is not a making up or invention but rather the discovery of the eidos [the form] of actions”. For Aristotle, events from history that happen causally after one another according to probability or necessity are fitting to the plot as long as they are unobstructed by anything accidental to the whole. It is against this that the singularity of Castelvetro’s understanding of verisimilitude and, therefore, poetics, becomes perceptible. In fact, he refuses to grant, as that Cascales’s rhetorical question concerning fortuitous coincidences between invented and actual events was revived on July 3, 1767, in one of the reviews that Gotthold Ephraim Lessing eventually published as Hamburgische Dramaturgie. In order to rule out the question of verisimilitude’s connection to history in favor of criteria that look for internal probability in the plot, Lessing stated: “Was hindert uns, eine ganzzlich erdichtete Fabel fuer eine wirklich geschehene Historie zu halten, von der wir nie etwas gehoert haben?”. Gotthold E. Lessing, Hamburgische Dramaturgie (Halle: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1878), 119 (“What prevents us from deeming an entirely fictitious fable a really authentic occurrence, of which we have never heard before?”). Gotthold E. Lessing, Hamburg Dramaturgy, trans. Helen Zimmern (New York: Dover Publications, 1962), 51. Pinciano’s case is illustrative of the difficulties met by scholars trying to make sense of Aristotle’s notion of imitation; and yet, they are nothing compared to some earlier attempts, such as that of Alessandro Lionardi in his Dialoghi della inventione poetica (1554), where plot and history come to be identified with likely and actual facts, respectively. Lionardi ends up concluding that tragedies tell things “ora per istoria, ora per favola” (“sometimes through history, sometimes through plot”), thus falling into contradictions found in almost every other contemporary author who failed to understand how poetry and history actually relate in the Poetics. Lionardi, “Dialoghi della inventione poetica”, 271. At any rate, even if Cascales was right in his criticism of Pinciano, it is also true that his way of understanding how poetry differs from history betrayed a different kind of misunderstanding. Poets fashion plots out of events which differ from those of the historian in the way they depart from mediocrity and become, so to speak, more extreme, and thus representative of cases found in life. Cascales, Tablas poéticas, 52-53.

91 “Κἂν ἄρα συμβῇ γενόμενα ποιεῖν, οὐδὲν ἥττον ποιητῆς ἐστι· τόν γὰρ γενομένων ἕνα οὐδὲν κωλύει τοιαῦτα εἶναι οἷα ἂν εἰκὸς γενέσθαι καὶ δυνατὰ γενέσθαι, καθ᾽ ὅ έκκεινος αὐτῶν ποιητῆς ἑστιν”. Aristotle, “Poetics”, 60-61, §9, 1451b.

92 Carli, “Poetry is More Philosophical than History”, 334. Carli suggests that, for Aristotle, every time that events happen according to probability or necessity, “the poet can ‘put them into poetry’ (genomena poiein) and still be regarded as their maker: he exercises his ability to recognize actions that form a unitary whole, and are thus the proper object of mimetic representations”. Carli, “Aristotle on the Philosophical Elements of Historia”, 332; see also Carli, “Poetry is More Philosophical than History”, 320. Consider also Aristotle’s assertion that “actual events are possible—they could not otherwise have occurred” (“τὰ δὲ γενόμενα φανερὸν ὅτι δυνατά· οὐ γὰρ ἃν ἐγένετο, εἰ ἦν ἄδυνατα”). Aristotle, “Poetics”, 60-61, §9, 1451b.
Aristotle had done, that a poet remains entitled to be called “maker” or “ποιητής” even though s/he does not “alter” the material given to him/her by chance, nature, or tradition.

Castelvetro makes a statement for understanding “invention” in terms of transformation and deviation. He takes occasion for this from passages where Aristotle speaks of “probability” in terms of conjecture about how actual events—or those thought to have actually happened—may have taken place insofar as the details, as mentioned above, are known only in outline. Aristotle exemplifies possible ways in which a poet may fill the voids in a story, using “invention” as something transformative. Yet in Aristotle this remains possible rather than a necessity.93

Castelvetro states his views most clearly as he refers to the relation that tragedians should entertain with the stories upon which they build their plots:

The poet […] should spend time thinking, and devising subtleties; for we may assert without doubt that the likeness requested from poetry is not, and should not be properly called likeness, but rather is, or may be called a competition of the poet, against the disposition of fortune, or the course of worldly things to find an accident of human action that may be more delighting, and more wonderful [italics added].94

93 The verb “ἐὑρίσκειν” (with the noun “ἐὑρεσίς”) is Aristotle’s equivalent to Castelvetro’s “inventare”. Invention helps build the plot, which the poet “finds out”, or “invents” after considering how events may appropriately follow one another: “One will find out what is appropriate and not miss contradictions” (“ἐὑρίσκοι τὸ πρέπον καὶ ἥκιστα ἄν λανθάνοι τὰ ὑπενναντία” [italics and translation mine]). Aristotle, “Poetics”, 86-89, §17, 1455a. Like the orator in search of arguments that present a case in such a way that each logically follows, poetry has to follow possibility. In another occasion, the verb “ἐὑρίσκειν” is opposed to “χρῆσθαι”, “to use”, in the alternative between creating plots ex nihilo or from materials already available. Aristotle writes that “[the poet] should be inventive as well as making good use of traditional stories” (“ἀντὸν δὲ ἐὑρίσκειν διὲ καὶ τοῖς παραδεδομένοις χρῆσθαι καλῶς”) [italics added]. Aristotle, “Poetics”, 74-75, §14, 1453b. Aristotle explains how the poet may successfully (“καλῶς”) use materials already available (“τοῖς παραδεδομένοις”, literally “that which has been handed down”). For example, the poet cannot stop someone from killing a character, when this is part of what the audience knows about the story; however, he can make the character do so in ignorance, or not, of the evil, or of whom the victim was. See Aristotle, “Poetics”, 74-77, §14, 1453b. Moreover, when there is recognition between two characters, this may happen according to different methods, carefully described in Aristotle, “Poetics”, 82-87, §16, 1454b-1455a.

94 “Conviene che il poeta […] vi spenda tempo a pensare, & a sottigliare in tanto che si può sicuramente affermare che questa rassomiglianza richiesta alla poesia non è, né si dee, o si può appellare dirittamente rassomiglianza, ma è, o si dee, o si può appellare gareggiamento del poeta, & della disposizione della fortuna, o del corso delle mondane cose in trovare uno accidente d’attione humana più dilettevole ad ascoltare, & più maraviglioso” [italics added]. Castelvetro, Poetica, 38r.
According to Castelvetro, the kind of “imitation” performed by the poet would be best described as competition (“gareggiamento”). In a poem, it is not about creating a likeness of things the way they are, but rather to have the upper hand after shaping a plot that appears more wonderful than sequences of events such as either nature or chance have provided. Contending with these, the poet fashions the matter at hand by the addition of something new and wonderful. This is, in Castelvetro’s opinion, why rendering events as they actually happened is out of the question for the poet, who is expected to resourcefully fill the gaps left in the knowledge that the audience has of a story. Assuming well-known cases as points of departure, the poet investigates—and thus s/he behaves “philosophically”, as Aristotle writes— which things and which not, within the entire range of possibilities, are likely to have led from one point to another in the chain of events. Whereas Aristotle would have subscribed to the outline of Castelvetro’s notion, the emphasis on transformation is new and as such it was to be adopted by Denores or López Pinciano, among other scholars.

The poet’s task is then to find (“inventare”) events, as well as the connections that make a sequence out of them: this is the form that “work”, “wit” and “artifice” adopt in poetry, as opposed to exactness (“ἀκριβεία”) as sought in portraits and histories. Castelvetro’s focus is on the distinction between what is given to the poet—the events known to the audience as well—and

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95 Castelvetro, *Poetica*, 40r. Castelvetro’s way of conceiving the entanglement of creation and materials handed down to the poet seems to have deeply influenced Torquato Tasso. Tasso read with eagerness the literature available on Aristotle’s *Poetics*. There are copies of commentaries containing his underlining and marginalia preserved today at the *Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*. In his *Discorsi dell`arte poetica* (1587), Tasso developed Castelvetro’s point by arguing that there is a reason why public events should be generally drawn from history. In fact, it is unlikely that wars, or relevant events in the lives of kings, may have passed unnoticed. Castelvetro did not seem as interested as Tasso would be in the application of this to the choice of a story, but he nonetheless laid the basis for a method that conceived and supported creation as actually re-creation. The debate would grow increasingly more violent in the decade of 1580. Torquato Tasso would defend in his *Apologia in difesa della Gerusalemme liberata* (1585) the idea of invention as discovery or “ritrovamento” of novelty within the factuality of history. For the debate entertained by Tasso and Camillo Pellegrino, the author of *Il Carrafa o vero della epica poesia* (1584), against the Accademia della Crusca of Florence, and especially Lionardo Salviati (who defended Ludovico Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso* against Tasso’s poem), see Claudio Scarpati, “1585-1587: Tasso, Patrizi e Mazzoni”, *Aevum* 76, no. 3 (Settembre-Dicembre 2002): 761-763.
what s/he alters and re-fashions. The opposition is conceptualized in terms of matter and form.

Poets deserve that name only insofar as, in creating a form out of matter, they are perceived as having created something new:

For the poet cannot compose a plot [already] composed by any [other] poet; this would be either history or theft. If someone arranged in a plot the way in which Orestes killed his mother, it would not be convenient to follow any story about a son who has killed his mother in the way he killed her, nor to follow the plot composed on the subject by Aeschylus, nor by Euripides, nor by Sophocles; but it is convenient for him to leave aside every historical or poetic similarity, and to devise subtleties, and, using his wit, to find out how the same event might have happened otherwise than as it has been narrated, or written by anyone so far—as the mentioned poets did [italics added].

A historian does not lay any claim to the events s/he narrates. Since s/he does not alter anything in them, they do not become any more of his/her property.97

For a poet, conversely, transforming the story is the alternative to becoming a thief. Introducing novelty within the boundaries of possibility or necessity and in a way that—in Castelvetro’s words—appears “wonderful”, is the work for which s/he is commended.98

96 “Conciosia cosa che il poeta non possa comporre una favola composta da alcun poeta perciò che o sarebbe historia, o furto, come se altri volesse ordinare in una favola come Oreste occise la madre non converrebbe seguire historia alcuna d’un figliuolo che habbia ucciso la madre nella manera d’ucciderla, né la favola composta di ciò da Eschilo, o da Euripide, o da Sophocle, ma conviene che lasciate da parte tutte le rassomiglianze o historiche o poetiche si dea a sottigliare, & col suo ingegno a trovare come possa essere avenuto quel fatto in altra maniera, che non è ancora stato narrato, o scritto da alcuno si come fecero altresi que’ poeti” [italics added]. Castelvetro, Poetica, 37r. Further in his commentary, Castelvetro would be even more explicit about what he meant, exemplifying the excellence of the poet as such in Homer’s work, who took for himself only a part of the war of Troy and out of it was able to fill countless books, leaving the audiences wondering at his inventiveness. At the core of the task of the poet, therefore, lies the effort invested in finding or inventing that which, not existing before, appears as new and the product of the work of the poet: “The poet does not make any effort as a poet, since he does not find anything by himself” (“il poeta non s’affatica come poeta non trovando nulla di suo capo, & per conseguente non può trovare gloria niuna”). Castelvetro, Poetica, 285r.

97 The notions of property and theft in connection to that of imitation play a crucial role in the minds of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scholars, poets and artists whenever it comes to weighing the value of a work. Concerning the importance of such notions in the field of the visual arts, see, for instance, Elizabeth Cropper, The Domenichino affair: novelty, imitation, and theft in seventeenth-century Rome (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

98 Castelvetro’s emphasis on the alteration of the course of events as essential to the poet’s task—and, as a result, the notion that “mimesis” and “imitation” are misnomers for what should be called “competition”—places Castelvetro’s theory at the origins of seventeenth-century theories of wit, which generally equate amount of effort to value, and need to estimate the former according to criteria of differentiation from something given. This is so because they value creation as transformation. For competition or “aemulatio” as a criterion in aesthetics in connection with
Castelvetro emphasizes innovation and change in a way unknown to Aristotle. Actual events and fictions previously shaped by others behave analogously, contributing to a substratum from which the poet draws matter in order to exert his wit. It is by introducing novelty that s/he earns the name of “maker” in relation to it.

I suggest that a great part of Castelvetro’s legacy was the understanding of creation as competition over a set of materials that are already given. As the audience notices what is new in the old, they marvel at the work –that is, the wit and the artifice– of the poet, employed in reshaping the matter available.

In the wake of Castelvetro’s commentary, Giason Denores wrote in his Poetica (1588) that, unlike the poet, the historian deals with actions that belong to others: property –the product of transformation– becomes the mark of the poet, whose work deserves greater praise than that of the historian, who does not write actions imagined and shaped by himself, but rather those made by others; [but, conversely, the poet] casts them by himself, reduces them to the universal, and figures them such as they should be – in this more similar to a philosopher; he brings greater benefits, in addition to the great recreation of the soul which goes together with it.99

Likewise and as mentioned above, the physician Pinciano adopted Castelvetro’s link between poetry and novelty. The poet, according to Pinciano, needs to be a creature of “furious and inventive wit”, brimming with creativity, or, at least, being able to add something to what others have invented before him:

99 “È più da stimare, che non è quella di qualunque historico, non scrivendo egli attion imaginate, & formate da se, ma quelle, che sono fatte da altri, & fingendole da se stesso, & riducendole all’universale, & rafigurandole, quali deono essere, la qual cosa è più da philosopho, & apporta maggior beneficio, oltra la gran ricreation d’animo, che la va sempre accompagnando”). Denores, Poetica, 2v.
What the poet invents should be new and rare; he has to be admirable in the events, and prodigious as well as awesome in the plot. For novelty is delightful, marvel is more so, and even more that which is prodigious and awesome. And as for he who lacks a greatly furious and inventive wit, he may add something to that which is already invented, for additions involve a sort of invention […] And this is what I thought that had to be said concerning marvel, and the marvelous poem.  

As he makes clear immediately afterwards, Pinciano too understands “invention” in terms of argumentation and reasoning, as a rhetorician would do.

In fact, it would not be difficult to prove that the discipline of rhetoric lingered in Castelvetro’s mind as he introduced language that opposed transformation to thievery. By making alteration of the sequence of a plot a requirement for poets who aspire to a name that in Greek means “maker”, Castelvetro was repeating a notion that he had formerly used in connection with the field of elocution, or style. In fact, he had written that

neither ought the poet to imitate with the figures of words used by others, like metaphors, and so on —for he would be considered a thief, or someone mean.

Castelvetro transfers to poetics a question that rhetorical theory and practice had faced for decades, namely what is “imitation” and what is “theft” whenever different authors reuse a

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100 “Que el poeta sea en la invención, nuevo y raro, en la historia admirable, y en la fábula prodigioso y espantoso: porque la cosa nueva deleyta, y la admirable más, y más la prodigiosa y espantosa: y el que no tuviere ingenio furioso harto, y inventivo, añada a lo inventado, que la añadidura también tiene invención en cierta forma […] Y esto es lo que yo siento ay que dezir en esto de la admiración, y del poema admirable”. López Pinciano, Obras completas, vol. 1, 198. In 1602, Carvallo would gloss the need for a wit full of inventiveness in terms of physiology. Referring first to Juan Huarte de San Juan and then to Josse Bade, he would claim that the poet needs to have “three degrees of heat” in his brain, for that corresponds to the intellect that excels in the imaginative faculty. The latter, in turn, matters for the poet because invention is part of it, “and not only inventing things, but also disposing them conveniently, and ordering them for a purpose, all these are the tasks of the imaginative faculty” (“y no solo inventarlas, pero el disponerlas en la forma conveniente y ordenarlas a su fin es todo obra de la imaginativa”). The greater the imaginative faculty of a poet, “he will invent things more subtle and elevated, more rare and admirable, as Ascensius [Bade] used to assert”. Carvallo, Cisne de Apolo, 98, 100.

101 “La facultad inventiva es de la parte que discurre, como Aristóteles lo enseña”. López Pinciano, Obras completas, vol. 1, 199.

102 “Né parimente dee [sc. the poet] rassomigliando adoperare le figure delle parole usate da gli altri, come sono le traslationi, e’ l rimanente dell’altre figure percióché sarebbe in ciò reputato o ladro o vile”. Castelvetro, Poetica, 37v.
figure, or a trope? I suggest that, as Castelvetro handled the notion of imitation or “μίμησις”, deriving from Aristotle’s *Poetics* and referring, as we have seen, to the poet modeling a plot in conformity with nature, that is, the course that events generally take, he did not entirely dispel the presence of a different idea of imitation, rendered in Latin as “imitatio”. The latter originated in rhetoric and had been highly operative since antiquity, presenting speakers with instances on which to model speech according to the example of others. A relation among individuals, “imitatio” entailed a component of rivalry and competition that became part, by contagion, of Castelvetro’s notion of imitation in poetics.\(^{103}\) As far as language is concerned, this explains that imitation appears for the author in terms of a competition between the poet and nature, with the former striving to bring about a plot that would be more marvelous than the events that both fortune and “the course of things” had produced themselves. In the things, it appears best in the rejection of Aristotle’s permission to the poet to encode events as they actually happened, whenever these agree with probability or necessity; and it results as well from the corollary that history and theft work analogously when considered from the point of view of the poet’s duty – as they only differ according to whether previous poets have treated events that have failed to be re-fashioned: for if this were so, the poet would be a thief according to Castelvetro and, if not, s/he would remain a historian.

Yet there is more to be said about the background of Castelvetro’s idea of imitation as the exercise of transformative work, artifice and wit.

\(^{103}\) Within the polemic about imitation in style there were many instances of the analogy between imitation and fight or competition. See for this the notion of *eristic imitation* in G. W. Pigman III, “Versions of Imitation in the Renaissance”, *Renaissance Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (Spring, 1980): 19-20. Pigman III refers to how Celio Calcagnini tells the story of Eros and Anteros: the former was able to grow only once the latter was created, when a competition between them became possible. It is not a coincidence that Poliziano’s letter to Cortesi, symbolically considered to be the point of departure for the debate, features competition as the form in which imitation naturally takes place; if one strives hard to step on the traces (Poliziano writes) of someone who runs before, he will be unable to surpass him. Angelo Poliziano, “Angelo Poliziano to Paolo Cortesi”, in *Ciceronian Controversies*, ed. DellaNeva, 4. I quote DellaNeva’s translation.
For one thing, Castelvetro was familiar with sixteenth-century discourses on “imitatio” and there is proof that he was well acquainted with the works on rhetoric of Giulio Camillo Delminio. Delminio famously built a method intended to map the borders between what is “public” in language—and, therefore, given—and what a speaker contributes as being of his own creation.\textsuperscript{104} Appropriation of the latter constitutes, in Delminio’s terms, a form of “theft”. Delminio applied to the invention of tropes the system of places or topics originally devised for arguments. Thus transformed, Delminio’s “topical method” purportedly taught writers the tools necessary to “investigate” how to say anything by means of a trope instead of using proper terms. Like Castelvetro after him, Camillo was careful to orient a branch of “invention” to the avoidance of repetition. As he wrote, this was intended to inspire wonder through variation of some kind.

The dimension of research involved in the invention of metaphors also results from a passage of Fernando de Herrera’s \textit{Anotaciones} to the poetry of Garcilaso, which in turn is clearly inspired by Delminio’s treatise \textit{On Imitation} (1544). Emphasizing the character of “inquiry” involved in invention, which establishes in turn a bridge between tropes and poetry’s somehow “philosophical” nature, Herrera describes how the poet Ausonius, wishing to deal with the frailty of human life, exchanged abstract and lofty terms for the metaphor of the rose. The poet

\textsuperscript{104} Castelvetro might have personally met Delminio in Modena, when the latter was hosted by Claudio Rangoni at Modena, Castelvetro’s homeland. This is, at least, what Valentina Grohovaz has suggested in connection with letters sent between Castelvetro and Filippo Valentini dating from 1535-36. Valentina Grohovaz, “A proposito di alcuni frammenti manoscritti di opere di Giulio Camillo Delminio e Lodovico Castelvetro”, \textit{Aevum} 67, no. 3 (settembre-dicembre 1993): 519-520. Camillo would have met Francesco Porto in Venice, before the latter moved to Modena in 1535. Porto, a Crete-born Hellenist, had a group of disciples, of which Castelvetro was a part, gather around him in Modena (p. 521). The presence of Camillo’s works in those of Castelvetro is abundant: Camillo was quoted in \textit{Esaminazione sopra la ritorica a Caio Herennio} (p. 523), published in 1653, many decades after the death of Castelvetro. Camillo was the object of Castelvetro’s critique in a text entitled \textit{Considerazione di Giulio Camillo degli indovini virgiliani} (p. 523). More importantly, Grohovaz shows evidence (drawn from manuscript sources supposed to have belonged to Castelvetro) that the latter widely copied and worked with great interest on Camillo’s works (pp. 523-531).
inquired with his thought which thing there might be as beautiful and agreeable as human life, and which, at the same time, lasted for so little a while. Then weighing the figure, smoothness, perfume, color, brightness, softness, and beauty of the rose, most beautiful among all flowers, and lasting only a day, he knew that this would give him delightful, beautiful, and choice words, such as are convenient for a poet […] and with a description full of artifice and smoothness, and with smooth rhythm, he devoted the entire elegy to the life of the rose, short and lasting only an instant [italics added].  

Camillo identifies a domain composed of proper terms and belonging to the public—a space of freedom to repeat without blame what others have previously said. With metaphors, however, we enter the domain of “artifice”, where ownership comes to the fore, with the result that things belong to him who created them first. In such cases, Camillo writes, repeating a trope would be a case of theft, unless we are able to make it ours and claim ownership over it through some kind of transformation. Camillo provides a method operative within the framework delimited by Seneca’s metaphor of the bee, which fabricates honey from flowers and, in doing
so, appropriates what was initially alien. This is the context in which Camillo utters the claim that Castelvetro would repeat and extend to the plot as well as to the field of elocution.

Considering the language previously used by a speaker or a poet, Camillo writes,

> if we dared to use metaphors that only that author would have created with his artifice […] I judge that we might run the risk of being called *usurpers or thieves*, unless we might be able to transform them in our composition, as the bee transforms the flowers into the work of honey [italics added].

With a method intended to help writers imitate tropes without *stealing* them, it seems fair to conclude that, for Camillo, “imitation” meant, much as for Castelvetro, “invention”, and involved likewise a process of transformation. While staying within the probable and reasonable, makers of tropes are expected to bring about something new, which in turn “introduces wonder” in the soul of the reader. In this, they are a model for Castelvetro’s poets of plots.

In subsequent years, scholars capitalized on Camillo’s achievements, further developing the possibilities they found in the method he claimed to have invented. Perhaps the most relevant instance is that of Bernardino Partenio’s *Dell’imitazione poetica*, published in 1560 and then translated into Latin in 1565 to reach a greater public. Partenio unfolded Camillo’s method

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108 “Ma quando fussimo arditi di usar traslati, che quel sol autor fatto havesse con suo artificio […] giudico, che potremmo cadere in pericolo di esser chiamati o usurpatori, o ladri, senon sapessimo quelli trasformare nella composition nostra, si come l’ape nell’opera del mele i fiori trasforma” [italics added]. Camillo Delminio, “Trattato dell’imitazione”, 165. For Seneca’s image of the bee as a producer of something new out of that which is alien, see Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Epistles*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 276-279, §84; see also Pigman III, “Versions of Imitation”, 4-8.


with examples drawn especially from Petrarch, Vergil and Horace, to offer a model for the creation of tropes, assimilated to “writing poetically”.

The freedom granted by Delminio to those who use words with their proper meaning mirrors that of the historian – always according to Castelvetro – to represent events exactly as they took place. In either case, however, the same liberty and absence of constraint precludes them from claiming any praise – that is, insofar as they do that. Conversely, the space of ownership delimited by tropes is reminiscent of a poet who creates a plot. Moreover, and much like a plot, tropes may be created either ex nihilo, or as a modification of previous ones, operated according to the rules of the art.

When Castelvetro interpolated imitation or “μίμησις”, as it takes place when a poet shapes a plot, with the notion of “imitatio” imported from the field of style, he incorporated within the former a set of assumptions and debates associated with the latter. A case in point is the ingredient of competition (“gareggiamento”), inherited from a framework intended mostly as

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111 Partenio’s success was far-reaching: in Spain, as late as the decade of 1620, Francisco de Cabrera presented his commentary of Góngora’s Soledades as an attempt to make of the latter “a field” to teach a method for imitation, “as Bernardino Partenio did with Horace”. Francisco de Cabrera, “Soledad primera ilustrada y defendida”, in María José Osuna Cabezas, Góngora vindicado: Soledad primera ilustrada y defendida. Zaragoza: Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza, 2009, 66. The reference is to Bernardino Partenio, In Q. Horatii Flacci Carmina atq. Epodos Commentarii quibus Poetae artificium, quia ad imitationem, atq ad Poetice scribendum aperitur (Venet.: apud Dom. Nicolinum, MDXXCIV [1584]). Camillo’s method and, therefore, Partenio, proposed ways to create tropes ex nihilo or to introduce variation in tropes found by others. It did so by means of his version of the topical method – the places of argumentation (or topics), mentioned above. Application of the topics to things other than arguments became the norm after Camillo’s day and reappeared in works as varied as Francesco Patrizi’s introduction to Luca Contile’s poems (1560), Orazio Toscanella’s Precetti necessari (1567), Francesco Robertello’s De artificio dicendi (1567), Andrea Gilio da Fabriano’s Topica poetica (1580), Torquato Tasso’s La cavalletta (1584), Maciej K. Sarbiewski’s De acuto et arguto (c. 1627), Matteo Peregrini’s Delle acutezze (1639), or Baltasar Gracián’s Agudeza y arte de ingenio (1648) – to name just a few.

112 As we consider Castelvetro’s engagement with contemporary debates on imitatio of style, it is important to keep in mind his rejection of the term “imitation” itself, nonetheless compatible with his ideas on re-fashioning and alteration of the given. Castelvetro’s attack on “imitation” is intended only to clarify his commitment to “art”, understood (with Aristotle’s Metaphysics) as operating with knowledge of causes, against the randomness of repetition. “Art and imitation cannot be together”, he famously concludes. See Lodovico Castelvetro, Esaminazione sopra la ritorica a Caio Herennio fatta per Lodovico Castelvetri... (Modena: Andrea e Girolamo Eredi del Cassiani, 1653), 17-18.
a relation among particulars. Castelvetro’s understanding of historical events as –almost– analogous with plots invented by others –as members of the category of that which is “given”, or “handed down to us”– lays emphasis on invention and competition as the criteria to value and wonder at the wit of the poet.

Castelvetro’s idea of imitation as necessarily entailing transformation resounds vividly, even though it goes unacknowledged, in Giulio Cortese’s lecture “On imitation and invention”, read in late sixteenth-century Spanish Naples before the Academia degli Svegliati and published in 1592 by some members of the group.

In the lecture “Advice to the poet” contained within the same book, Cortese subscribes to Castelvetro’s notion that it is the ability to inspire wonder that makes a poet deserve the name and he compares the invention of what is wonderful with the markets of wonders commonly held in cities such as Venice, Genoa or Seville, in which merchants returning from remote territories

\[\text{113} \text{ The notion of imitation as it was current in discussions about language and style was confined to the realm of particulars, since it rested upon the supposition that one writer could become alike another one, posited as an example to follow. Attempts at identifying the object of stylistic imitation with an idea of a perfect style that would be either inborn or obtained empirically through abstraction were condemned to fail. Among proposals of this kind, the most famous was that by Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, whom Pietro Bembo would contest by upholding that imitation could not be even conceived of without a particular. Bembo wrote: “Imitation, however, because it has to do entirely with example, must be sought from example. If that is missing, how can there be any imitation?” (“Imitatio autem, quia in exemplo tota versatur, ab exemplo petenda est. Id si desit, iam imitatio esse ulla quae potest?”). Pietro Bembo, “Bembo to Pico”, in Ciceronian Controversies, ed. DellaNeva, 56-57.}

\[\text{114} \text{ For Giulio Cortese, see Lina Bolzoni, “Note su Giulio Cortese. Per uno studio delle accademie napoletane di fine ‘500”, La rassegna della letteratura italiana 77, no. 3 (Settembre-Dicembre 1973); and also, by the same author, “Le proposte letterarie di Giulio Cortese: una fonte della giovanile ‘poetica’ campanelliana”, Giornale storico della letteratura italiana 148, no. 462/463 (1971). See also Maurizio Slawinski, “La poetica di Giulio Cortese tra Campanella e Marino”, Bruniana & campanelliana 7 (2001). He should be distinguished from Giulio Cesare Cortese, although library catalogues do not always do so. Like Castelvetro, Cortese was originally from Modena, although by the time he wrote the essay he had become important in the cultural life of late sixteenth-century Spanish Naples, founding the Accademia degli Svegliati. The volume containing his works on poetics was entitled Rime et prose del sig. Giulio Cortese, detto l’Attonito… vi sono aggiunte alcune lettere et annotationi del signor Francesco Mauro, detto l’Errante Svegliato (In Napoli: appresso Giuseppe Cacchi, MDXCI [1592]). However, I always quote from Giulio Cortese, “Dell’imitazione e dell’invenzione”, in Prose, ed. Maurizio Slawinski (Torino: Res, 2000). The Accademia degli Svegliati served as a pole of attraction for scholars and poets such as Cortese, Ascanio Pignatelli and even the young Giambattista Marino. Francesco Ferrari, Vita del cavali
data small
displayed either genuine, or cunningly crafted exotic goods to the curiosity of the public.\textsuperscript{115} Yet, invention, as Cortese remarks, unless one was a god, is not to be conceived of as happening \textit{ex novo}, but rather as transformation of something that necessarily preexists. In the case of poetry, the author invents through

explanation of reasons, conveniences, or examples not yet advanced by past authors, and coherent with the matter being dealt with. Invention will be used in every part of poetry – the subject, the episodes, and even the epithets, for clothing a substance with some new and coherent accident that contains a reason, or some explanatory cause, will be a most noble invention – and here lie the richness of poetry.\textsuperscript{116}

According to Cortese, the poet will be inventive by excogitating, in a different way from others before him, the reason why something was done, in which circumstances, or with which expectations. This is applicable not only to the actions of characters in a plot, but also to style as well – for example, as the poet devises yet new and surprising ways of assimilating a feeling to a phenomenon of nature. Writing in the wake of Delminio and Castelvetro, it was relatively straightforward to Cortese to conceive invention, understood as variation in accidents and circumstances, as universally operative in poetry as inventive art and applicable to every domain from plot to tropes.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{115} “The poet will easily and fruitfully beget noble and rare conceits […] he will bring new things to the intellects, not unlike that merchant who makes his way back from the Indies, or other remote lands, and unveils goods never seen before” (“facilmente conciperà come fertile concetti nobili e singolari […] apporterà agli intelletti cose nuove, a guisa di quello mercante, che venendo dall’Indie o da altri paesi remoti, scopre la sua merce non ancora vista”). Giulio Cortese, “Avvertimenti nel poetare”, in \textit{Prose}, ed. Maurizio Slawinski (Torino: Res, 2000), 23.

\textsuperscript{116} “[L’invenzione è] una esplicazione di ragione o di commodità o di esempio non ancora da’ passati tocca, congruente alla materia che si tratta. L’uso di questa sarà in ogni parte della poesia, così dico nella materia, come negli episodi, e ne gli epiteti ancora, vestire una sostanza di accidente nuovo congruente che contenga ragione o cagione di esplicazione sarà assai nobile invenzione, e qui stannole ricchezze della poesia”.” Cortese, “Dell’imitazione”, 5.

\textsuperscript{117} The continuity between plot and trope would become clear in connection with seventeenth-century theories of wit, insofar as the latter performs similarly in either field, arguing connections between events in a story as it does between objects in a metaphor. Yet this was already something that sixteenth-century scholars often contemplated, partially as a result of Averroes’ interpretation of what “imitation” means, known to scholars like Robortello from his enormously successful commentary on the \textit{Poetics}. Averroes, in fact, had famously translated “imitative speeches” as “sermones imaginativi”, including metaphors (“translationes”) as one of the ways in which the art of
Thus related with one another, Delminio, Castelvetro and Cortese are representative of “imitation” understood as the ability to transform something given into something else. Even more importantly for the argument, all three agree that, as the poet does so, s/he renders himself the true object of wonder insofar as s/he challenges the state of things: renewing either received stories, or the course of nature taken as probability (“τὸ εἰκός”), s/he becomes admirable himself. In Castelvetro’s words, when the poet

imitates the actions of nature, fortune, or the course of things with various arts […] it seems to [the audience] as if there were a new nature, a new fortune, a new course of things, and that he has something heavenly [italics added].

As the poet’s “work”, channeled in the wit and the artifice s/he shows, creates novelty within something that preexists, s/he becomes invested with a godlike quality. In a context in which it had become fashionable for scholars to adduce passages of Plato and even occasionally from Aristotle’s Poetics, in order to claim that poets were somehow godlike in nature, Castelvetro returned poetics to the human. Interestingly, he would do so by unveiling and demystifying the process of conceiving the godlike that takes place in the intellect of the audience. The latter concides exactly with the mechanism that renders noticing the fabrication of novelty in a plot something pleasurable and the end of poetics as a discipline. What men call

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poetics is able to imitate. Averroes, Declaratio compendiosa per viam divisionis Alfarabii super libris rethoricorum Aristotelis ad formam tantum clariorem et tabule reducta per infrascriptum dicens correctorem (Venetiis: impressum per magistrum Philipum Venetum), 91r-v. In a similar vein, Cortese would distinguish “saying” from “imitating” in terms of using the name of the thing versus metaphorically paraphrasing it –as in the difference between “I see” and “the lucid image of the object entered the pupil”. Cortese, “Dell’imitazione”, 3.

118 “Quando rassomiglia l’attioni della natura, o della fortuna, o del corso delle mondane cose con varie arti […] parendole essere una nuova natura, o fortuna, o corso delle mondane cose, & havere non so che di celestiale” [italics added]. Castelvetro, Poetica, 39v. See also Denores, Poetica, 19v-20r and Cave, Recognitions, 59 for the analysis of Denores’ position on the issue.
“godlike” is nothing other than a kind of “work” that seems unattainable to them, because it involves excellence of wit and artifice far above the average.\textsuperscript{119}

In what follows, I will continue delving into the influence of Castelvetro’s ideas of wonder in scholars such as Denores, Pinciano, and Ordóñez. However, I will not take wonder – as has been the case so far – as a reaction to the wit and the artifice of the author, but rather as the form of causality that holds the attention of the spectators in suspense and becomes, so to speak, both the source and the possibility for the kind of wonder discussed above to come into existence.

3. Wonder as a tool for imitation (18, 1456a18 and ff.)

The translation of Aristotle’s \textit{Poetics} published in 1626 by Ordóñez das Seyjas y Tovar seems to have followed Piccolomini’s 1575 \textit{Annotationi} when it comes to making a choice among dubious readings of the text. Yet Castelvetro’s blueprint is even more influential, since it informs choices that have to do with the structure of the work and therefore reaches far beyond the reference to poetry being subtler than history, with which I started section two.

\textsuperscript{119} “If making plots and verses were made naturally and without any effort, even though not anybody were able in general to do it perfectly, one would not admire poetry, nor would one have it in the esteem one does, since we do not wonder at someone who does those things that we are able to do, even if we do not do them successfully. Neither would the poets have been able to put into people’s minds that they were full of divine fury when they composed their poems both due to the wonderful invention of the matter, and for the new way of making verses, considered by those who ignore the reason, or who are not exerted in these things, to be heavenly, or at least made with the special help of god” (“se il comporre le favole e ’l verseggiare si facesse naturalmente & senza fatica anchora che ognuno comunemente non fosse pienamente atto a farlo altri non ammirerebbe la poesia né la terrebbe in quel conto che la tiene, perciòché noi non ci maravigliamo che altri faccia quelle cose che sappiamo o possiamo fare o siamo atti a fare anchora che non le facciamo così bene a punto. Né i poeti haverebbono potuto mettere nel capo al vulgo che essi fossero stati ripieni del fureore di dio quando comisero i suoi poemí si per la mirabile inventione della materia, & si per la nuova maniera del verseggiare repute cose celestiali o fatte almeno con aiuto spetiale di dio da chi non sa la ragione, & non è in esse esercitato”). Castelvetro, \textit{Poetica}, 37v. The notion of “industria” appears closely linked to that of wit or “ingenium”, both in poetics and in everyday life, as I will point to in Chapter Three in connection with the link between wit and “prudence” and the relation between the latter and picaresque. For a study of wit and “industria”, see, for example, Mariela Insúa, “Aspectos del ingenio y la industria en el Buscón de Quevedo”, \textit{Revista Signos} 38, no. 57 (2005).
Ordóñez gave chapter IX of his translation the title “That the plot has to be wonderful” ("Que la fábula ha de ser maravillosa"). Marvel, as a matter of fact, was just one in a series of requirements for the plot with which Castelvetro had headed several sections devoted to the composition of the latter. As further evidence of allegiance to Castelvetro’s commentary, Ordóñez would respect the division as well as the titles established by his predecessor.

Yet Castelvetro’s conviction that a plot remains without effect unless it is full of wonder did more than inform the title of a subsection in his commentary. In fact, it was powerful enough to suggest to him the emendation of Aldo Manuzio’s 1508 text of the Poetics at a point where the text, at least at first sight, did not appear to be incongruous.

The conviction behind Castelvetro’s emendation, which pervades his commentary from beginning to end, proved highly influential in the reception of the Poetics in the decades to come and is likely to account, to a great extent, for the need expressed by authors from Jacopo Mazzoni to Alonso López Pinciano to make wonder fit within the framework, sometimes perceived as hostile to it, of probable and verisimilar imitation.

Castelvetro’s emendation takes place in the context of Aristotle’s discussion of tragedy’s effect upon the spectators.

Aristotle made purgation of feelings in the audience the end of tragedy. "Through pity and fear accomplishing the catharsis of such emotions" ("δι᾽ ἐλέους καὶ φόβου περαίνουσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν"). Aristotle, “Poetics”, 46-49, §6, 1449b.

Aristotle left the nature of catharsis unexplained. The commentators thought this hardly fitting for a notion explicitly placed at the core of the noblest of genres. To remedy this, they embarked on a debate, which, as shown by Lorenzo Giacomini’s lecture to the Academy of the Annoyed (Accademia degli Alterati) in Florence in 1586, produced widely different interpretations. Lorenzo Giacomini, “De la purgazione della tragedia”, in Trattati di poetica e retorica del cinquecento, ed. Bernard Weinberg, vol. 3 (Bari: G. Laterza, 1970-74), 347-351. In general, there were two currents of thought: either pity and fear served to purge pity and fear themselves and make the

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120 Ordóñez das Seyjas y Tovar, *La poética* (1626), 26r.
121 For the present case, we read in Castelvetro’s “particella” 3.9: “Che la favola deva essere maravigliosa”. Castelvetro, *Poetica*, 122v.
122 "Through pity and fear accomplishing the catharsis of such emotions” ("δι᾽ ἐλέους καὶ φόβου περαίνουσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν"). Aristotle, “Poetics”, 46-49, §6, 1449b.
123 Aristotle left the nature of catharsis unexplained. The commentators thought this hardly fitting for a notion explicitly placed at the core of the noblest of genres. To remedy this, they embarked on a debate, which, as shown by Lorenzo Giacomini’s lecture to the Academy of the Annoyed (Accademia degli Alterati) in Florence in 1586, produced widely different interpretations. Lorenzo Giacomini, “De la purgazione della tragedia”, in Trattati di poetica e retorica del cinquecento, ed. Bernard Weinberg, vol. 3 (Bari: G. Laterza, 1970-74), 347-351. In general, there were two currents of thought: either pity and fear served to purge pity and fear themselves and make the
generally accepted that, regardless of what catharsis is, it would necessarily take place as the effect of “the tragic”, therefore resulting from two feelings that it is the task of tragedy to inspire in the audience –namely pity (“ἔλεον”) and fear (“φόβος”). In order that pity and fear may take place, it is advisable for the characters who are the object of suffering (“πάθος”) to have erred through “a certain mistake” (“δι᾽ ἁµαρτία τινά”), rather than as a consequence of sheer evilness. Only if such conditions are met would the audience feel fully identified with the character, pitying his or her misfortune and fearing that they might become prey to evils such as those that they have been witnesses to.\(^{124}\)

As for wonder or “τὸ θαυμαστὸν”, the term is hardly mentioned on three occasions in Aristotle’s Poetics. In connection with tragedy, it is referred to as a catalyst that intensifies the feelings of pity and fear within the machinery of the poem.\(^{125}\) The numbers certainly give the impression that wonder is somehow secondary to the picture –something that did not deter Castelvetro from making it sneak here and there across the commentary, making it central to the audience accustomed to the contingencies of chance, or else pity and fear were counted as beneficial feelings and served to purge bad passions. Among the earliest followers of each opinion, see respectively Robortello, In librum Aristotelis, 98-99 and Minturno, Arte poetica, 76-77. In Spain, González de Salas and Cascales followed, respectively, the former and the latter. See Kappl, Die Poetik des Aristoteles, 266-311; and also Antonio García Berrio, Introducció a la poètica clàssica: Cascales (Barcelona: Planeta, 1975), 99-100. For a survey of recent attempts to understand what Aristotle had in mind when he spoke of “catharsis” and a satisfactory explanation of the concept, see Heath, “Aristotle and the Value of Tragedy”.

\(^{124}\) “Such a person [sc. the hero of the tragedy] is someone not preeminent in virtue and justice and one who falls into adversity not through evil and depravity, but through some kind of error” (“ἐστι δὲ τοιοῦτος ὁ μὴτ ἄρετὴ διαφέρων καὶ δικαιοσύνη ν ἐγερή διὰ κακίαν καὶ μοχθηρίας μεταβάλλων εἰς τὴν δυστυχίαν ἀλλὰ δι᾽ ἁµαρτίαν τινά”). Aristotle, “Poetics”, 70-71, §13, 1453a. For the study of error (“ἁµαρτία”) rather than injustice as the cause for the suffering in connection with the feelings of the audience, see Kathy Eden, Poetic and Legal Fiction in the Aristotelian Tradition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 54-61.

\(^{125}\) Aristotle, “Poetics”, 62-63, §9, 1452a; and 122-123, §24, 1460a. The notion of wonder is variously rendered in Latin translations and treatises with terms related to either “mirari” or “admirari”. Any attempt at differentiating between “wonder” and “admiration” with meanings close to those in English or other modern languages would be misleading. For one thing, as far as the present study is concerned, both derive the most often from a single word in Greek, namely “τὸ θαυμαστὸν”. As for distinctions that other texts written in Latin used in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, J. E. Gillet made clear almost a century ago that contemporary scholars use the two terms in a way that rarely lends itself to distinction. J. E. Gillet, “A Note on the Tragic ‘Admiratio’”, The Modern Language Review 13, no. 2 (April, 1918). When Francesco Patrizi eventually turned wonder into the element that characterizes poetics and sets it apart from the other arts, he too equated “wonder” and “admiration” as he made “wonderful” and “admirable” into synonyms: “La maraviglia […] nasce dal mirabile, che ed ammirabile, ed ammirando, e maraviglioso vien detto”. Patrizi, “Deca ammirabile”, 293.
operation of poetics upon the audience and opening up a path that many others would follow with enthusiasm.

The passage announced above as emended by Castelvetro is exemplary of the kind of intervention that incorporates wonder in a context from which it was originally absent.

For a comparison, let us start with both the Greek and Latin texts featured in Robortello’s 1548 commentary for Poetics 18, 1456a, corresponding respectively to Aldo’s edition and Pazzi’s translation, published for the first time in 1508 and 1536 respectively:

In reversals and simple actions, poets aim for what they want wonderfully. For this is tragic and arouses fellow-feeling.

Ἐν δὲ τὰς περιπετείας καὶ ἐν τὰς ἀπλοῖς πράγμασις στοχάζονται ὣν βούλονται, θαυμαστῶς. Τραγικὸν γὰρ τοῦτο, καὶ φιλάνθρωπον.126

The text as well as the translation offer what seems to be a judgment of value: tragedians are great as they aim at obtaining the effect of tragedy, for both simple actions and those including reversals –that is, sudden and unexpected mutations of fortune– arouse fellow-feeling in the audience because of the suffering they stage, which leads, in turn, to the purgation of emotions.

Yet, as Castelvetro transcribes Aldo’s Greek text in 1570, he does so only to make more clearly the case for the emendation he would propose. Castelvetro’s translation reads as follows:

Both in reversals and in simple actions [the poets] attain the goal they have proposed for themselves by means of wonder [italics added].127

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If the goal of tragedy is the purgation of emotions through pity and fear, Castelvetro introduces wonder as a means that somehow conflicts in the mechanism, prompting him to immediately justify his emendation:

Then Aristotle adds *the thing with which they [the poets] specifically obtain what they want*. And this is nothing else but wonder, saying στοχάζονται ὄν βούλονται θαυμαστῶς [=they aim wonderfully at what they wish]. I am inclined to believe, on account of what follows, that we should read θαυμαστῶ or rather τῷ θαυμαστῶ [=by means of wonder] [italics added].

None of the earlier translators or commentators had questioned the reading “θαυμαστῶς” (“wonderfully”), understood as a judgment about *the way in which*, rather than *the means through which*, poets are expected to bring about the purgation of emotions.

Among those who came later, Piccolomini would tacitly reject Castelvetro’s reading, maintaining the adverb in what seems to be a proof of allegiance to Vettori’s choice. So did Ordóñez, generally faithful to Piccolomini in spite of the influence of Castelvetro mentioned above.

Castelvetro was luckier with Riccoboni’s commentary, published in 1587. Without mentioning at all the existence of a conflict in the tradition that preceded him, Riccoboni

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128 “Poi si soggiunge quello con che specialmente ottengono ciò che desiderano. Il che non è altro che la maraviglia dicendosi στοχάζονται ὄν βούλονται θαυμαστῶς. Io m’induco a credere per le parole seguenti che leggere si debba θαυμαστῶ o più tosto τῷ θαυμαστῶ” [italics added]. Castelvetro, *Poetica*, 221v.

129 Alessandro de’ Pazzi’s 1536 translation had rendered the text this way: “Tum in peripetiis, tum in simplicibus actionibus hi quidem suum mirabiliter propositum assequantur. Etenim tragicum, atque humanum est” [italics added]. Castelvetro, *Poetica*, 221v.

implicitly accepted Castelvetro’s emendation when he translated “through wonder” (“per admirabile”). The question does not yet seem to be settled even in the present day.

Castelvetro justified his emendation in allusion to the text that follows. The statement may seem odd, given that Aristotle devotes the rest of the section not to wonder, but to explain the conditions for a mutation of fortune to arouse pity and fear and therefore to be tragic. However, if we place ourselves within Castelvetro’s understanding of Aristotle’s treatise taken as a whole, we will easily understand whence exactly he could get the idea that wonder was somehow, and even deeply, involved in tragedy. In fact, Aristotle declares in 9, 1452a that pitiful and fearful reversals are wonderful and therefore more pleasurable and effective whenever the mutation of fortune of which the audience is witness occurs unexpectedly and against all odds – and yet according to probability or necessity. To this Castelvetro had reacted as follows:

Wonder, conjoined with the mutation from happiness to misery in a person of average goodness augments and magnifies fear and pity, and this in turn allows wonder to be called tragic. And wonder, conjoined with the mutation from happiness to misery in a wicked person augments and magnifies the pleasure of the people, because they are full of relief. Wherefore wonder may be reasonably called a thing pleasurable to men.

131 “[Poets] obtain what they want through wonder; that which is said to be tragic, and pleasurable to men” (“assequuntur id, quod volunt, per admirabile; quod dicitur esse Tragicum, & gratum hominibus”) [italics added]. Riccoboni, Poetica Aristotelis, 101.
132 Bywater’s version rejects Castelvetro’s emendation, as he translates that poets “show wonderful skill in aiming at the kind of effect they desire”. Aristotle, Aristotle on the art of poetry, ed. Ingram Bywater (Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1920), 65. So does Tarán in the most recent edition of the text. Aristotle, Poetics, 196. Conversely, it is accepted in Halliwell’s, who reads “τῷ θαυμαστῷ”, acknowledges Castelvetro in the footnote and then translates as follows: “Poets aim for what they want by means of the awesome”. Aristotle, “Poetics”, 94-95, §18, 1456a.
133 “La maraviglia congiunta con la mutatione di felicità in miseria nella persona di mezzana bontà accresce e magnifica lo spavento & la compassione & per ciò la maraviglia si può domandare essere cosa tragica. Et la maraviglia congiunta con la mutatione pur di felicità di in miseria nella persona malvagia accresce & magnifica con la consolazione il compiacimento del popolo. Laonde ragionevolmente si può la maraviglia domandare cosa aggredevole agli huomini”. Castelvetro, Poetica, 222r.
That Castelvetro had in mind the passage referred to (9, 1452a) as he emended and glossed 18, 1456a obtains confirmation from a different, although related emendation that he suggested for the former. In fact, when Aristotle asserts that pitiful and fearful matters “arise above all when events occur contrary to expectation yet on account of one another”, Castelvetro thinks that some kind of explanation ought to be missing after *above all*—one that specifies clearly that pitiful and fearful matters “arise above all ‘through wonder’”:

If I am not wrong, this sentence lacks the words “διὰ τοῦ θαυμαστῶν” [=through wonder], or they must be understood, and they indeed can be understood if we look at the words that follow.\(^\text{134}\)

What follows is Aristotle’s claim that wonder takes place whenever events follow logically—that is, according to probability, or necessity and not by chance—from one another, and yet result in outcomes that shock our expectations.

What matters for us is Castelvetro’s insistence on substantivizing the appearance of wonder: in the first instance, it occurred as a correction of the adverb “θαυμαστῶς”, while here, perhaps more audaciously, it appears in the place of a void. Yet, even though Castelvetro’s emphasis is doubtless symptomatic of a new behavior towards wonder, none of the conclusions involved so far seem to contradict what Aristotle himself conceived about wonder’s place in tragedy. For the moment, in fact, Castelvetro’s emendations match with the idea—found in *Poetics* 18, 1456a—that wonder intensifies the feelings of pity and fear towards the obtention of the effect of tragedy.\(^\text{135}\)

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\(^\text{135}\) That wonder intensifies pity and fear seems to agree with the view of recent scholarship on the *Poetics*. According to Malcolm Heath, in reversals, “contrary to expectation” is taken up in the reference to amazement.
distinction between simple and complex plots, of which the latter alone would have reversals and recognitions. Castelvetro would make wonder present in plots in general, as something necessary rather than advisable.\textsuperscript{136}

More radical among Castelvetro’s modifications is the respective role that he grants wonder in relation to pity and fear. Castelvetro’s emendation of “by means of wonder” instead of “wonderfully” in 18, 1456a entailed a change of antecedent for the sentence that follows, namely “for this is tragic and arouses fellow-feeling”, which initially referred to reversals. Castelvetro’s transformation of the adverb “\textipa{\textgreek{o}\textipa{\textgreek{a}m\textipa{\textgreek{a}st\textipa{\textgreek{o}}}s}” into a noun has the latter play the role of antecedent, so that what is tragic is no longer a reversal, but wonder itself. This is far from troubling for Castelvetro, who simply explains that, because pity and fear are the means for the goal of tragedy, “this [sc. the fact that wonder augments and magnifies both] allows wonder to be called tragic”.\textsuperscript{137} Pity and fear are tragic, but that which controls the intensity of both is even more so. In arguing so, Castelvetro gives wonder a place of privilege within the logic of Aristotle’s Poetics –first through emendation, then erasing, with his commentary, any shadow of strangeness or incoherence.\textsuperscript{138}

However, Castelvetro plays throughout his commentary with the notion that wonder does more than merely intensify pity and fear as a means for the tragic, but becomes somehow the main ingredient towards obtaining some sort of emotional response from the audience. While –as

\textsuperscript{136} Cave has remarked that Robortello had already described how complex plots, insofar as they have reversals, added wonder to pity and fear. Cave, Recognitions, 58. Castelvetro would speak of wonder across distinctions of this kind, at least for the purpose of insisting on the omnipresence of wonder as a source of “the tragic”.

\textsuperscript{137} Castelvetro, Poetica, 222r.

\textsuperscript{138} Castelvetro’s surgery of the Poetics made Aristotle speak the mind of the commentator. As a result, he –and even more explicitly, Jacopo Mazzoni– would be the target of Francesco Patrizi’s attacks. Patrizi was as persuaded as Castelvetro of the centrality of wonder for poetry; nonetheless, he thought it important to clarify that such a view was not shared by Aristotle –for whom, Patrizi maintained, wonder was only accidental to some aspects of the poem. Francesco Patrizi, “Deca ammirabile”, 307-308.
shown above–*Poetics* 18, 1456a lent Castelvetro the chance to assert that wonder is “tragic” because it augments pity and fear and thus cooperates towards the effect of tragedy, as he comments on 6 1449b, he seems to hesitate to promote it from mere intensifier to “generator” of the two feelings in question. As he describes tragedy as “a likeness […] of fearful and pitiful things”, he then adds that fearful and pitiful things are mainly such because of the work of wonder, we should not overlook the wonder which generates and augments fear and pity, to attain complete knowledge of pity and fear, the main parts in the action or the plot of tragedy.[139]

Castelvetro is likely to have drawn inspiration from Minturno’s *L’arte poetica* (1563). According to Minturno, the events imitated by the poet,

whether their end be sad, or happy, they would fail to bring grief, happiness, or fear, if they were unable to awake wonder at them in the soul of the spectators.[140]

Castelvetro would turn Minturno’s assertion into a principle structurally engrafted in the theory of poetics, which contemporary as well as later scholars would often derive from his commentary. Castelvetro would conclude that wonder, centrally involved in the process that makes fearful and pitiful things be such, ought to be listed as “the sixth thing that is required from the plot”. In doing so, he included wonder into the recipe of poetry in general and tragedy in particular to be inherited by López Pinciano, or Ordóñez, to name just a few.

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139 “Rassomiglianza […] di cose spaventevoli, & degne di compassione […] Sono principalmente spaventevoli, & compassionevoli per opera della maraviglia, non è da lasciar di dire della maraviglia che genera & accresce lo spavento & la compassione accioché s’habbia piena conoscenza dello spavento, & della compassione, parti dell’attione o della favola della tragedia principali” [italics added]. Castelvetro, *Poetica*, 122v-123r.

140 “E questi qualunque sia il fin loro, o tristo, o lieto, né dolor mai, né allegrezza, né spavento apporterieno, se di loro negli animi degli auditori maraviglia non destassero” [italics added]. Minturno, *L’arte poetica*, 40.

141 Castelvetro, *Poetica*, 122v.
Castelvetro’s hesitation whether to consider wonder as a supplement to the feelings awakened by tragedy, or to concede that it lies at the origin of them, yields to the certainty that part of his readers seem to share about the centrality of wonder as a point of departure for any other kind of feeling that a poem may inspire.

In *marginalia* to the second edition of Castelvetro’s commentary, his contemporary Michelangelo il Giovane wrote in the passage just mentioned: “Sixth part, of wonder, out of which fear and pity are born”. In doing so, he would pick the most radical among the choices available in Castelvetro’s explanation.142

Along the same line, Giason Denores accomplished a crucial step when he incorporated wonder into the definition of the discipline that opens his *Poetics* of 1588. Poets, according to Denores, imitate “some human action, wonderful and whole”, something that Denores’ plagiarist Mártir Rizo unsurprisingly repeats in Spanish.143 Denores would clarify his position, writing that only what is wonderful makes the object of imitation for the poet:

> Because not every human action is a convenient subject for poetics, but only the one that, receiving a sudden reversal of fortune, and not expected for –either from prosperity to adversity, or from adversity to prosperity–, fills the soul with wonder.144

What matters for Denores is no longer that a greater or lesser degree of unexpectedness may intensify the feelings of pity and fear inspired by a reversal, but rather that the latter has to be unexpected enough so as to bring wonder to the soul of the audience. It is wonder, after all,

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144 “Percioché non ogni attion humana è conveniente soggetto della poetica, ma solamente quella, che, ricevendo in se una subita, & non antiveduta tramutation di fortuna; o dalla prospera nell’avversa; o dall’avversa nella prospera, riempie l’animo di maraviglia”. Denores, *Poetica*, 3r.
that makes a plot qualify as poetic according to Denores, something that he would greatly expand upon in a lecture in which he advocated the benefits of poetry for the government of the republic:

Every poem is built upon marvel. For, if it were not, it would not beget that pleasure in our souls that the audience looks for. For a banquet, a joust, a feast, a spectacle, or a music concert, if it lacks that rarity, it does not gratify the soul, nor does it end up satisfying it. For things that are frequently treated, usual, and common are neither seen nor heard with the applause of the spectators, nor that of the listeners.¹⁴⁵

In what follows, Denores develops various embodiments adopted by wonder according to genre, whether tragic, comic, or epic. As he develops the question as to what is wonderful in each of them, it turns out that they differ insofar as they feature reversals based upon divergent kinds of mutations of fortune.¹⁴⁶ Yet, at the center of the machine, wonder is the ingredient that makes every one of them “poetic” and able to perform the effect that each genre aims at.¹⁴⁷

Attesting to Denores’ reliance on Castelvetro’s precedent, he follows the latter also in the transition—discussed in section two—from wonder as a requirement in the economy of the plot to wonder as a reaction in the audience as they marvel at the wit and the artifice of the poet, who

¹⁴⁵ “È fondato ogni poema nella maraviglia, perciò che, se non è tale, non partorisce negli animi nostri quel diletto che si propone l’auditore. Un convitto, una giostra, una festa, uno spettacolo, un concerto di musica, se non ha in sé questa rarità, non appaga l’animo, né mai compie di sodisfarlo. Imperóché le cose usitate, le solite, le communi non sono né vedute né udite con applauso de’ spettatori né dagli ascoltanti”. Giason Denores, “Discorso intorno a que’ principii, cause et accrescimenti che la comedia, la tragedia et il poema eroico ricevono dalla filosofia morale e civile e da’ governatori delle republiche... [1586]”, in Bernard Weinberg, Trattati di poetica e retorica del Cinquecento, vol. 3 (Bari: Laterza, 1970-74), 390.
¹⁴⁷ Minsaas has pointed out that Denores speaks of wonder as instrumental for something to be taught. For instance, tragedy would use wonder to make the audience learn in a pleasing way how things usually end for tyrants and, consequently, abhor the path they take. Minsaas, “Poetic Marvels”, 153-154. In doing so, Denores continues and enriches the interpretation inaugurated by Maggi in 1550, generally considered to be “Horatian” in that it reinterprets the blend of “utile” and “dulci” in connection with marvel. Marvel, being pleasant, attracts the attention of the audience to the events through which it has come into existence. In 1591-1592 Eugenio de Salazar would also embrace the link between learning and marvel or admiration: “The goal of poetry is to delight the soul of those who read, or hear under the cover of gallant veils and useful inventions, and by means of admiration to direct the people to the effect that results from the principles or moral philosophy, as well as to the path of virtue” (“el fin de la poesía es, debajo de galanos velos de Morales y útiles invenciones, deleitar el ánimo del que lee o oye, y enderezar los hombres por estilo de admiración al efecto de los preceptos de filosofía moral y al camino de la virtud”). Eugenio de Salazar, Suma del arte de poesía, ed. Martha Lilia Tenorio (México, DF: Colegio de México, 2010), 97.
was able, while encoding a reversal, to overcome the difficulty of causally connecting events in a way that is both surprising and unexpected:

Since poetry has marvel as one of its main foundations, every time that the action invoked by the plot would lack this mutation of fortune, the former would fall short from the praise that it deserves. For such a reversal begets admiration, which in turn discovers the wit of the poet, as he was able to wonderously find a manner and a path to shape the mutation of fortune with prudence and elegance.\footnote{Avendo la poesia ricevuto per un de’ suoi principal fondamenti la maraviglia, ogni volta che l’azion nella quale è constituita la favola non avesse questa tal tramutazion di fortuna, mancherebbe della sua debita laude. Un tal rivolgimento, dunque, partorisce ammirazione e l’ammirazione scuopre l’ingegno del poeta nel trovar modo e via maravigliosamente di accomodarla con prudenza e leggiadria”. Denores, “Discorso”, 392. About reversals in tragedy, for instance, Denores writes that “if then the reversal is conjoined with wonder, this wonder does not exist without a good deal of training in the civil life” (“se ben dunque la peripezia è congionta con la maraviglia, non è però una tal maraviglia senza grande ammaestramento della vita civile”). Denores, “Discorso”, 394. Cesc Esteve has read Denores’ discourse as a transformation of wonder in poetry, from a mere intensifier of pity and fear to a source of pleasure in poetry, which in turn results in usefulness because it teaches the audience the existence of Divine Providence, which they infer from the misfortunes of characters that happen against expectation. Esteve, “Les poétiques de la meravella”, 78-79. For the relation between wonder and Divine Providence, especially in Robortello’s commentary, see also Vega Ramos, “El azar y la maravilla”, 136-141. Yet Denores’ praise of the wit of the poet as a source of wonder is generally indebted to Castelvetro. For example, as the latter did, Denores finds wonder at the wit of epic poets justifiable on account of the ability they have to create an infinity of episodes out of a single line of plot. Copiousness becomes the object of the admiration of the audience: “[As the poet] finds with his wit matter and invention to accompany the plot and to extend it in many books, he certainly operates every sort of wonders” (“trova col suo ingegno materia et invenzion di accompagnarla e di distenderla in molti libri, costui per certo opera ogni sorte di maraviglia”). Denores, Discorso, 396.}

Like Denores, Pinciano was sensitive to the issues related to wonder. Following Castelvetro, Pinciano would incorporate wonder as a requirement for a poem to attain the end it aims at. However, somehow foreshadowing issues that I will study below in section four, the characters of Pinciano’s dialogue show themselves acutely aware that it is not always easy to inspire wonder while simultaneously maintaining verisimilitude. One of them, for instance, asserts that “what is wonderful and what is likely seem to contradict each other”.\footnote{“Parece que tienen contradicción lo admirable, y lo verisimil”. López Pinciano, Obras completas, vol. 1, 200.} Yet both seem to be required in the plot, for, whereas the latter provides the basis of imitation and is required for the plot to be one, it is wonder that enables the poem to be of any effect upon the
audience. To make things clear, Pinciano, a physician himself, would resort to a comparison with medicine. The plot, he writes,

ought to be wonderful. For poems that fail to inspire admiration are also unable to move, and are often similar to cold dreams. This is what Galen teaches, and then he writes in the third book *On the use of the parts*: “The muse of poetry, among the ornaments and belongings that she has, the main one is miracle and wonder”. It seems, therefore, that the poem that has no prodigies has no being either.\(^{150}\)

Just as a dream lacking warmth remains ineffective, a poem deprived of wonder fails to achieve the goal for which it exists. It is to no avail that a poem features characters who, according to Aristotle’s guidelines, are suitable to cause pity and fear, for unless it makes events follow one another against expectation, it will fail to beget in the audience the effect of purgation pursued by tragedy.

A symptom of wonder’s increasing importance for late sixteenth-century theoreticians is the attempt, often found in works of the period, to distinguish among genres according to different kinds of wonder that would be respectively operative in each of them.\(^{151}\) This is what Denores had in mind in his “Discorso”. Embodying the feeling of marvel inspired by the poet, reversals are conceived of as partaking in as many types as there are genres of poetry. According to Denores, for instance, marvel takes place in a comedy because a man, even if he starts in trouble, “he ends in great happiness […] in the space of only one day”, “being necessary for the

\(^{150}\) “[La fábula] ha de ser admirable, porque los poemas que no traen admiración, no mueven cosa alguna, y son como sueños fríos algunas veces. Esta doctrina enseña Galeno, que, en el tercero *Del uso de las partes,* dice así: ‘La poética musa, entre otros ornamentos y arreos que tiene, el principal es el milagro y maravilla’, por lo cual parece que el poema que no es prodigioso es de ningún ser”. López Pinciano, *Obras completas*, vol. 1, 197-198.

\(^{151}\) The fact that sixteenth-century scholars subdivided wonder into types that then were taken to be characteristic of each of the genres is exemplar of a trend to think in a way that was naturally genre-specific and which, according to Javitch, responded to literary and cultural needs of the time rather than to suggestions originally contained in the *Poetics*. See Daniel Javitch, “On the Rise of Genre-specific Poetics in the Sixteenth Century”, in *Making Sense of Aristotle: Essays in Poetics*, ed. Øivind Andersen and Jon Haarberg (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 2001), 131. Along the same line, Javitch also stated elsewhere that “sixteenth-century writers and theorists built upon Aristotle’s theory of tragedy to define more fully as well as to distinguish all the relevant poetic genres”. Javitch, “The assimilation of Aristotle’s *Poetics*”, 58.
good poet to have a reversal of fortune take place such as would take him from misfortune to happiness”. Conversely, the tragedian has the audience marvel at the work involved in making someone fall down all of a sudden and yet according to a set of probable or necessary causes.\footnote{\textit{Se ben […] egli è in disturbo, all’ultimo tuttavia sortisce felicissimo fine […] nello spazio di un sol giorno} “essendo necessario che il buon poeta faccia intervenir tal rivolgimento di fortuna dalla infelicità alla felicità”. Denores, “Discorso”, 390-391.}

The suggestion that there is a kind of wonder proper to comedy served the purposes of theorists who, much like Denores, were interested in justifying for comedy – in symmetry with tragedy – a process of purgation or catharsis. For Denores, comedy “does not purge fear and pity, but those pains which disturb our quietness and tranquility, due to the fall in love of wives, sons, and daughters, the deceit and betrayal of servants, ruffians, nurses, and others of the kind, so as to make us love private life, for the preservation of the well-ordered republic of the people in which we live”.\footnote{[	extit{La commedia}] non purga il terrore, & la misericordia, ma quei travagli, che turbano la nostra quiete, & tranquillità per gli inamoramenti delle mogli, de’ figlioli, delle figlieole, per gl’inganni, & tradimenti de’ servitori, de’ ruffiani, delle nutrici, & di altre persone simili, per farne inamorar della vita privata a conservation di quella tal ben regolata republica popolare, nella quale ci troveremo”. Denores, \textit{Poetica}, 7v. As usual, Mártir Rizo has the same idea, directly translated from Denores. Mártir Rizo, \textit{Poética de Aristóteles}, 83.}

However, it might be argued that Denores does not actually distinguish among different kinds of wonder, but focuses instead on the variations at the level of the reversals that bring wonder into existence. The kinds of characters who suffer mutation of fortune do change and so do the feelings that take place in concomitance with wonder. The latter, however, stays one and the same, admitting of no further analysis. Indeed, attempts at defining it end up in tautology, as when, for instance, the wonder of tragedy is said to happen whenever the mutation of fortune taking place in the plot is also tragic.

In a certain sense, Pinciano comes closer than Denores did to conceiving of wonder as the element that sets genres apart from one another. The homonymous character of \textit{Philosophia antiqua poética} asks the following:
This wonder, which you claim to be so necessary, does it admit a division into species, or it is only of one kind? And Ugo answered: Yes, there are three species of wonder, for some are neither happy nor sad, like Pegasus’ flight; others are sad, like Priam’s death and Hecuba’s misfortune. Others are ridiculous, like the jokes between Mercury and Sosia.  

The reference to sadness and even more to laughter and the ridiculous locate Pinciano’s dissection of wonder within the field of feelings. Although he seems rather uninterested in further exploring the distinction he has sketched, it is worth mentioning that Giovanni Talentoni’s Discorso on marvel, read in Milan in November of the same year that witnessed the publication of Pinciano’s dialogue, expands on a division of wonder into species, with the laughable being one of them. Both Pinciano and Talentoni had the precedent of Maggi’s treatise De ridiculis appended to the commentary published by the latter in 1550, which touched on similar issues. Lastly, Peregrini’s 1639 treatise Delle acutezze would discuss the possibility of a kind of wonder closely related to laughter and therefore tied to the idea of comedy as a genre.

It seems fair to conclude that Castelvetro’s commentary was extremely influential for the restoration of wonder as a necessary ingredient of the plot. Wonder obtained a place, together with pity and fear, in the definition of tragedy and, whether as origin or intensifier of feelings like the ones mentioned, it became the counterpart of imitation as a requirement for a poem to...

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154 “Esta admiración que dezís ser tan necessaria, dividese en especies, o es solamente una? Ugo dixo: Sí, tres especies ay de admiraciones, porque unas son ni alegres, ni tristes como el buelo de Pegaso, otras trágicas y tristes como la muerte de Príamo, y desventura de Hécuba. Otras son ridículas como las burlas entre Mercurio y Sosia”. López Pinciano, Obras completas, vol. 1, 200.

155 However, the ascription to genres according to the kind of wonder found in a reversal is not intended as definitive, since, for example, Heliodorus’ Historia Ethiopica –which Pinciano considers to be a case of epic– shows his author in such a light that “no one excels more in tragic delight” (“ninguno tiene más deleite tragico”). López Pinciano, Obras completas, vol. 1, 461.

156 Talentoni’s treatise classifies a wonder of the third kind in connection with the ridiculous and therefore appropriate to comedy. To arrive at this, he draws inspiration partly from his theory of wonder and partly from Vincenzo Maggi’s De ridiculis (1550). Talentoni, Discorso, 54. Peregrini’s treatise on wit also separates serious and ridiculous wonder as the form of witty sayings of “acutezze”. Matteo Peregrini, Delle acutezze, che altrimenti spiri, vivezze, e concetti, volgarmente si appellano (Genova: Gio. Maria Farroni, Nicolò Pesagni, & Pier Francesco Barbieri, 1639), 61-63.
operate upon the audience the effect aimed at. Moreover, even though Castelvetro and later Denores referred to wonder as instrumental for the end of tragedy, they popularized the idea that it might also serve as a sort of end in itself, being a source of pleasure and a proof of the wit of the author:

With the arrow of wonder, poets hit the target of which they aim at—a twofold sign, insofar as it is partly near, and partly far. Nearer is the goal of moving fear and pity, or pleasure at deserved evil. Further is the goal of attracting the favor of the people, or of getting the victory over their rivals.157

Wonder at the wit of the poet—as Erycius Puteanus would put it in the early years of the seventeenth century—is a shaft.158 It may well have a function in the poem—as catalyst or intensifier of pity and fear—but it is ultimately called to become independent and perform as the arrow that awakes the audience to the consideration of the poem as the result of the poet’s wit put to work. Castelvetro, moreover, went even further as he pointed to wit’s ability to gain the sympathy of the audience, becoming a factor in the constitution of what Aristotle called the character of the speaker, helping him win over his rivals.159

4. Wonder between order and irrationality (9, 1452a and 24, 1460a)

With wonder as the ingredient that turns imitations “poetic”, it is only understandable that sixteenth-century scholars would address the question as to what is responsible for wonder to

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157 “Toccano adunque i poeti con la saetta della maraviglia il segno delle cose desiderate, il quale segno è doppio, perciocché l’uno è vicino, & l’altro più lontano. Più vicino è il segno di volere muovere spavento & compassione o compiacimento per miseria meritata. Più lontano è il segno di volere essi accattare il favore popolare, o di volere essere dichiarati per vittoriosi sopra i suoi avversari”. Castelvetro, Poetica, 221r-222v.
158 See chapter four, section three.
159 See chapter four, section two for a discussion of the reasons why wit may reinforce the relation of sympathy between the poles of emission and reception of a speech.
appear. As seems natural, commentators turned for this to the occurrences of wonder ("τὸ θαυμαστὸν") in Aristotle’s Poetics – namely 9, 1452a and 24, 1460a.

The former is no doubt the closest to a theory of wonder’s role in the plot to be found in the Poetics and has been referred to more than once in the sections that precede. Wonder, it reads, results from unity of action coinciding with the unexpected. This means that whenever events respond to relations of cause and effect – so that things happen because of one another ("δι᾽ ἀλληλα") according to probability, or necessity – but in a way, if only at first sight, which results in surprising and challenging what the audience expects, then they appear paradoxical.160

In line with the role of wonder as intensifier, as discussed above, Castelvetro writes that actions are more pitiful and fearful when they are wonderful because men stumble into them precisely through those ways by which they think to be escaping them, and especially if the end of the one is the beginning of the other, such as it was said before in the example of Oedipus, who (because it had been predicted to him that he would kill his father and lie with his mother) moved away from Corinth, where he held for certain that both his father and mother lived; and thinking to himself that distance ought to make him safe from both crimes, he made nonetheless a mistake insofar as this was precisely that which led him to commit them.161

160 In the case of tragedy, “fearful and pitiable matters […] arise above all when events occur contrary to expectation yet on account of one another” (“καὶ φοβερῶν καὶ ἐλεημονῶν, ταῦτα δὲ γίνεται καὶ μᾶλλον ὅταν γένηται παρὰ τὴν ὀδόξαν δι᾽ ἀλληλα”). Aristotle, “Poetics”, 62-63, § 9, 1452a. Sometimes the commentators had trouble setting apart things merely following one another (“μετ᾽ ἀλληλα”) from those being born of one another. See, for example, Robortello, In librum Aristotelis, 99-100, quoted in Vega Ramos, “El azar y la maravilla”, 137-138. Likewise, as noted by Terence Cave, Robortello excepted comedy from the requirement that reversal and recognition originate from relations of causality and admitted chance on the authority of Terence’s works. Cave, Recognitions, 59; see Robortello, In librum Aristotelis, 103-104. As modern critics often point out, unexpectedness and paradox in the events are to be considered from the point of view of the character, which is often made that of the audience as well. For example, Oedipus’ story, when considered with every bit of information about it, makes perfect sense. If it brings about surprise and wonder, it is because the audience is brought to partake of Oedipus’ ignorance of the facts as crucial as the identity of the person – his father – whom he has killed at a crossroads. For the role of perspective in the relation between causality and paradox in connection with Aristotle’s ideas on tragedy, see, for instance, Heath, “The Universality of Poetry in Aristotle’s Poetics”, 393 and passim.

161 “Maravigliose perché gli huomini v’incappano per quelle vie, per le quali essi dirittamente si credono fuggirle, & spetialmente se il fine d’una via sia il principio dell’altra si come di sopra fu dato l’esempio in Edipo, il quale essendogli stato predetto che egli doveva uccidere il padre, & giacere con la madre s’allontana da Coranto, dove haveva per cosa certissima che il padre & la madre habitassero, & dandosi ad intender che la via della lontananza lo
Oedipus’ story illustrates wonder as it happens in a case in which the sequence of events leads the character in a direction from which his choices were supposed to keep him safe. As such, the outcome is of a kind that results in the unconceivable, at least until the character learns pieces of information of which the ignorance allowed him to commit a crime while remaining unaware of it. However, it would take a comparison with alternative patterns of wonder-making for sixteenth-century commentators to reduce multiplicity to a method. The case of Mitys’ statue was particularly helpful. According to the Poetics, the statue representing Mitys would fall upon the murderer of the latter, creating the appearance that something as deprived of will as a statue had purposefully taken revenge on behalf of Mitys himself. The statue seems to have acted out of will and premeditation. While this is certainly surprising and unexpected, it also fulfills the requirement of causality as soon as ideas such as fate, or the will of a god, replace a reading of the story as resulting from chance, or even the apparent nonsense of claiming that objects have will.

Castelvetro was less interested in the philosophical or theological implications deriving from a model like this, than in devising a method to combine ingredients in ways that might turn...

dovessi sicurare dall’uno, & dall’altro misfatto in tanto prende errore che quella via fu che lo condusse a commettergli”. Castelvetro, Poetica, 131r.

162 Giason Denores glosses in the same way the role of reversal in the plot as a device that awakes wonder by deceiving expectation. Reversal is “a verisimilar or necessary upheaval of our actions, taking place contrary to our plan and imagination. Oedipus flees from Corinth in order not to kill Polypus, whom he firmly believed was his father, and thus in the road he kills precisely Laius, who was his real father” (“una verisimile o ver necessaria rivoluzion delle nostre azioni al contrario del nostro disegno et imaginazione. Fugge Edippo da Corinto per non uccider Polipo, che fermamente teneva per suo padre, et uccide appunto per strada Laio che veramente era suo padre”). Denores, “Discorso”, 393.

163 Castelvetro, Poetica, 131v. For the problems of punctuation of the passage about Mitys’ statue, which, in turn, bear on the interpretation of the passage, see Vega Ramos, “El azar y la maravilla”, 130-131.

164 For the consideration of patterns of causality acting over the will of the characters as a requirement to avoid the appearance of chance, see Heath, “The Universality of Poetry in Aristotle’s Poetics”, especially 393-394.
a plot wonder-inspiring.\textsuperscript{165} He described a set of schemes able to host all the modalities of wonder, differentiated from one another according to degrees of unexpectedness.\textsuperscript{166} By emphasizing the contrast between aim and outcome as the source of wonder, Castelvetro ended up minimizing Aristotle’s precaution as the latter asserted, for instance, that if misfortune were to happen to someone perfectly good this would be shocking but not tragic.\textsuperscript{167} Once again, Castelvetro appears to prioritize the search for surprise—intimately linked with wonder—over considerations more directly related to those that awake pity and fear.

In Castelvetro’s system, for animals and inanimate beings—as with Mitys’ statue—wonder results from the appearance of reason and will in subjects deprived of either.\textsuperscript{168} For people, conversely, what appears wonderful is the existence of a will interfering with that of the character.\textsuperscript{169}

\textsuperscript{165} On the contrary, Robortello had shown himself concerned with the role adopted by notions such as fate and providence according to the way causality comes to be understood in tragedy. As pointed out by Vega Ramos and Terence Cave, Robortello resorted to Aristotle’s \textit{Physica} 2.4-6, as well as to \textit{Posterior Analytics} I and Philoponus’ commentary of the latter, which provided him with clues about the different connections of causality that may exist among things and, therefore, among the events linked in the plot. \textit{Consensio}—the belief that the different works of Aristotle mutually illuminate each other—fed Robortello’s attempt to frame the role of wonder in the plot within the context of perspective that might be consistent from both a philosopohical and a theological perspective. See Vega Ramos, “El azar y la maravilla”, 132; and also Cave, \textit{Recognitions}, 60.

\textsuperscript{166} Vega Ramos has described Castelvetro’s exposition in terms of “a table of tragic possibilities in which Castelvetro does not want to leave any empty sport” (“un cuadro de posibilidades trágicas en el que no quiere dejar ninguna casilla vacía”). Vega Ramos, “El azar y la maravilla”, 144-145. Castelvetro’s commentary is characteristically illustrated with numerous diagrams—tables, trees and schemes—which place before the eyes the relationships between elements that are constitutive of poems. This may be seen as a proof that Castelvetro was familiar with the currents inspired by the popularity of Petrus Ramus’ teachings in Paris in the decades of 1550 and 1560. The influence of Ramism would be even more obvious in Denores’ \textit{Poetica} (1588), which presents itself as a reduction of Aristotle’s \textit{Poetics} to logical exposition and employs diagrams of the kind usually associated with the influence of Ramus in the second half of the sixteenth century. For the role of diagrams and trees in sixteenth-century poetical and rhetorical treatises, seen as an alliance between the printing press and a conception of knowledge as a method of places whose relations can be glanced at on the page, see Lina Bolzoni, \textit{La stanza della memoria. Modelli letterari e iconografici nell’età della stampa} (Torino: Einaudi, 1995). For the importance of Ramism in the development of a model of learning focused on the relation between logic and visual representation, see Walter J. Ong, \textit{Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue, from the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958).

\textsuperscript{167} For this point see Minsaas, “Poetic Marvels”, 156.

\textsuperscript{168} Castelvetro, \textit{Poetica}, 127r.

\textsuperscript{169} The temptation to consider the mechanism of wonder as propitious to foster the belief that Providence is at work behind reversals of fortune seemed to be inevitable for some of those who otherwise followed closer to Castelvetro’s position. Giason Denores claimed that reversal (“peripezia”) is powerful as an instrument to make people
This is how Castelvetro conceives of the wonder resulting from the story of Oedipus – who committed a crime without awareness of it and thanks to his attempt to escape from evil – in comparison to the story of someone who willfully errs. Even if both represent a series of calamities,

in the first one nonetheless, thanks both to the chain with which events are knotted to each other, and to the novelty they bear, they seem to be ordered with a purpose, and after wise deliberation, and not randomly or by chance [italics added].

The existence of a plan – some reason, as opposed to mere chance – is distinctive of wonder as it originates out of a sequence of actions: it may be something that acts as though there was a purpose where there should be none, or that a cause above the human imposes itself upon the events in spite of men. In both cases – and this constitutes the common ground to which the mechanism of wonder seems to be reducible – the audience wonders at a cause that had remained concealed and, consequently, the spectator had been unable to anticipate.

Marvel, moreover, varies in intensity according to whether the outcome is only different from, or also contrary to, intention. Should the latter be random, or indifferent to results, it

170 “Non dimeno l’una per la catena, con la quale sono annodate insieme e per la novità sua paiono ordinate da consiglio, & da savia deliberazione, & non temerariamente o dal caso” [italics added]. Castelvetro, Poetica, 131v. In fact, modern scholarship agrees that it is chance that Aristotle bans from tragedy. Vega Ramos points to Aristotle’s Rhetoric 1.10, 1369a32-34 as a source commonly produced to make this point. Aristotle explains there that events with indefinite or no cause are the opposite to probability or necessity, insofar as, in a framework where knowledge is always of causes, those remain unintelligible and therefore unsuitable for the plot – which, unlike history writing, has no place for accidents and only for causally bound, meaningful events. See Vega Ramos, “El azar y la maravilla”, 130; and Minsaas, “Poetic Marvels”, 156.

171 As Castelvetro and other commentators gloss this passage, they bear in mind Aristotle’s opposition between things happening by design (“ἐξίτησις”) and those happening by chance (“ἀπὸ τύχης”). Aristotle, “Poetics”, 62-63, §9, 1452a. For a discussion of what Aristotle might have considered causal relations and what not, see Heath, “The Universality of Poetry in Aristotle’s Poetics”, 393-396.

172 As will result from late sixteenth-century theories of wonder and later on from Gracián’s treatise on wit, there is a relation between the wonder at causes previously unknown and the admiration at the way such a cause operates once it has been known. In other words, there is continuity between the surprise at Oedipus’ fate and the admiration towards the craft of the poet who devised the plot.
follows that the event may diverge only moderately from expectation. The principle here at play
is one already familiar to us. We have seen it stated by Castelvetro in connection with the ability
of poets to show excellence as they overcome difficulty and surpass the form in which a plot is
handed to them. The work of wit is made visible against the backdrop of difficulty and it awakes
wonder because of that; therefore, it should come as no surprise that unexpectedness in the
outcome of actions may be marvelous insofar as it directly challenges the course of action
conceived by the character and, therefore, the audience. 173

The preceding may suffice in connection with Poetics 9, 1452a. The second appearance of the
word for wonder in Aristotle’s Poetics happens in 24, 1460a.

The paragraph in question presented scholars with serious interpretive difficulties, which
eventually resulted in Pietro Vettori’s emendation of Aldo Manuzio’s Greek text. Yet, as I will
discuss below, Vettori’s solution to the problem came at the expense of creating and opening for
debate what some scholars considered to be a contradiction in Aristotle’s thought. As a matter of
fact, Vettori’s emendation is significant insofar as it sealed a connection between wonder and the
irrational that was absent from and even unnecessary to—for example—Castelvetro’s
commentary. The connection between marvel and the absurd, however, would remain central to
poetics during well into the early seventeenth century. Present in Pinciano’s 1596 Philosophía
antigua poética, it would inform the bulk of ideas on imitation and wonder found in milestones
such as the treatises by Jacopo Mazzoni and Torquato Tasso, both of them published in 1587. As

173 The logic that dictates contravention of what is usual to be productive of wonder applies also to relations among
characters. It explains, for example, that we feel greater wonder at Oedipus’ misfortunes—which result from human
error—than we would at the tragic end of someone being deceived by someone else. Deceit, Castelvetro writes, is a
common feature and therefore less surprising when it comes to understanding that which entailed the change of
fortune. Castelvetro, Poetica, 127v-128r. For Castelvetro’s incorporation of deceit in the theory of tragedy, see Vega
Ramos, “El azar y la maravilla”, 144-145.
I discuss below in Chapter Two, echoes of the debate would reach as far as the considerations about poetics contained in Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* Part one, as late as 1605.

In 24, 1460a, Aristotle granted epic poetry greater room for wonder than he allowed in the case of tragedy. The reason was, apparently, that in the former we do not see the agent acting on the stage, but only listen to the deeds he performed.

Aristotle had illustrated the prevalence of wonder in epics rather than tragedies with the episode from Homer’s *Iliad* containing what he calls “Achilles’ prosecution of Hector”. There Achilles makes a nod to his men in order that they leave the fight to him. As a result, the soldiers contemplate the action without intervening. According to Aristotle—at least as the commentators understood it—the scene, which appears wonderful in narration, would be ridiculous if staged.174

Prior to Vettori, commentators such as Robortello and Maggi had accepted both Aldo’s reading and Pazzi’s translation. So did Castelvetro in 1570, in spite of the example set by Vettori ten years earlier. What Pazzi understood and therefore translated, was the following:

> Causing wonder is suitable to tragedy, but even more to the epic poem, for of course this occurs proportionally. Accordingly, wonder is most suitable to the latter, for in it we do not see the agent himself [italics added].175

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174 Scholars had trouble identifying the episode referred to by Aristotle. Was Achilles or Hector the one who was prosecuting? Blame and refutation circulated in every direction, both in commentaries and even across some of the manuscript annotations that are extant on editions of the time—as with Filippo Sassetti’s *postille* to Piccolomini, *Annotationi*, 387, preserved today at Florence’s *Biblioteca Nazionale*, RARI.Post.15. Furthermore, identifying the episode was not the only problem that scholars had to face, for even among those who agreed that it was Achilles prosecuting Hector (and not the reverse), interpretations varied as to what exactly was laughable there. Only the acceptation of Vettori’s emendation provides evidence interior to the text as to how we are to understand Aristotle’s meaning, even though there were scholars who guessed right without that help—as in the case of Mazzoni, who rightly connected Aristotle’s observation with Horace’s advice not to stage certain sorts of actions. Mazzoni, *Della difesa*, 370.

Pazzi’s “proportionally” (“proportione”) translates “τὸ ἀνάλογον”, the reading found in Aldo’s text of 1508. The example from Homer’s Iliad offered a clue for commentators to infer something about the nature of the advantage that epic poetry held over tragedy in connection with wonder and yet the text itself remained meaningless and forced interpreters to come up with periphrases in order to somehow restore the meaning of it. This was so, at least, until Pietro Vettori emended “τὸ ἀλογον” (“irrationality”) for “τὸ ἀνάλογον” (“the analogy”, or, adverbially read, “by analogy”, as in Pazzi’s translation “proportione”). As was the case with Castelvetro’s emendation discussed earlier, Vettori’s replacement happened ope ingenii, that is, resulting from the understanding that the commentator had of the Poetics as a whole, such as would suggest to him what Aristotle had meant here. Once emended, the passage would read as follows:

Causing wonder therefore is convenient to tragedy; but what lacks reason, by means of which wonder happens for the most part, is more common to epic poetry, for [in the latter] they [the audience] do not see the agent [italics added].

The emendation did more than introducing a notion –the irrational or “τὸ ἀλογον”– that was absent from the passage in the way in which it had been transmitted so far. Vettori’s reading “τὸ ἀλογον”, moreover, made it possible to take the term not adverbially, as Pazzi had done in the case of “τὸ ἀνάλογον”, but rather as a noun. If Pazzi and those who followed had to read adverbially “τὸ ἀνάλογον”, this was because they did not see how to make sense of it as the antecedent to the relative clause “through which wonder mostly happens” (“ὅτι ὁ συμβαίνει μάλιστα τὸ θαυμαστόν”). Vettori, unlike them, had less trouble making irrationality a source of wonder and therefore placed “τὸ ἀλογον” (“irrationality”) precisely as the element that the

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176 “Oportet quidem igitur in tragedijs facere admirabile: magis etiam contingit in epopoeia quod ratione caret, ob quod evenit maxime id, quod admirable est, quia non spectant in eum, qui gerit”. Vettori, Commentarii, 255.
relative clause would be there to explain. Witness the way in which Vettori justified the emendation:

I read ἄλογον –instead of (as it used to be found in printed volumes) ἀνάλογον: for which word (if I am not wrong) there can be no place here in any way. Whereas, conversely, the term with which I replaced it fits wonderfully. Therefore I dared to emend it, compelled by the truth of the meaning. Because it cannot be doubted that below he [Aristotle] discusses what appears irrational and alien to reason […] Moreover, it is of no little help to my conjecture a passage very similar to this, found somewhat below, in which [examples like these] are openly called ἄλογα.177

Late sixteenth-century commentators tended to ignore Vettori’s emendation, which, nonetheless, others among his peers would greet with enthusiasm.178 It has been accepted, rather unanimously, by modern scholarship. 179

As announced earlier, Vettori’s intervention had the major implication of transforming irrationality into the main cause for wonder—and this, allegedly, by Aristotle’s own assertion.

177 “Lego enim ἄλογον: non plus ut prius in excusis erat, ἀνάλογον: cui verbo (nisi fallor) locus hic esse nullo modo potest: cum contra, illud, quod restitui, mirifice hoc loco quadret. quare ausus sum, veritate sententiae me hortante, ita emendare. Nam quin infra de eo, quod absonum videtur, & alienum a ratione, disputet, dubitare non potest... Adiuvat etiam non parum conjecturam meam locum huic valde similis, qui est paulo infra, ubi aperte ἄλογα appellatur”. Vettori, Commentarii, 256.

178 Castelvetro and Piccolomini would ignore Vettori’s emendation. See Castelvetro, La poética, 300v; Piccolomini, Annotationi, 386. So would, in the wake of Piccolomini, Ordóñez das Seyjas y Tovar. See Ordóñez das Seyjas y Tovar, La poética (1626), 64v-65r, and La poética (MS), 65r. Mazzoni rejected it as well, while seeing a connection with Horace’s advice in Ars poetica ll. 180-188 to avoid staging otherwise marvelous and awesome events: “The narrative poet more than anyone else should pursue the marvelous, as Aristotle wrote in the Poetics with these words […] It is necessary to awake wonder in tragedy, but this is more convenient in epic poetry, in a proportional way. For this same reason he adds that marvel often takes place when people are shown in an account, who, represented on the stage, would provoke laughter rather than marvel. This is confirmed with Horace: Let Medea not [kill] her children in the face of the people, etc.” (“il poeta narrativo deve specialmente seguitar il maraviglioso, come anchon ha detto Aristotelie nella poetica con queste parole [...] Adunque si dee nelle tragedia eccitare la maraviglia: ma più è lecto ciò nell’epopeia proportionatamente. E per questo medesimo soggiunge egli, che la maraviglia ha luogo molte volte nelle persone mostrate per racconto, le quali se fossero rappresentate recarìano più tosto riso, che maraviglia, e si conferma con Orazio, Nec pueros coram populo Medea etc.” Mazzoni, Della difesa, 370. As for those who would approve of the change, there are two volumes in Florence (Biblioteca Nazionale) containing manuscript annotations that prove that Vettori’s emendation was well known and accepted within scholarly circles. First, RARI.Post.39 contains Vettori’s edition of Aristotle’s Poetics—in Greek and without commentary—densely annotated by Alessandro Rinuccini, who writes next to Vettori’s emendation: “Vettori corrected it in this way, and I find him right” (“Ita correxit V[ettori] et sane placet”). Vettori, Ἀριστοτέλους, 27v. We have also the evidence of Filippo Sassetti’s annotations. Sassetti was a friend of Vettori who annotated a volume of Piccolomini’s commentary. As he approached this passage, he would add Vettori’s reading, in Greek, on the margin next to Piccolomini’s translation and without providing any further explanation.

179 It is accepted, for example, in Leonardo Tarán’s recent Editio maior. See Aristotle, Poetics, 210.
Assuming that irrationality suits wonder—which in turn is necessary to poetry—amounted to identifying a black hole at the core of the *Poetics*—especially in light of Aristotle’s explicit assertion that “stories should not comprise irrational components; ideally there should be no irrationality”. To reconcile irrationality—as the cause of wonder—with imitation as adherence to probability or necessity became a task that would passionately engage a generation of scholars.

Pinciano faced the conflict directly by opposing wonder and likelihood (“verisimilitud”) as a pair of contradictory ingredients of which poetics seeks the equilibrium. In fact, a character in *Philosophia antiqua poética* remarks that there seems to be contradiction between a thing being simultaneously wonderful and likely. Likelihood had become the keyword that governed what sixteenth-century readers of Aristotle understood as imitation. In Pinciano’s words, “likelihood […] is so necessary that, wherever it were missing, the soul and the form of poetry would be missing too, because s/he who fails to make a certain action likely does not imitate anyone”. A poet who imitates actions that cannot take place imitates nothing. However, for someone like Pinciano, who—as discussed in section three—was also a proponent for the idea that only through wonder does the plot move the audience, it followed that it was necessary to

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180 "Τούς τε λόγους μὴ συνιστάσθαι ἐκ μερῶν ἄλογων, ἄλλα μάλλον μὲν μηδὲν ἐχθεν ἄλογον”. Aristotle, “Poetics”, 124-125, §24, 1460a. The Jesuit Martín Antonio Del Río seems to have thought about this when he described the need for tragedy to avoid irrationality in terms of distance from the norm of nature, posited as a rule for an imitation to be such: “Let it not contain anything monstrous or portentous, insofar as monsters, however terrible, they are incompatible with nature. Tragedy, in turn, imitates natural and human actions” (“nihil tamen monstrificum vel portentosum continent. Monstra enim quamvis terribilia sint, naturae tamen repugnant: tragedia vero naturales & humanas actionis imitatur”). Martín Antonio Del Río, *Martini Antonii Delrii ex Societate Iesu Syntagma tragoediae latinae: in tres partes distinctum* (Antuerpiae: ex Officina Plantiniana, apud Viduam & Ioannem Moretum, MDXCIII [1593]), 20.


182 "La verosimilitud yo digo que es tan necessaria, que adonde falta ella falta el ánima de la poética y forma, porque el que no hace acción verisímil, a nadie imita”. López Pinciano, *Obras completas*, vol. 1, 201.

183 López Pinciano, *Obras completas*, vol. 1, 201. This seems to echo, in a certain way, Aristotle’s notion for the field of diction, that the excess in the analogies obtained with metaphors resulted in “attaching impossibilities to a description of real things”. Aristotle, “Poetics”, 110-111, §22, 1458a. Ordóñez translated as follows: “For a speech to have enigmatic form means that it is composed of impossible things (“aquel hablar tendrá forma enigmática, que fuere compuesto de cosas imposibles”). Ordóñez das Seyjas y Tovar, *La poética* (1626), 57r.
somehow reconcile likelihood and wonder—even with the latter conceived as the offspring of the unlikely.

For Pinciano, the contradiction that sets likelihood against wonder is only one within a series of tensions that inform the composition of a plot. For the latter to remain simultaneously one and varied, he proposed that episodes be inserted into a sequence otherwise unitary; in order that it may be perturbing and simultaneously appeasing, Pinciano resorted to a notion of catharsis, which, although never thoroughly explained, made possible a transition from pity and fear to the purgation of emotions. As for the plot being likely yet wonderful, Pinciano had nothing conclusive to say, but simply stated: “The poet must cause wonder in such a way that s/he does not abandon the terms of likeness of truth”.\footnote{“Así que el poeta de tal manera debe ser admirable, que no salga de los términos de la semejanza a verdad”. López Pinciano, \textit{Obras completas}, vol. 1, 201.}

In fact, Aristotle’s \textit{Poetics} never does state that such a tension \textit{needs} to be solved other than case-by-case. He had advocated the need to obtain a sort of equilibrium between extremities, which he explained through a solution in which the distinction between matter and plot—the sequence of events carved out of the matter—appears crucial. If poets cannot do without the irrational, at least the latter, Aristotle stated, “should lie outside the plot” (“ἐξω τοῦ μυθεόματος”).\footnote{Aristotle, \textit{“Poetics”}, 124-5, §24, 1460a.} To illustrate this, Aristotle refers to parts of Oedipus’ story that are acceptable because they happened in a time prior to what the audience is presented with and nonetheless set the ground for reversals that fill spectators with wonder.\footnote{In general, the commentators followed Robortello in order to clarify the reference to absurdities in Oedipus’ story. Robortello translates “τὸ ἄλογον” as “absonum”, that is, “things that do not fit reason, and do not suit either the opinion of the readers or that of the listeners” (“non quadrant rationi, neque cum legentium, aut audientium mente conveniunt”). According to Robortello, the fact that Oedipus has not heard the story of how Laius was murdered before the moment he does “is entirely absurd and not at all fitting to reason; and, as Aristotle says, completely ἄλογον”. Robortello, \textit{In librum Aristotelis}, 286.} The distinction between interiority and exteriority of the plot grants the poet all the advantages of irrationality—such as the power to
inspire wonder—while simultaneously avoiding drawbacks such as the coldness with which the audience would receive what seems implausible to them.

Yet Aristotle also contemplates the case when a poet needs to deal face to face with irrationality in order to make a plot effective by means of wonder. In cases like these, when something absurd enters the plot, they have to keep the latter acceptable. To exemplify this, Aristotle resorts to an episode in book XIII of Homer’s *Odyssey*, which he claims to contain irrational elements (“τὰ ἄλογα”). These, he writes, “would clearly be intolerable if a bad poet were to poetize; [but] as it is, the poet makes use of his other virtues to soften and disguise the absurdity” [italics added]. What follows then is a passage apparently implying that by “the other virtues” (“τοῖς ἄλλοις ἄγαθοῖς”) Aristotle intends diction or style, a factor able to obscure the meaning of words so as to cover, or distract the attention from anything unlikely.

Passages like those characterize the duty of the poet to bring about wonder in balance with a constituent that may divert the attention of the audience from a factor of irrationality, which in turn is responsible for wonder in the first place. Should the plot contain something excessively bold, diction will hide it. Aristotle is explicit about this when he writes about style.

For the field of elocution he describes as “mixing” (“κέκρασθαι”) the procedure that poets and orators use to conciliate the excess of strangeness that results from metaphors with the banality and familiarity of the proper way of speaking. Aristotle pointed to equilibrium and the

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188 “Ἀποκρύπτει γὰρ πάλιν ἡ λίαν λαμπρὰ λέξις τά τε ἢθη καὶ τὰς διανοίας” (“a highly brilliant diction, on the other hand, obscures character and thought”). Aristotle, “Poetics”, 124-125, §24, 1460b. This seems to have inspired Castelvetro, as he wrote that poets make the absurd tolerable with “the splendor of a noble speech” (“splendore di nobile favella”). Castelvetro, *Poetica*, 130r. Ordóñez translates: “Illustrating absurdity with speeches, and beautiful artifices, [the poet] turns it smooth” (“ilustrando el absurdo con discursos, y hermosos artificios le hace parecer suave”). Ordóñez das Seyjas y Tovar, *La poética* (1626), 67r. For Aristotle’s permisiveness towards the inclusion of a certain degree of irrationality that threatens the universal with which poetics is concerned, see Malcolm Heath, “Cognition in Aristotle’s Poetics”, *Mnemosyne* 62 (2009): 71.
achievement of a middle point between extremes. Tension and a precarious stability between irreconcilable ends were, so to speak, the hardest and most important duties of a poet.

As a rule, sixteenth-century scholars were generally compliant with a conception that sees the art of poetry as a walk on a tightrope in which vacillation, however slight, may lead to failure. Someone as moderate as Vettori does not hesitate to describe in terms of dissimulation the process by which poets use the brightness of metaphors in order to divert attention from the irrationality of the actions they imitate. Vettori concluded the passage he had just emended by glossing on style as a means to disguise absurdity:

[Absurdity] goes unnoticed in narration, and remains concealed to the auditor. However, this is not the case in action [sc. on the stage], in which the entire thing lies before the eyes of the spectators.¹⁹⁰

The preceding would remain incomplete without giving Castelvetro a chance to recapitulate. As mentioned above, the emphasis he places on inspiring wonder in the audience has to do almost invariably with the feeling towards connections of causality crafted in such a way that they appear unexpected and new. In section two it has been argued that the surprise experienced at the disparity between the plan and the outcome of actions fosters the impression that there is some kind of reason governing the events above that of the characters –so as to prompt some scholars, such as Denores, to see here a way of instilling the belief that there is some kind of Divine Providence above the will of men. This is in stark contrast with the kind of wonder highlighted by Vettori’s emendation, which results, conversely, from the lack of reason and the absurdity of

something. In turn, this causes the poet to handle each of them differently: while the first becomes the object of attention of the audience in the form of reversals, recognitions and, in general, the climax of the poem, the second has to be obscured, engaging the attention of the reader anywhere else. Commenting upon Poetics 24, 1460a, Castelvetro adds a distinction between the relation of each of the two kinds of wonder and the art of poetics:

Aristotle speaks here of the lack of convenience that is found in what is impossible and incredible, rather than of the error in the constitution of the plot; for [the latter] is not tolerable and cannot be rendered tolerable in any way, since it is a fault of the art of the poet, while the lack of convenience in what is impossible, and incredible can be made tolerable in many ways, especially when the plot has a lot of parts worthy of praise, and if the part that is not convenient is accompanied of other meanings, and of diction so bright as to attract the sight of the onlookers and bring it far from what was not convenient.  

Castelvetro makes a distinction between two sorts of absurd: in the sequence of events, and in the things themselves, the first having to do with the logic of causality and the second with the beliefs of the audience. A consecutive sequence of events should be equally logical for audiences of every kind, while readers and listeners may differ as to whether something is credible or not, depending on beliefs that are part of the education of each person.

Castelvetro applies here Aristotle’s distinction between faults that are proper to the art (“κατὰ τὴν τέχνην”) and those that are not (“κατ’ ἄλλο”). Absurdity is unacceptable in the logic that links the events, because the latter belongs to the art of the poet, who, conversely, is allowed to disguise and even profit from the irrational whenever it appears in the poem but does not result from the art s/he is commended for, which has to do with composing events into plots.

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191 “Aristotele parla qui di quelle sconvenevolezze, le quali si contengono nella 'impossibilità, & nella 'incredibilità & non nel nocumento della constitutione della favola conciosiacosa che [questa] non sia tolerabile né si possa far divenire tolerabile per via niuna poiché è peccato dell'arte propria del poeta & le sconvenevolezze della 'impossibilità, & della 'incredibilità possano divenire tolerabili per più vie, & spetialmente se la favola ha molte parti lodevoli, & se la parte sconvenevole è accompagnata da altri sensi, & da favella di tanta luce che possa tirare in sé la vista da’ riguardanti & rimuoverla da riguardare nella sconvenevolezza”. Castelvetro, Poetica, 316v.

What I find extremely relevant is that Castelvetro’s clarification also entails the conclusion that wonder originating in the connection among the events is the only one that actually belongs to poetics, with the other playing spuriously and somehow parasitically to the art. That is why, as Jacopo Mazzoni would explain in his treatise of 1587, the only way that poets may be commended and praised for wonder at things that are absurd is, paradoxically, by making these pass unnoticed.

The distinction here sketched is extremely relevant: it would linger in the background of debates that since the decade of 1580 would increasingly highlight the role of wonder in poetics, as well as the centrality of the wit of the poet taken as a source for it. According to the preference that each scholar grants the one or the other, they will produce characterizations of poetics that are entirely different from one another and acquire contours that clash in almost irresoluble conflict, even when they speak, somehow, to a common core of concerns –namely how poetry is pleasant and how the wit and the art of the poet become protagonists of a new way of understanding what today we call aesthetics.
Near the end of *Don Quixote* Part One (1605), while the hero is being carried back home by his friends from the village, they meet a canon of Toledo who famously delivers a speech that acts somehow as a brief treatise on poetics. The views expounded by the canon, which some identify with Cervantes’s—others contest this—contain a nuanced diatribe against chivalric romance.¹⁹³

The point made by the canon has the flavor of late sixteenth-century debates. It serves as a comment on the state of things current in the discipline at the moment we ended Chapter One. According to him,

*fictional stories should fit the understanding of their readers. They should be written so that by making impossibilities seem easy and marvels seem straightforward and by enthralling the mind, they amaze and astonish, gladden and entertain, so that wonder and pleasure go hand in hand; and none of these can be achieved by the writer who forsakes verisimilitude and imitation, because the perfection of all writing consists in these two qualities* [italics added].¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ The relationship between the canon’s stated ideas and those, barely implicit, that Cervantes may have wished to express, has been the object of long debates. Forcione has made the case for the notion that Cervantes projected in the position of the canon the commonplaces of late sixteenth-century Aristotelian theory, while expounding in his own practice the former’s shortcomings: “In acknowledging that the audience can decide to believe, Cervantes suggests that the fundamental misfocus in the neo-Aristotelians’ approach to the problem of belief lies in their concentration on the objects of imitation rather than on the reader’s apprehension of those objects”. Alban Forcione, *Cervantes, Aristotle, and the “Persiles”* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 253-254.


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The quotation above presents us with a conception of poetics that requires the coexistence in the poem of wonder and likelihood. If the canon postulates that “impossibilities” are to be smoothed instead of erased, it is because they are still required in order for marvel to take place, and to delight the audience.

The conception of poetics as a sort of equilibrium and a struggle between verisimilitude and the impossible brings us back to the emendation introduced by Pietro Vettori in 1560, when he turned the irrational –what is impossible according to reason– into the main source of wonder.

As described in Chapter One, the commentators had offered brief hints, inspired by Aristotle’s *Poetics*, as to how the poet may conceal or dissimulate the component of impossibility that makes the poem wonderful.\(^{195}\) First among the resources was camouflaging the absurd by diverting attention to style, while second in importance came what one might call a trick, through which the component of irrationality was placed outside the plot –present, yet at the same time latent.

There is little doubt that when the canon of Toledo refers to “making impossibilities seem easy” –or, as the original says, make them flat, as one would obstacles protruding on a road– he conceives the poet’s task as involved with handling absurdity with deftness and skill so as to have it beget the feeling of wonder while itself going more or less unnoticed.

At the closure of Chapter One, I quoted Castelvetro as he summarized the existence of two sorts of wonder: one was internal to the poem, derived from a sequence of events governed by causal links of probability or necessity, yet leading to outcomes that appear unexpected. As such, it was proper to the art of the poet –“κατὰ τὴν τέχνην”, in Aristotle’s terms. The other, external and accidental to poetics, resulted from objects or events that fail to agree with the beliefs of the audience: things that are wonderful because they clash intriguingly against the beliefs of the audience: things that are wonderful because they clash intriguingly against the audience.

\(^{195}\) See Chapter One, section four.
horizon of expectations that readers or listeners bring to the poem, rather than as a consequence of a plot crafted with art and ingenuity.

The views of the canon of Toledo correspond with the kind of wonder that Castelvetro characterized as external to poetics. The ideas he expounds come as no surprise, modeled as they are upon late sixteenth-century Italian debates on chivalric poems, or romanzo—the genre that, together with Heliodorus’ *Historia Ethiopianica*, provides us with references for Cervantes’s theorization of the virtues of a work of fiction.\(^{196}\) Starting with Giraldi Cinzio’s ideas in the 1550s and culminating, in the 1580s, with the polemic on whether preeminence should be granted to Lodovico Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso* or to Torquato Tasso’s *Gerusalemme liberata*, the genre of romanzo tended to associate wonder with the occurrence of preternatural or supernatural events and creatures, rather than with the kind of virtuosity displayed by the poet as s/he handles the logic of events, such as Castelvetro had praised—following, in that at least, Aristotle’s own preference.\(^{197}\)

*Romanzi*, in fact, were generally discussed within a framework that foregrounded issues related to Vettori’s emendation, studied above, which made the irrational the source of wonder *par excellence*. It is the popularity of debates like these that has sometimes caused them to become exemplar of sixteenth-century attitudes towards verisimilitude and wonder, even if they represent only a part of it, however relevant they may be. In line with this, we may consider

\(^{196}\) For the relationship between marvel and verisimilitude in Cervantes, in connection with the notions common in poetics at the time, see Riley, *Cervantes’s Theory of the Novel*, 179-199. Following Riley, Eisenberg suggests that Cervantes’s ideas on the marvelous were influenced by Torquato Tasso’s ideas, but through the mediation of Pinciano’s *Philosophia antiqua poetica* (1596). See Daniel Eisenberg, “Cervantes and Tasso Reexamined”, *Kentucky Romance Quarterly* 31 (1984): especially 305-306; also Antonio Armisén, “Admiración y maravillas en ‘El Criticón’ (más unas notas cervantinas)”, in *Gracián y su época: Actas de la I Reunión de Filólogos Aragoneses* (1985), ed. Manuel Alvar, (Zaragoza: Institución Fernando el Católico, 1986), and Forcione, *Cervantes, Aristotle, and the “Persiles”*, 212-256.

\(^{197}\) I have mentioned above that, in the prologue to his manuscript of the *Poetics*, Ordóñez referred to works engaging in the polemics over the genre of “romanzo” that took place in late sixteenth-century Italy. The texts he mentions are now obscure, and the fact that Ordóñez knew them attests to the awareness of the debates in question among learned men across the Spanish and Italian peninsulas. See Chapter One, section one.
Daniel Javitch’s opinion, as he stated that the tendency to understand Aristotle’s *Poetics* through the prism of Horace, and to apply to poetics a series of concerns borrowed from rhetoric, had the consequence that the reaction of the audience to the plot was understood in terms of credibility – that is, according to the beliefs of the listeners. According to him, sixteenth-century commentators “modified Aristotle’s call for probability [*eikos*], a concept that bears on the logical sequence and intelligibility of a plot, into a requirement of verisimilitude, a notion that bears on the relation of what the poet represents to the beliefs of the audience”.  

I suggest that, considering Castelvetro’s comment – quoted at the end of Chapter One – on *Poetics* 24, 1460a, it seems more accurate to say that there was awareness of a difference between probability and necessity in the logic of the plot, and credibility according to belief, as well as of the fact that wonder may arise from either, and under different conditions. While some, like Castelvetro, were able to trace a line between one and the other, many would simply favor one of them. Moreover, it is also worth mentioning that “credibility” was as present in Aristotle’s *Poetics* as was probability, taken as the logic of the plot, even though Aristotle referred to it as a remedy rather than as a rule. As Jacopo Mazzoni would repeat *ad nauseam* – and he is far from being the only one to do it –, we read in *Poetics* 24, 1460a that “things probable though impossible should be preferred to the possible but implausible”. Since it makes no sense to speak of something simultaneously probable and impossible, sixteenth-century scholars understood that here Aristotle’s “*eikóta*” referred not to probability as it is conceived in logic, but to credibility according to belief – something that appears from Aristotle’s

198 Javitch, “The assimilation of Aristotle’s *Poetics*”, 56.
199 “Προαιρεσθήτω τε δεῖ άδύνατα εικότα μᾶλλον ἢ δύνατά ἀπίθανα”. Aristotle, “Poetics”, 122-125, §24, 1460a. For the opposition between logic causality and credibility considered as sources of wonder, see Minsaas, “Poetic Marvels”, 151.
development of the idea when he explicitly says that the impossible may cater to “(general) opinion” (“πρὸς τὴν δόξαν”) in order to become acceptable.200

In what follows, I will study how, starting in the 1580s, scholars resumed the work of the commentators on Aristotle’s Poetics in a direction that placed wonder as the ingredient that defines poetry and sets it apart from any other use of language, such as history, rhetoric, or philosophy. Moreover, I will demonstrate that the principles that theoreticians of poetics individuated as related to the exercise of wonder and to the pleasure that results from it culminate in Castelvetro’s intuition in 1570 that a poem is pleasant insofar as it makes noticeable for the audience the acuity of the wit of the poet. Attesting to this, I will establish bridges between late sixteenth-century scholars on poetics, such as Jacopo Mazzoni and Francesco Patrizi, and seventeenth-century Jesuit theoreticians on the faculty of wit itself, like Maciej K. Sarbiewski, Matteo Peregrini, and Baltasar Gracián. Acting as a hinge between the two realms just mentioned, I will consider Giovanni Talentoni’s Discorso sopra la maraviglia, read in Milan in 1596, which somehow recapitulates the ideas of Patrizi and foresees those of Sarbiewski and Peregrini. Closing with Gracián, in turn, has the advantage that he explicitly rescues the activity of composing a plot, and therefore of the competence proper to a poet, according to Aristotle, and reintroduces it within a theory of wit. This, if nothing else, grants meaningfulness and a degree, even if partial, of circularity to the path entered upon at the beginning of Chapter One.

200 Aristotle, “Poetics”, 134-135, §25, 1461b. In fact, reestablishing the symmetry of the opposition, Vettori suggested that Aristotle intended not the probable (“eikóς”), but the credible (“πιθανόν”), which is the contrary of incredible (“ἀπιθανόν”). He writes: “It seems clear enough that we should understand eikóς as if it were πιθανόν: for δόνατα [possible things] are the opposite of that which he called ἀδύνατα [impossible things], and likewise ἀπίθανα [incredible things] would be the contrary of that which he called εἰκότα [improbable things]” (“capere vero ipsum hic eikóς pro πιθανόν perspicitur satis aperte: ut enim δόνατα contrarium est eius, quod dixerat ἀδύνατα, ita ἀπίθανα, eius, quod vocarat εἰκότα”). Vettori, Commentarii, 260.
As I develop the link between wonder and acuity of wit, the divergences heretofore sketched concerning the preferred source of wonder—an either virtuosity in logically connecting events that result in unexpectedness, or the skill to conceal the irrationality of things that are marvelous insofar as they challenge the expectations and beliefs that the audience brings to the poem—will define different and often conflicting contours of the way in which the poem becomes a vehicle for the acuity of wit of the poet to be noticed. While I aim at carefully distinguishing the consequences of each position in connection to the faculty of wit, I am also committed to restricting the exposition to aspects that are relevant to the relationship between late sixteenth-century notions on the wonders of poetry and seventeenth-century theories of the acuity of wit.

1. Wonder in late sixteenth-century poetics: between knowledge, logic, and deceit

Whenever it came to the question—an increasingly urgent in light of the late sixteenth-century taste for the marvelous—of the reconciliation between wonder and verisimilitude in a poem, Torquato Tasso’s position in Discorsi dell’arte poetica (1587) became a point of reference. No one could have been surprised to find Lope de Vega cite him at the start of the fourth book of El peregrino en su patria (1604), as he states that:

things with no appearance of being true are unable to move [the audience]; for, as Torquato Tasso says in his Poetics, where faith is absent, feeling and taste for what we read are absent as well. Truth in writing causes those who listen to be in suspense.

\footnote{Tasso’s Discorsi dell’arte poetica was circulated widely, as proved by the abundance of copies in Spanish libraries. Tamayo de Vargas would produce a translation that never went into print, now preserved in Ms. 6903 at Madrid’s Biblioteca Nacional. The codex is entitled Traducción de la arte poética de Q. Horacio F. Príncipe de los poetas líricos i de los tres discursos sobre el poema heroico de Torquato Tasso por D.n Thomás Tamayo de Vargas, Toledano. It is worth mentioning that the life of Tasso’s text of Discorsi is made of variants: read far before the publication of Accademia ferrarese, they would be reworked for the printing in 1594 of Discorsi del poema heroico.}
fearful, bold, sad or happy, confident or without trust – or, at least, if there lacks evidence that what is told is true, it needs, at least, to appear verisimilar.\textsuperscript{202}

The insistence on truth – or the appearance of it – acts as a counterpart to the emphasis that the poem needs to be marvelous. Tasso writes that:

\begin{quote}
the marvelous and the verisimilar have extremely different natures, and so different that they are almost contrary to each other. However, both the one and the other are necessary to the poem, and it requires the art of a good poet to pair them together. While many have achieved that, there has been none […] who teaches how this is done. On the contrary, there have been most learned men who, as they observed the incompatibility that they entertain, have judged what is verisimilar in poems not to be marvelous, and what is marvelous, not to be verisimilar.\textsuperscript{203}
\end{quote}

The context of chivalric romances – or, in Tasso’s terms, epic poems – such as Lodovico Ariosto’s \textit{Orlando furioso}, and Tasso’s \textit{Gerusalemme liberata} would unceasingly evoke the issue here in question. Wonder of the kind related to the irrational was evoked mostly in terms of

\begin{quote}
“Las [cosas] que no tienen apariencia de verdad no mueven, porque, como dice en su \textit{Poética} Torcato Taso, donde falta la fe, falta el afecto o el gusto de lo que se lee [...]. El ir suspenso el que escucha, temeroso, atrevido, triste, alegre, con esperanza o desconfiado, a la verdad de la escritura se debe; o a lo menos, que no constando que lo sea, parezca verisímil”. Félix Lope de Vega Carpio, \textit{El peregrino en su patria}, ed. Juan Bautista Avalle-Arce (Madrid: Castalia, 1973), 334-335. For a study of Lope’s position within the conflict and his relation to Tasso’s ideas, see Javier González Rovira, “Mecanismos de recepción en ‘El peregrino en su patria’ de Lope de Vega”, in \textit{Studia aurea: actas del III Congreso de la AISG} (Toulouse, 1993), ed. Ignacio Arellano et al. (Pamplona: G.R.I.S.O.; Toulouse: L.E.M.S.O., [1996]). Peter G. Platt has argued that, while being aware of the importance of wonder, Aristotle tried to domesticate it and keep it within limits. I think that sixteenth-century scholars – with all the misunderstandings involved – understood well that if wonder needed boundaries, the reason for that is simply that being excessive, it fails to be wonderful at all. In fact, unless what seems surprising ends up somehow entering the space of the familiar and usual, it is simply scorned. Wonder presents similarities with the notion of the suspension of disbelief that we have come to identify with the act of reading, but it is not to be confounded with it. See Peter G. Platt, “Theories of Wonder from Aristotle to the Renaissance”, in \textit{Reason Diminished: Shakespeare and the Marvelous} (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

\textsuperscript{202} “Diversissime sono […] queste due nature, il meraviglioso, e ’l verisimile, & in guisa diverse, che sono quasi contrarie fra loro; nondemeno l’una e l’altra nel poema è necessaria , ma fa mestieri, che arte di eccellente poeta sia quella, che insieme le accoppi , il che , se ben è stato sin’hora fatto da molti, nissuno è […] il quale insegni come si faccia, anzi alcuni huomini di somma dottrina veggendo la ripugnanza di queste due nature, hanno giudicato, quella parte , ch’è verisimile ne’ poem, non essere meravigliosa, né quella, ch’è meravigliosa, verisimile”. Torquato Tasso, \textit{Discorsi... dell’arte poetica; et in particolare, del poema heroico} (In Venetia: ad instanza di Giulio Vassalini, librario a Ferrara, MDLXXXVII [1587]), 3v. Quoted also in Riley, \textit{Cervantes’s Theory of the Novel}, 179-180.
miraculous or monstrous creatures and events. Tasso himself wrote that by wonder he intended “those rings, those spell-casting shields, flying horses, ships turned into nymphs”.

When Tasso speaks of wonders, these belong to the realm of the supernatural, and are far removed from the kind of virtuosity found in surprising reversals and recognitions such as those that comprise Oedipus’s story, or the possibilities discussed by Aristotle for the case of Iphigenia. With this in mind, maintaining verisimilitude in spite of the irruption of irrationality became the exercise at the center of poetic theory and practice for those who performed within a framework that Tasso himself, and then Jacopo Mazzoni, did much to promote.

The question remained as to the means to succeed. The commentators on the Poetics had mentioned strategies to have the absurd (“τὸ ἄλογον”) pass unnoticed. These were inspired by Aristotle’s ideas, and ranged from the use of style to distract the attention from absurdities to relocating them to the margins of the plot.

Tasso starts by rejecting that the alternation of verisimilar and irrational moments may serve as a principle of composition. This, in fact, would imply that parts of the poem fail to comply with the law of verisimilitude. Neither does he mention the use of brilliant diction as a stratagem such as would keep the attention distracted, as Aristotle had suggested when he mentioned that poets with less talent and skill than Homer failed to make absurdities pass that he, instead, rendered digestible and pleasant to the audience.

With something rather different in mind, Tasso claims that one and the same action, despite what others may have said before him, may be simultaneously verisimilar and wonderful. This is possible every time that the component of irrationality in relation to what the audience

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204 “Poco dilettevole è veramente quel poema, che non ha seco quelle maraviglie, che tanto movono non solo l’animo degli ignoranti, ma de’ giuditiosi ancora, parlo di quelli anelli, di quelli scudi incantativi, di que’ corsieri volanti, di quelle navi converse in ninfe”. Tasso, Discorsi, 3r.

205 “Alcuni huomini […] hanno giudicato […] si debba hor seguire il verisimile, hora il maraviglioso”. Tasso, Discorsi, 3v-4r.
happens to believe is only apparent. This means that there is a way, even though this is not immediately obvious, of picking events that are simultaneously wonderful and verisimilar – namely, religion.

As a matter of fact, religion provides for Tasso a kind of supernatural that eventually overcomes the barrier of irrationality, without losing for that the charms of the marvelous. The supernatural takes place against habit and custom, so as to confer to events the degree of unexpectedness necessary for wonder to arise. Miracles, however, fulfill the condition of preserving verisimilitude, insofar as, in Tasso’s words, religion may be described as “belief” or “opinion” of a kind that that men “have drunk since childhood together with the milk” and which later on “has been fortified in their minds by the teachers” of the faith. This is different from what happens when poets narrate wonders performed by a god of the heathens, for these they hold as not only false, but also impossible to ever have taken place.206

Tasso is adopting Aristotle’s suggestion that the coexistence of credibility and impossibility – tolerable if subservient to the end of poetry, insofar as it awakes wonder – may be obtained by modeling events bearing in mind the opinion of the audience, which appears thus implicitly opposed to the truth about things. The poet indulges the errors that people entertain about the world, exploiting them to work out the effect of wonder.207 What makes Tasso’s interpretation remarkable is that, whereas for Aristotle this was a way of relying on what might be called a trick to deceive the audience – as Mazzoni understood extremely well –, Tasso sets Catholicism, explicitly described as the truth of things rather than false opinion, in the place that the philosopher had allotted to error.

206 “Havendo gli huomini nostri bevuta nella fasce insieme co ’l latte questa opinione, & essendo poi in loro confermata da i maestri della nostra Santa Fede”. Tasso, Discorsi, 4r; and, in general, 3r-v.
207 Aristotle, “Poetics”, 134-135, §25, 1461b. See the introduction above.
The device that allows Tasso to do this is the use of miracles. These provide him with things that may be sufficiently unusual to awake marvel and yet simultaneously verisimilar to a community of readers that, as a party in the faith, would not despise them as irrational, thus avoiding the cancelation of the effect of wonder. Tasso describes in miracles a sort of deferral in the experience of the reader: surprised at first, yet reassured immediately after that by the belief that religion affords, and which fails to come in the case of heathen or unjustified marvels. It is as though miracles were somehow less immediately acceptable than the course of events usual in nature, yet always justifiable in the form of a second thought. In fact, the deferral in question is not different from the one that Patrizi, around the same time, and Talentoni a decade later would describe for wonder: first comes something that happens against expectation, so as to have the audience desire to know why it is so; then, upon learning the reason for what looked paradoxical, the curiosity is appeased. For miracles—and this is what makes them intimately connected to the faith of a community—the cause is only the will of God to suspend the course of things to which men are accustomed. The deferral in cognition that makes wonder possible mirrors therefore the understanding of the world as essentially twofold—constituted by a causality that belongs to nature, and that coincides with the will of the divinity except when the latter decides to activate some kind of exceptionality.208

A crusade—the subject of Tasso’s epic poem—did certainly invite a model such as the one he presents in his Discorsi. It comes as no surprise, however, that others would try to propose a method of harmonizing wonder with verisimilitude that might somehow contemplate the

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208 Miracles, after all, belong to the category of the preternatural. They take place against the laws of nature, but are contemplated as a deviation that may take place whenever God, as the creator of everything, wants to alter the way things usually happen. See, for instance, Daston and Park, Wonders, 141. In terms of sixteenth-century Aristotelianism, God or the primary cause operates through secondary or natural causes, which He then may suspend if necessary.
experience of the audience in connection with wonder in broader terms than the belief or not in a particular religion.

This is what Jacopo Mazzoni (Cesena, 1548-1598) would also attempt in 1587, as he published his defense of Dante’s *Commedia*. Mazzoni’s arguments were built upon decades of debate concerning Aristotle’s *Poetics*, and granted wonder a weight that, except for Castelvetro and Tasso, was unrivaled among the works then available in the discipline.\(^{209}\)

Born in 1548—the year of publication of Robortello’s pioneering commentary—, Mazzoni belonged to a younger generation. No matter how much the scholars differed in terms of the way each understood poetry, they still shared the language become standard in criticism that originated in interpretation of the *Poetics* carried out since the 1540s. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that Mazzoni would follow Robortello in his choice to discuss the role of poetry amidst the realm of sciences.

While philosophers seek the truth, Mazzoni writes, both poets and rhetoricians look for “the credible” (“il credibile”). If their respective disciplines remain separate, this is because of

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\(^{209}\) The book has been mentioned above: *Della Difesa della comedia di Dante. Distinta in sette libri. Nella quale si risponde alle oppositioni fatte al discorso di M. Iacopo Mazzoni, e si tratta pienamente dell’arte poetica, e di molt’altre cose pertinenti alla philosophia, & alle belle lettere. Parte prima...* (In Cesena: appresso Bartolomeo Raverij, l’anno MDLXXXVII [1587]). The title gives some clues to understand the polemic in which the author took part. Mazzoni had published, first under a pseudonym in 1572, then under his own name in 1583, a text entitled *Discorso in difesa della Comedia del divino poeta Dante* in response to a manuscript circulating in the earlier years of the 1570s with the title *Discorso di M. Ridolfo Castravilla nel quale si mostra l’imperfettione della Commedia di Dante*. Castravilla had claimed that Dante’s poem was not admissible according to Aristotle’s ideas about poetry. A polemic started, with replies going back and forth on both sides, among which Belisario Bulgari played a prominent role. Bulgari, who had opposed Mazzoni’s *Discorso*, published a book in 1586 against Girolamo Zoppio’s defense of Dante and Petrarch. It is to Bulgari’s objections to his own *Discorso* that Mazzoni refers in the title of 1587. Mazzoni’s treatise of 1587, moreover, was only the first part of the second volume, containing Books IV to VII, which had to wait until 1688, when it appeared as *Della difesa della comedia di Dante distinta in sette libri, Nella quale si risponde alle oppositioni fatte al discorso di M. Iacopo Mazzoni, e si tratta pienamente dell’Arte Poetica, e di molte altre cose pertinenti alla filosofia, & altre belle lettere. Parte seconda postuma, Che contiene gli ultimi quattro libri non più stampati: et hora publicata a beneficio del mondo letterato* (In Cesena: per Severo Verdoni, 1688). Mazzoni’s work has recovered from a certain silence in the last decades. See, for example, Claudio Scarpati, “Iastico e fantastico. Iacopo Mazzoni fra Tasso e Marino”, in *Dire la verità al principe: Ricerche sulla letteratura del Rinascimento* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1987). Concerning the adventures of Mazzoni’s book involving the process of publication, see Claudio Gigante, “Per un’edizione critica della ‘Difesa’ della ‘Commedia’ di Dante” di Jacopo Mazzoni”, *Rivista di studi danteschi* 1 (2001).
the tools through which they pursue credibility. The rhetorician builds arguments through example and enthymeme, while the poet applies himself to the composition of a plot adorned with rhythm. More importantly, in order to admit that the credible is the end that poetics and rhetoric share, a distinction is necessary as to the way in which each of them understands the notion in question:

A most beautiful doubt is born [...] for it seems that rhetoric is indistinguishable from poetry, because the one and the other have the same object. To this I answer that the credible may be considered in two different ways. The first is when one takes it insofar as it is credible and able to persuade, and in this way it is proper to rhetoric. The second way is when it is considered insofar as it is wonderful; thus it becomes the proper object of poetry, for poetry always seeks a wonderful subject, as Aristotle says in many places of his Poetics [italics added].

Poetics looks for the credible specifically insofar as the latter can bring wonder rather than just cause someone to believe something. Whereas the orator – at least in Mazzoni’s construction – is expected to use arguments such as would be easily trusted, the poet, conversely, would reject these as utterly non-poetic. The credibility embraced by the author of plots bears the mark of frailty, permanently on the brink of absurdity and failure to persuade. This is so because poetics first and foremost teaches – or, at least, ought to teach – the skill required to perform in each particular case the equilibrium that pushes things as far as possible towards the incredible – the producer of marvel – without ever falling into the pit of the unbelievable. Filled

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210 Mazzoni, Della difesa, 403.
211 “Egli nasce un bellissimo dubbio, & è che […] pare, che la rhetorica non si possa distinguere dalla poesia, poiché l’una, e l’altra ha il medesimo oggetto. Dico adunque per risposta, che il credibile si può considerare in due modi differenti. Il primo de’ quali è, quando si prende il credibile, in quanto ch’egli è credibile e persuasibile, e in questa maniera è proprio oggetto della rhetorica. Il secondo modo è quando egli vien considerato, come maraviglioso, e così diventa proprio oggetto della poesia, essendo che la poesia ricerchi sempre soggetto maraviglioso, come ha testimoniato Arist. in molti luoghi della sua Poet” [italics added]. Mazzoni, Della difesa, 403. For a similar opposition of poetics and rhetoric in terms of credibility with or without wonder, see also Mazzoni, Della difesa, 409.
212 Mazzoni, like Aristotle, defines wonder in terms of a reaction to something happening against expectation: “When the hearers learn something that they thought that it could not happen” (“quando gli auditori imparano quello, che non credevano potere avenire”). Mazzoni, Della difesa, 403.
with wonder at that which is barely believable and yet still is, the spectators enjoy what they see in a way that makes them better citizens.\textsuperscript{213}

Even though it is widely acknowledged that Aristotle’s \textit{Poetics} set a goal for poetry in the order of the emotions, and that, for the poet to succeed—–as Mazzoni likes to repeat—the philosopher had preferred credible to possible events whenever it was necessary to choose between these, it remains nonetheless true that among sixteenth-century commentators Mazzoni ventured furthest from Aristotle’s idea of a plot as a set of actions built according to the way things happen, always or for the most part.\textsuperscript{214} This –the notion of “imitation” evoked \textit{ad nauseam} by scholars since the days of Robortello– becomes for Mazzoni little more than a delusion to keep the audience satisfied while they fall prey to a feeling of wonder born of exactly the opposite of probable or necessary events. Even Francesco Patrizi, who –as I will show later on– rejected the idea that poetry “imitates” at all, remained definitely closer to Aristotle’s principles.

As a matter of fact, late sixteenth-century scholars owe to Mazzoni a method intended to codify into principles the exercise of dissimulating impossibility encouraged by the canon of Toledo in \textit{Don Quixote} Part One.

Not only did he repeat pieces of advice such as obscuring absurdity through brilliant diction, or placing the irrationally exteriorly to the plot.\textsuperscript{215} He went on to conceive methods like

\textsuperscript{213} Following the example of Giason Denores’s 1586 “Discorso”, discussed in section three of Chapter One, Mazzoni has poetry exploit the dependence on the marvelous for the purposes of educating men into civility and life in community: “The end of poetry as an art of imitation is the representation of the idol: as a game it has delight as its end, while, as a game qualified by the civil faculty its end is the useful, it seems to me that we can now add to the mentioned discourse that insofar as poetry is a rational faculty, it has wonder as its end […] I think therefore that one might boldly conclude that the universal object of poetry is the credible, as long as it is wonderful” (“la poesia, come arte imitatrice, ha per fine la rappresentazione dell’idolo, e come gioco il diletto, e come gioco qualificato dalla facoltà civile l’utile, parmi ch’ora si possa giungere a quel discorso, ch’ella, come facoltà rationale ha la maraviglia per fine […] Credo adunque, che si possa arditamente concludere, che l’oggetto universale della poesia sia il credibile, inquanto ch’egli è maraviglioso”). Mazzoni, \textit{Della difesa}, 403.

\textsuperscript{214} For the \textit{Poetics} as a text that conceives the end of poetry in terms of feelings rather than learning, see above Chapter One, section one, and –already cited– Heath, “Aristotle and the Value of Tragedy”, \textit{passim}.

\textsuperscript{215} “The epic poet pursues the wonderful more than the others do, and nears the incredible. This is the reason why he has picked up the kind of verse that is fullest of ornament, in order to make disappear the unseemliness which
these in a different light. The commentators had often referred to them as a sort of subterfuge, required even though they bordered on the illegitimate. Vettori had glossed Aristotle’s idea of “obscuring” irrationality through a style too difficult or too bright using the verb “fallit” – in the sense of escaping someone’s notice, but meaning also “deceive”.216 Perhaps the pun was unintended in the case of Vettori, but what matters is that for Mazzoni there was nothing reproachable in pronouncing the art of poetry to be a form of trick that belongs to the realm of sophistry.217

As announced earlier, Mazzoni’s operates within the framework of Aristotle’s principle, expressed in Poetics 24, 1460a, that credibility should be preferred to impossibility.218 He writes:

\[
\text{“Poetry is, in a certain way, a species of the sophistic rational faculty” (“la poesía sia in un certo modo specie della facoltà rationale sophistica”) [italics added].} \]

Mazzoni, Della difesa, 403. Even though Robortello’s division of disciplines – much in the spirit of Averroes’ commentary – had also distinguished between poetry and sophistry in a way that was far from conclusive, he clarified later that the notion of “poetic lies”, which had tempted scholars after Aristotle’s statement in §24, 1460a that Homer had taught poets how to tell lies, was nothing other than a name for arguing according to probability: “But if you look at this with care, you will see that fabricating poetic lies is nothing else than speaking according to probability. From this results that the poetic faculty rejects what is plainly false, and coincides with rhetoric, which – as Aristotle explains abundantly in the first book of Rhetoric – argues from probability […] The poet makes his lies from these [sc. probable signs], that is – as I think it ought to be interpreted –, he tells verisimilar, and probable things” (“iam vero si diligenter consideres; nihil aliud est, confingere mendacia poetica, quam probabiliter loqui; ex quo patet poetiacam facultatem […] reiciere ea, quae prorsus sunt falsa; convenireque cum Rhetorice, quae ex probabilibus ducit argumentationes, sicut dicet Aristoteles copiose libro Rhetor. Primo […] ex his [signis probabilibus, from rhetoric] sua mendacia confingit, hoc est (ut ego interpretandum puto) verisimilia, & probabilia loquitur”). See Robortello, In librum Aristotelis, 1, and 283-284. For Torquato Tasso’s refutation of Mazzoni’s qualification of poetics as sophistry, see Emilio Russo, “Il rifiuto della sofistica nelle postille tassiane a J. M.”, La Cultura 38 (2000).

216 Vettori, Commentarii, 257. Vettori’s comment corresponds to Aristotle, “Poetics”, 122-123, §24, 1460a. Alban Forcione has shown that Cervantes’s Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda parodies the means of deceit through which a plot may become credible in spite of being impossible. On the occasion of a story being told that contains a flying horse, there is someone in the audience who ponders that the event might have been likelier should the animal break “three or four legs”. This is a hint that belief works differently in poetry than it does elsewhere, and points at the abundance of resources that poets have available to guide readers into the belief of absurdities. See Forcione, Cervantes, Aristotle, and the “Persiles”, 251-254.

217 ““Poetry is, in a certain way, a species of the sophistic rational faculty” (“la poesía sia in un certo modo specie della facoltà rationale sophistica”) [italics added]. Mazzoni, Della difesa, 403. Even though Robortello’s division of disciplines – much in the spirit of Averroes’ commentary – had also distinguished between poetry and sophistry in a way that was far from conclusive, he clarified later that the notion of “poetic lies”, which had tempted scholars after Aristotle’s statement in §24, 1460a that Homer had taught poets how to tell lies, was nothing other than a name for arguing according to probability: “But if you look at this with care, you will see that fabricating poetic lies is nothing else than speaking according to probability. From this results that the poetic faculty rejects what is plainly false, and coincides with rhetoric, which – as Aristotle explains abundantly in the first book of Rhetoric – argues from probability […] The poet makes his lies from these [sc. probable signs], that is – as I think it ought to be interpreted –, he tells verisimilar, and probable things” (“iam vero si diligenter consideres; nihil aliud est, confingere mendacia poetica, quam probabiliter loqui; ex quo patet poetiacam facultatem […] reiciere ea, quae prorsus sunt falsa; convenireque cum Rhetorice, quae ex probabilibus ducit argumentationes, sicut dicet Aristoteles copiose libro Rhetor. Primo […] ex his [signis probabilibus, from rhetoric] sua mendacia confingit, hoc est (ut ego interpretandum puto) verisimilia, & probabilia loquitur”). See Robortello, In librum Aristotelis, 1, and 283-284. For Torquato Tasso’s refutation of Mazzoni’s qualification of poetics as sophistry, see Emilio Russo, “Il rifiuto della sofistica nelle postille tassiane a J. M.”, La Cultura 38 (2000).
let the poet be constrained to always pay respect to the credible, and in such a way that if he should distance himself even slightly from it, he commits a great mistake in his art, and so great that he receives no excuse, as Aristotle’s words make clear: “Πρὸς τε γὰρ […] In connection to poetry, one ought to choose the credible and impossible, rather than the possible and incredible. Therefore one must hold for a steady conclusion that poetry looks at the credible as its object, and that, as a result, because poetry tries to persuade that which is credible to the best of its ability, it is to be classed among the rational faculties [the italics belong to the text].

As a matter of fact – and in spite of Castelvetro’s preference for a kind of wonder that results from the probability of a sequence of logically connected events yet producing unexpected outcomes – a majority of the commentators, as suggested by Javitch, had prepared the ground for the emphasis that both Tasso and Mazzoni place on credibility as the criterion at the center of the imitation performed by the poet. For instance, Piccolomini’s comment in his Annotationi of 1575 may have rendered it easier for scholars to admit that, as long as one complies with the beliefs of the audience, and moreover with one that is generally unlearned, it does not matter the degree of absurdity reached by a plot. Piccolomini, in fact, wrote that

something being possible or impossible, true or false remains accidental to the matter of poetry as long as it happens together with the credible. And no one should marvel at hearing that the possible is different from the credible, since they are born from different sources. Credibility is born from a kind of agreement that has one believe that the thing paraphrases this as an injunction to the poet to “escape the incredible rather than the impossible” (“ch’egli fugga più l’incredibile, che l’impossibile”). Mazzoni, Della difesa, 408.

219 “Il poeta sia obbligato a rimirare sempre questo credibile, e di maniera che s’egli s’allontana punto da quello, commette fallo grandissimo nell’arte sue, e tale, ch’egli non riceve sorte alcuna di scusa, come mostrano chiaramente le infrascritte parole di Aristotele: ’Πρὸς τε γὰρ […]’ Per quello, che pertiene alla poesia, si deve più tosto eleggere il credibile impossibile, che il possibile incredibile. Sia adunque stabilita per ferma conclusione, che la poesia habbia per oggetto il credibile, e per conseguente, che cercando ella di persuaderlo con ogni maniera a lei possibile, si deva riporre tra le facoltà rationali” [the italics belong to the text]. Mazzoni, Della difesa, 403.

220 Piccolomini’s text circulated widely among late sixteenth-century scholars. We have evidence of Tasso’s familiarity with the Annotationi thanks to a volume of the work containing marginalia in the hand of the poet that is now preserved in the Barberini collection of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. For a study of Tasso’s postille to Piccolomini’s commentary, see Simona Miano, “Le postille di Torquato Tasso alle Annotationi di Alessandro Piccolomini alla Poetica di Aristotele”, Aevum 74, no. 3 (September-December 2000).
believed can take place. Possibility has to do with the effect of something not finding any obstacle in the path that leads from the cause.221

Yet, as Piccolomini immediately concludes, “the knowledge of obstacles like these is often absent from the mind of the crowd, and of most people”. As a consequence, people tend to believe what is actually impossible, no less than to resist the evidence of what is not only possible, but also necessary.222

Piccolomini’s reference to “agreement” prefigures the notion advanced by the canon of Toledo in Don Quixote Part One that “lies” in the plot have to “match” or “marry” (“hanse de casar”) the understanding of the readers. The connection of poetics to logical truth, and therefore with the sort of universality that Aristotle located in the poem in 9, 1448b, is virtually severed in the interpretation here exposed, shared by a majority of scholars active during the last decades of the sixteenth century, according to which theoreticians would have poets inspire feelings of marvel by evoking genres of beings that are factually inexistent, or by the narration or the staging of events that are logically incongruous. These are valid, and indeed the object of poetics as long as they are acceptable to the beliefs of a majority. Also predating Mazzoni’s development of such a model into a method, in a manuscript that Bernard Weinberg dates around 1573, the scholar Filippo Sassetti would expand on the role of verisimilitude – as opposed to logic and probability –, not surprisingly also in a work about Dante. Sassetti would explain, coherently with

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221 “L’esser la cosa o possibile, o non possibile, o vera, o falsa, è cosa accidentale alla materia della poesia, secondo che per accidente accasca, che si congiunga col credibile. Né s’ha da maravigliar’ alcuno, ch’il possibile sia cosa diversa dal credibile, nascendo essi da diversi fonti. Conciosiachè la credibilità derivi da una convenienza, per la quale possa alcun credere, che dovesse condursi ad effetto la cosa, che si crede. Dove che la possibilità nasce dal potere l’effetto non trovar’ impedimento dell’uscir dalla potentia sua, & dalla causa sua”. Piccolomini, Annotationi, 391-392.

222 “La notitia dei quali impedimenti, […] nella moltitudine & nel più degli huomini spesse volte non si ritruova”. Piccolomini, Annotationi, 392. Giraldi Cinzio’s characterization of the way in which belief, even false, weighs far more than probability in the effect of a poem may have been largely influential in the development of poetics, especially in connection with the debates about chivalric romance. See Giovanni Battista Giraldi Cinzio, Discorsi di M. Giovanbattista Giraldi Cinthio nobile ferrarese, e segretario dell’illustissimo, et eccellentiss. Duca di Ferrara, intorno al comporre dei romanzi, delle commedie, delle tragedie, e di altre maniere di poesia (In Vinegia: appresso Gabriel Giolio de’ Ferrari, et fratelli, MDLIII [1554]).
the idea that poetics has to model the plot upon the belief of the audience, that the art itself is contingent upon time and place as factors that modify the beliefs in question.²²³

From Aristotle’s concession that possibility can be sacrificed for the needs of credibility, scholars went as far as to deny Aristotle’s statement that “the possible seems plausible”, as when Pinciano discarded as verisimilar that a man may tumble when walking on a tightrope, even though one, so he says, would agree that it can be done.²²⁴ If statements like this, ubiquitous at

²²³ “‘Since, then, verisimilitude depends upon the opinions of men, it is absolutely necessary that, as these change, the probable should also change’ (“standing adunque il verisimile con l’oppenione degl’huomini egli è al tutto di mestieri che secondo che esse si mutano si muti ancora il probabile”). Weinberg, A history of Literary Criticism, vol. 1, 531. For Sassetti’s treatise, I always quote Weinberg’s translation. The work, entitled Sopra Dante, is preserved at the Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence, with the signature MS VII, 1028. As the quotation shows, Sassetti refers to verisimilitude and probability as synonyms, both of which he distinguishes from truth. While Castelvetro—as discussed at the end of Chapter One—kept probability and verisimilitude separate, they become somehow close to one another because of Sassetti’s notion that “those things are probable which are in agreement with the opinion of all men or of most or of the wisest” (“probabili sono quelle cose le quali sono secondo l’oppenione di tutti o de’ più o de’ più saggi”), quoted in Weinberg, A History of Literary Criticism, vol. 1, 531. Aristotle’s text of Poetics 24, 1460a already contained the confusion between credible and probable, which Vettori corrected as mentioned above when he wrote: “It seems clear enough that we should understand τικός as if it were πιθανόν”. Vettori, Commentarii, 260. There is nothing new in the assertion that makes the probable become what is probable for the wisest. However, a position that appears so clearly aristocratic becomes problematic in a time in which the delimitation of poetry’s ideal public was widely discussed. In fact, Castelvetro and Mazzoni had decreed that the audience for poems was not the wise, but rather the crowd, or what Mazzoni calls the unlearned. Mazzoni’s position, in fact, makes the distinction between “probable” – “in itself”, according to science and logic– and “credible” or verisimilar – for the audience, that is, the crowd– something useful to preserve. In other terms, one would call probable what is credible for the wise, and credible what the unlearned believe.

²²⁴ “Ὅτι πιθανόν ἐστὶ τὸ διόποτον”. Aristotle, “Poetics”, 60-61, §9, 1451b and López Pinciano, Obras completas, vol. 1, 204. By the mid seventeenth century, Antonio López de Vega would problematize even more the dynamics that oppose possibility to the credible or verisimilar. In fact, he would target the habit of fabricating extremely unlikely plots founded on the assumption that things like those may happen under conditions that in truth are rarely met. Against this, López de Vega advocated verisimilitude, made equivalent to usage: “Other poets form a tangle from unlikely events and accidents. They think that, if we object to that, they say enough with adducing that they are possible according to the test of nature. They fail to acknowledge the difference between possibility and verisimilitude, and refuse to admit that not everything that is possible is for that verisimilar, being the case that the former has borders as wide as that which nature or art are able to, whereas the latter is restricted to what ordinarily happens: not the same particular case, but what looks similar to it, and so to speak, of its genre. Then it should be so disposed, and seasoned as to appear somehow new. In this way, the difficult cohabitation of wonder and verisimilitude so greatly commended by both the poets and the masters of the art is made easy” (“formam otros la maraña de casos, i acidentes inverisimiles: pareciéndoles, si se lo notamos, que satisfazen, con que al examen de la naturaleza se hallen posibles; sin acabar de reconocer esta diferencia entre la posibilidad, i verisimilitud: ni queriendo persuadirse a que no todo lo posible es verisimilar: teniendo lo primero tan anchos términos, quanto es lo que cabe en el poder de la naturaleza, o del arte: i no siendo más lo segundo, que lo que de ordinario suele suceder: si no lo mismo individualmente, lo que parece, lo que pareza (digámoslo así) de aquella casta: bien que dispuesto, i sazonado de forma, que tenga allí lugar alguna novedad: allanándose assí aquel difícil concurso de la admiración, i verisimilitud, cuya hermandad tanto encomiendana los poetas los maestros del arte”). Antonio López de Vega, Heráclito i Demócrito de nuestro siglo. Describese su legítimo filósofo. Diálogos morales ([Madrid:] por Diego Diaz de la Carrera, a costa de Alonso Pérez librero de su magestad, año MDCXL [1641]), 176. The use of “allanar”
the time, may appear relativistic, this is yet a consequence of deferring the criteria of acceptability to the reader, the spectator, or the critic, rather than to elements internal to the plot.

It is within the coordinates just evoked that we ought to interpret Mazzoni’s choice to make the cornerstone of his method the injunction for the poet to shape plots in search of “the impossible that is credible”, or “l’impossibile credibile”.225

Mazzoni’s conception of poetry as sophistry, a discipline that aims at making credible what is actually impossible, depends on a division of the audience, meaning that a poem works differently according to whether it addresses the unlearned (“indotti”) or the erudite (“dotti”). Although Mazzoni holds that the poet composes the plot having the crowd in mind—generally uneducated and “rough”—, the result may nonetheless be pleasant for the learned. While the pleasure experienced by the former is, so to speak, proper and genuine, those who are educated enjoy in a derived, reflexive, and more sophisticated way.226

“Science” (“scienza”) dictates to the learned what to expect from the world. It makes them able to judge what may be deemed credible and what may not. The unlearned, conversely, host a multitude of beliefs that range from superstitions born out of a miscellany of religions to outdated and false ideas about nature. The poet infuses wonder into the latter by exploiting the gap between “science” and the opinions of the unlearned. In practice, this means that for any for overcoming the conflict of verisimilitude and wonder, it must be noticed, echoes the verb used by the canon in Don Quixote Part One.

225 Mazzoni, Della difesa, 409.
226 “Aristotle means that in the crowd, who is the suitable hearer of poetic fables, there are many rough and ignorant people who hold the invention of the poet to be not only credible, but also true” (“vuol dire Aristotele, che nel popolo, il quale è adeguato ascoltatore delle favole poetiche vi sono molte persone roze, & idiote, c’hanno per credibile, anzi per vera l’inventione del poeta”) [italics added]. Mazzoni, Della difesa, 410. Castelvetro had already pronounced himself favorable to the idea that poetry was conceived for initially popular, unaristocratic audiences: “Poetry was invented […] to delight, and entertain the common people” (“la poesía è stata trovata […] per dilettare, & ricreare, il popolo commune”). Castelvetro, Poetica, 17r. Already in 1550, as Vincenzo Maggi conveyed the same emphasis on credibility that characterizes Mazzoni’s, or Sassetti’s views on poetics, he had stated that poets obtain the trust of the audience by accommodating what they say to the beliefs of the crowd (“quoniam poeta praestare non posset, nisi ei fides adhiberetur, icedcreo vulgi opinionem sequitur”). Maggi and Lombardi, In Aristotelis librum, 268.
flying horse – that which seems marvelous, and yet fails to persuade the learned, who know that
nature does not allow for them to exist – there will always be some theory or legend that may
come to the aid of the audience as they justify for themselves the credibility of what they find to
be wonderful.

To help poets derive benefit from the ignorance of the unlearned, Mazzoni devised what
he would call “a topical method”, a procedure that allegedly provided makers of plots with
sources (“fonti”) from which they might invent the kinds of impossibility that nonetheless appear
credible to the unlearned, so as to work upon them the effect of wonder without obstacles.227 For
instance, a poet can obtain support in the falseness that some sect of philosophers asserts to be
true, or maybe speak of things that lie far removed from the reality of the audience, either in time
or place.228 Cases like these create spaces of indeterminacy where falseness may pass unnoticed
to the unlearned: they contravene the knowledge or experience of the audience concerning the
way things usually are – and therefore inspire wonder –; yet they are eventually accepted as
credible because the unlearned lack the certainty about the causes of things that would allow
them to reject falseness. Moreover, and connected to this, they are prone to believe what is false
due to the multitude of opinions that circulate here and there, which they are unable to weigh and
judge properly.

227 Mazzoni, Della difesa, 409 ff. Mazzoni’s “topica” is yet another attempt, characteristic of the second half of the
sixteenth century, to adapt the methodologies employed by dialecticians for the invention of arguments to other
fields. In Chapter One we saw Camillo Delminio’s topical method, employed for the invention of tropes, and in the
following we will see Francesco Patrizi proposing a method or “topica” for the invention of wonder. See Francesco
Patrizi, “Deca plastica”, in Della poetica, ed. Danilo Aguzzi-Barbagli, vol. 3 (Firenze: Istituto di Studi sul
Rinascimento, 1969-71), 315-316.
228 “When something is held credible, and according to the course of nature by some opinion of a sect of
philosophers, even if the other sects hold that same thing to be impossible, it would be nonetheless wonderful”
(“quando la cosa è tenuta credibile, & ordinaria secondo il corso della natura per qualche opinione d’una setta de’
philosophi, se bene la medesima cosa dall’altere sette vien stimata impossibile, e maravigliosa”). Mazzoni, Della
difesa, 416.
The process of distortion and creation of the marvelous is feasible because the crowd believes any portents and monstrosities one may feed them with, both in historical and natural matters:

Nor has the poet the privilege of falsifying only human plots and histories, but also natural history. For the poet, in order to bring greater wonder to the crowd, can tell them something differently than it is found in nature. And this without going out of the credible, for the majority of the people does not really know how it is in truth. And in doing so he can be bold inasmuch as his path has been prepared by opinion [italics added].

Mazzoni’s “topica” points, in the first place, to three modalities in which true things or facts may be altered and made false; then he proposes to the poet how to apply each of them to objects conceived, in turn, in terms of the ten categories of Aristotle—substance, accident, quantity, and so on. Multiplying the former by the latter, the result is a wealth of combinations that the poet finds at hand in order to turn any plot into something simultaneously impossible and credible. It is a guide illustrating for poets the art of deceiving the audience, and artfully

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229 “Né solo ha il poeta privilegio di falsificare le favole, e le historie humane: ma anchora l’historia naturale. Percioché può il poeta raccontare al popolo, per recargli magior maraviglia, una cosa diversamente da quello, che si ritrovi nella natura, né per questo uscirei fuori del credibile, poiché la maggior parte del popolo non sa veramente, com’ ella si stia. E in questo potrà essere tanto più ardito, quanto più si trovasse appianata la via dalla fama” [italics added]. Mazzoni, Della difesa, 416. Since at least Giraldi Cinzio’s Discorsi, it was commonplace that the accumulation of readings and education modifies the opinions of the audience. As discussed above, Tasso had referred to Catholicism as the opinion that turns miracles believable insofar as is taught by the teachers of the faith. In line with this, paradoxically, Elizabeth Cropper recounts how Girolamo Aleandro had countered Tommaso Stigliani’s attack on Marino’s Adone that the fables of the heathens would be incredible to us by saying that we have loved the tales in question since we were children. As a result, we have no trouble in temporarily transforming ourselves into pagans in order to be credulous about them and obtain pleasure. Cropper, The Domenichino Affair, 167. The latter, in turn, resembles closely the parody that Cervantes reserves in his Persiles for the requirements of verisimilitude, for which I have quoted Forcione above.

230 “These three species, or main places of the credible impossibility can be used in the ten categories of Aristotle […] and therefore will multiply those three main places of the credible impossibility to thirty, for it is possible to make this credible by falsifying the history in its substance, and also in the other categories” (“queste tre specie, o tre luoghi principali dell’impossibile credibile ponno essere praticati in tutti li diece predicamenti d’Aristotele […] e però multiplicano que’ tre luoghi principali del credibile maraviglioso in altri trenta, essendo che si possa prendere questo credibile, o secondo la falsificatione della historia nella sostanza, e ne gli altri predicamenti”). Mazzoni, Della difesa, 416.
dissimulating—rather than doing so at random—the part of impossibility or absurdity that Mazzoni posits as necessary for wonder to take place.

With the learned, however, poetry succeeds on entirely different grounds. They enjoy, according to Mazzoni, as spectators not of the poem, but rather of the manoeuver of deceit performed by the poet. They do not fall into the trap of the artificer who, full of trickery, profits from the scraps of varied and incoherently heaped beliefs harbored by the people. As part of a distinction that owes much to Plato’s thought—as it is often the case in Mazzoni—they inhabit the space of science, far removed from the variety and instability of opinion.231 Banned from the pleasure of wondering at the absurd—which they cannot fail to recognize as being such—as the learned marvel at the way in which the poet has crafted the imitation, and concealed the irrational: “Those who know that [the invention] is false enjoy in the imitation, through which the false seems to become credible” [italics added].232

Unlike the crowd, the learned wonder at the poet’s artifice and work, precisely inasmuch as they remain safe from the trap themselves.

Castelvetro had postulated for poetry a process of wonder that applied to audiences of every kind: spectators wonder at plots or tropes, and as a result they marvel at the poet’s artifice

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231 Plato is, in fact, the great intruder in Mazzoni’s Aristotelianism as it is present in Della difesa. As he differentiates between the expectations harbored by learned and unlearned audiences, Mazzoni places himself in a world reminiscent of that of Plato’s Theaetetus. Of course, the intermingling of Platonic and Aristotelian notions was a common feature of late sixteenth-century thought, but Mazzoni’s interest in harmonizing both within a theory of poetics (as it will be the case with Francesco Patrizi) is especially remarkable. As for Mazzoni’s other works, they show like concerns to be a constant in his life. While a professor at the university of Pisa between 1588 and 1597, Mazzoni lectured “ordinarily” on Aristotle, but also “extraordinarily” on Plato, according to a distinction established since the times of archduke Francesco de’ Medici, who in 1576 authorized Francesco de’ Vieri to teach also Plato in addition to Aristotle, as long as this was done exclusively “nei giorni delle feste”. For the anecdote, see Bernard Huss, Florian Neumann and Gerhard Regn, eds., Lezioni sul Petrarca. Die Rerum vulgarium fragmenta in Akademievorträgen des 16. Jahrhunderts (Münster: Lit, 2004), 182. Mazzoni would eventually publish a treatise comparing Platonic and Aristotelian philosophies, entitled In universam Platonis et Aristotelis philosophiam praeludia, sive de comparatione Platonis, et Aristotelis liber primus (Venetiis: Apud Ioannem Guerilium, MDXCVII [1597]).

232 “Quelli, che la conoscono per finta [sc. l’invenzione] si rallegrandr della imitatione, per mezo della quale pare, che il falso si renda credibile. E in questo modo si vede per isperienza, che la Pedia di Ciro dileitta equalmente gli ignoranti, che l’hanno per vera, e li dotti, che l’hanno per falsa” [italics added]. Mazzoni, Della difesa, 410.
and work, apparent from his ability to craft the former. Conversely, Mazzoni splits the trajectory of wonder so as to ascribe to unlearned audiences a wonder different from that of the learned: the former marvel at the unexpectedness of a plot or a trope, and yet, fooled by the sophistry of the poet, they cannot admire the craft in it. The learned, while marveling at the work of the poet, fail to enjoy the surprise prepared by the latter. By severing the two moments in the pleasure of poetry, Mazzoni broke the circle of wonder, once promoted by Castelvetro and soon to be claimed by seventeenth-century theorists of wit. It is perhaps fair to conclude that this was ultimately a consequence of the search for marvel within in a framework that privileged credibility over possibility and logic –external criteria over those internal to the poem–, and that, at the same time, conceived of wonder as a result of the irrational and absurd.

The pleasure reserved for the learned may have appeared somehow parasitic – simultaneously loftier and lacking the awe and “stupor” that sixteenth-century theorists had generally made a part of wonder, now confined to the reactions of the crowd. Mazzoni grants the learned a pleasure marked by a touch of voyeurism, as he conceives a group of readers detachedly enjoying the spectacle of a poet inspiring wonder into others. Castelvetro, who also

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233 Castelvetro, Poetica, 39v-40r.
234 See Introduction for the relation between “stupor” and wonder, as discussed in the argument between Girolamo Cardano and Giulio Cesare Scaligero.
235 That of Mazzoni was not the first case –and certainly it would not be the last– of a scholar who dissects the pleasure of wonder in order to point at the awareness of the artifice as a source of a derived pleasure. Bernardino Partenio had considered a division similar to Mazzoni’s in connection with Giulio Camillo Delminio’s topical method for the invention of tropes: for more, see Chapter One, section two. Partenio explains in Dell’imitatione poetica –published in 1560 and later translated into Latin in 1565– that those acquainted with the art in question fail to wonder (that is, to be amazed and surprised) at the tropes and the figures used by the poets. As a compensation, however, they enjoy a different, loftier kind of pleasure thanks to their partaking of the secrets of the art that they share with the poet. They do not wonder at the poem, but (much like Mazzoni’s “dotti”), they come to understand how the poet has crafted that which makes the unlearned feel wonder. Accomplishing a step hinted by Castelvetro, and then normalized in seventeenth-century wit-related aesthetics, Partenio has the learned enjoy insofar as they feel equal in skill with the poet. In his words, knowledge and understanding of the topical method “is the cause of two things for those who read the poets: that in them wonder ceases at those concepts so divinely expressed. After which a certain sweetness penetrates their souls because they know those secrets in the same way that he who was used them does. This is why the learned enjoy more than the ignorant when reading good poets” (“questa cognizione a quelli, che leggono i poeti, di due cose n’è cagione, che in loro cessa la maraviglia di quelli concetti tanto divinamente espressi. Pocia che nell’animo ne viene una certa dolcezza dal conoscere que’ segreti..."
conceived of poetics as a hunt for wonder, had not envisaged the need for a victim. This, as a matter of fact, was entirely a result of Mazzoni’s understanding of poetry as sophistry and deception, and of the poet as an impostor, or, in a more flattering light, a player.

However, in a time bursting with claims that wonder was less a sign of ignorance than a stimulus to knowledge, Mazzoni’s circumscribing of wonder to deceit and falseness clashed more or less directly with alternatives better aligned to the recovery of wonder as a feeling with the potential to enlighten audiences. Reestablishing a link with Castelvetro’s position, these would recover in some way the notion of readers who are able simultaneously to wonder at something new and unknown and to value the novelty in terms of work, wit, and artifice.

The refutation of Mazzoni’s idea–developed as a reconceptualization of the relations between wonder, credibility, and audience–took place in writings that Francesco Patrizi seems to have prepared precisely in the months of 1587 that followed the publication of Mazzoni’s treatise.

It was in the spring that Patrizi embarked on the continuation of the part already published of his treatise Della poetica.236 One year earlier, in 1586, the two first parts or decades had seen the light in Ferrara.237 Conversely, the draft sketched and edited in 1587 would remain

236 Patrizi writes month and year at the beginning and the end of the chapters in his manuscript. Conflicting dates correspond to different stages of writing and revision. At any rate, they remain within the terms of 1587. For more details and for an attempt at a chronology of the writing process of Patrizi’s manuscript of Della poetica, see Danilo Aguzzi Barbagli, “Introduzione”, in Francesco Patrizi, Della poetica, vol. 1 (Firenze: Istituto di Studi sul Rinascimento, 1969-71), XVII-XX.

237 The two first decades were published as Della poetica di Francesco Patrici. La deca istoriale, nella quale, con dilettevole antica novità, oltre a ‘poeti, e’ lor poemi innumerabili, che vi si contano: si fan palesi, tutte le cose compagne, e seguaci dell’antiche poesie. E con maravigliosa varietà, e notizia di cose, maraviglioso piacere, ed utile, si pone avanti a’ leggitori. E si gittano i veri fondamenti all’arte del poetare... (In Ferrara: per Vittorio Baldini, Stampator Ducale, MDLXXXVI [1586]); and Della poetica di Francesco Patrici. La deca disputata. Nella quale, e per istoria, e per ragioni, & per autorità de’ grandi antichi, si mosta la falsità delle più creditte vere opinioni, che di poetica, a’ di nostri vanno intorno. Et vi è aggiunto il Trimerone del medesimo, in risposta alle oppositioni fatte dal Signor Torquato Tasso al parer suo scritto in diffesa dell’Ariosto (In Ferrara: per Vittorio Baldini, Stampator Ducale, MDLXXXVI [1586]).
unpublished until the discovery of the manuscript in the mid-20th century in Parma’s Biblioteca Palatina. Patrizi and Mazzoni were perfectly aware of each other’s work, to the point that the latter would have many of his ideas about wonder refuted in Patrizi’s Deca ammirabile, and in his Deca plastica, written scarcely months after the publication of Mazzoni’s Difesa.

Like Mazzoni, Patrizi places wonder at the center of poetics. However, he considers the conflict between verisimilitude and absurdity a false one. Wonder is, according to Patrizi, the process that turns what is apparently absurd into something likely and reasonable. This means that he intends as the source for wonder – closer in this to Castelvetro than to Mazzoni – the unexpectedness of something argued in a way that shows virtuosity, rather than something false and impossible. Considered by sixteenth-century commentators as the point of departure for any reflection about poetry, likelihood was redefined in Patrizi’s treatise as the appeasing and comforting result that remains to the audience once that wonder at something unknown and apparently absurd is eventually solved and, as a result, pleasurably consumed.

Patrizi claimed to be demolishing the edifice of Aristotle’s Poetics; yet it may be argued that, in a certain sense, he was actually completing and fulfilling the path started by the commentators. Through a strenuous work of rivalry and cooperation, these accomplished steps in clarifying and simultaneously decontextualizing the ideas of the philosopher proved crucial.

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239 The narrow gap between the publication of Mazzoni’s Della difesa and the date of composition of Patrizi’s draft of Deca ammirabile becomes a lesser obstacle if we consider that prints of Mazzoni’s book seem to have circulated since 1585. Davide Dalmas, “Mazzoni, Jacopo”, in Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani, 72 (2008), accessed September 12, 2015, http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/jacopo-mazzoni_(Dizionario-Biografico) In addition to the response found in Patrizi’s manuscript of Della poetica, the latter also published within the term of 1587 a pamphlet refuting punctual criticism of himself contained in Mazzoni’s book. Francesco Patrizi, Risposta di Francesco Patrizi a due opposizioni fattegli dal Sig. Giacopo Mazzoni (In Ferrara: appresso Vittorio Baldini stampator ducale, MDLXXXVII [1587]); a second publication containing Patrizi’s refutations appeared the same year under the title Difesa di Francesco Patrizi, dalle cento accuse dategli dal Signor Iacopo Mazzoni (In Ferrara: appresso Vittorio Baldini, MDLXXXVII [1587]). The rivalry between the two scholars, as one may see, was far from a punctual event.

240 For the concentration of debates about wonder’s role in poetry around the year 1587, see Scarpati, “1585-1587”, 761.
for the formation of the set of ideas against the background of which Patrizi developed his theory.

For instance, Patrizi considered one of his greatest achievements getting rid of imitation in poetic theory once and for all. However, when he described the paradox of claiming that poetry is the result of imitation, he found himself echoing ideas that had served Castelvetro to contest the analogy between portrait making and poetics, discussed above in Chapter One.241 In fact, Patrizi claimed that since imitation is always of particulars, it follows that the historian imitates more than the poet does.242 As Castelvetro had done some years earlier, Patrizi insisted that the poet needs to invent and resort to investigation within possibilities generally conceived for a subject in order to look for events able to beget wonder in the audience.

Patrizi, himself a student of Robortello in Padua in the 1550s, introduced himself as breaking in a single stroke with a lineage of commentaries on Aristotle's *Poetics* that had proliferated for almost three decades.243 Yet, while attacking a notion of imitation understood as the replication of particulars that was, after all, entirely alien to Aristotle, Patrizi developed a notion of poetics that in many respects might be called Aristotelian. Rather than questioning Aristotle’s notion of imitation, as he thought he was doing, Patrizi delved deeper into issues that had concerned Aristotle than other commentators had managed to do – even if they aimed at staying closer to the mind of the philosopher – as they misconstrued as Aristotelian a notion of imitation actually more resembling the idea of imitation, vilified and negative, to be found in Plato’s *Republic*.244

241 See Chapter One, section two.
243 Patrizi introduced himself as starting a revolution in the understanding of poetics, a trope also found in scholarship about him. See, for instance, Baxter Hathaway, *The Age of Criticism: The Late Renaissance in Italy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1962), 415.
244 See Chapter One for Castelvetro’s understanding of imitation as invention.
Wonder makes a piece of writing qualify as poetic. With the title of *Deca ammirabile*, Patrizi’s first contribution contained in the manuscript at Parma introduces itself as a reaction against Mazzoni’s claim that the credible is the object of poetry, even though—as I am going to show—the conflict is nominal rather than real. Patrizi’s incursion into the tradition of Aristotelian—or allegedly anti-Aristotelian—poetics takes place in a language that also blends the results of Patrizi’s research in ancient philosophy and poetry. Resulting from his activity as a humanist and a collector of texts, these often appeared fairly unorthodox in the eyes of his contemporaries.\(^\text{245}\)

Boasting of a culture that surpassed the average of those who spent time reading little more than Aristotle and modern works, Patrizi referred to the two books of *Della poetica* printed in 1586 as a survey of all the sources available on poetics. These, in turn, would lay the foundations for his theory, expounded in the part that remained in manuscript.\(^\text{246}\)

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\(^{245}\) Patrizi’s reputation as a thinker with independent views reached Spanish intellectual circles as well. In a letter to the historian Jerónimo Zurita, dated June 25, 1572, Antonio Agustín (who had made Patrizi’s acquaintance when the latter came to Spain to sell his library to Philip II) described Patrizi’s *Discussionum peripateticarum libri XIII* (1571) as “greatly diligent for those who study Aristotle. He deals with Aristotle’s life, books, and method, and gives envy to [Pedro Juan] Núñez, because he shares in his way of understanding Aristotle” [italics added] (“muy diligente para los que estudian en Aristóteles; trata de la vida, y libros, y método dél, y pone grandes zelos al maestro Núñez, porque es de su manera de entender a Aristóteles”). Antonio Agustín, *Opera Omnia... Volumen Septimum* (Luccae: typis Josephi Rochii, MDCLXXII [1772]), 211. Agustín emphasizes Patrizi’s familiarity with sources which few had access to: his book “incorporates every source that was thought to be lost, and speaks of all the Peripatetics who ever were, and who ever wrote, and together with this this he adds many things of great curiosity, and shows that he has with him more printed books by the philosophers” (“trahe todo lo que se ha perdido, y habla de todos los peripatéticos que huvo en el mundo, y que escrivieron, y asistir a cosas muy curiosas, y muestra tener más libros de los impresos de varios filósofos, de los quales algunos tengo ya por acá”). Agustín, *Opera omnia*, vol. 7, 211. As for his collection of manuscripts, Patrizi’s reputation was even greater, and was, in fact, the treasure that had made him welcome at a time when Philip II was forming the library at *El Escorial*.

\(^{246}\) As pointed out by Antonio Agustín above, Patrizi’s wealth of unaccustomed sources had an impact on his research. This would be also the case in his treatise on poetics. In Patrizi’s *Deca plastica*, a continuation of the inquiry on poetry and wonder started in *Deca ammirabile*, the author describes the method followed for the latter as guided by the history and the very nature of poetry: “Both through traces of the ancestors which we were able to look at, and the notions which the thing itself seemed to suggest” (“e per ricordi degli antepassati raccorre habbiam potuto e che ci è paruto la cosa stessa recarci avanti”). Patrizi, *“Deca plastica”*, 3. In practice, Patrizi’s sources were almost exclusively Greek—especially from the most ancient period—, while the presence of Latin authors is beneath the average of the scholarship of the day, so as to seem a very conscious decision.
In a dialogue with both predecessors and contemporaries, Patrizi acknowledged that Castelvetro, Mazzoni, or Tasso had mentioned wonder as a part necessary to poetics.\textsuperscript{247} However, following a survey of ideas about marvel in recent literature on poetics, Patrizi made Castelvetro and Tasso guilty of Mazzoni’s notion that “the credible and impossible” is the source of wonder.\textsuperscript{248} They would have prompted him to lay the roots of a misconception pushing entire generations of scholars to a dead end, condemning them never to understand the nature of poetry.\textsuperscript{249}

Patrizi’s study of the scholarship available on Aristotle’s \textit{Poetics} is remarkable in that it somehow denounces the process of decontextualization and generalization through which his predecessors turned wonder into a requirement for poetry. Patrizi denounces that wonder is mentioned merely twice in Aristotle’s text—not “in many places”, as Mazzoni would have it.\textsuperscript{250} According to Patrizi, the ancients in general devoted little attention to wonder, while sixteenth-century scholars “did not understand almost anything” about it.\textsuperscript{251} They perhaps understood how important a role wonder plays in a poem, but despite this they remained clueless about the nature of the process it set in motion. Patrizi devalues the efforts through which Castelvetro and others had rescued the importance of wonder from hints scattered throughout Aristotle’s text, a merit for which he instead proposes himself as a pioneer.\textsuperscript{252}

\textsuperscript{247} Patrizi, “Deca ammirabile”, 297-298.
\textsuperscript{248} Patrizi, “Deca ammirabile”, 258-261.
\textsuperscript{249} Patrizi, “Deca ammirabile”, 293.
\textsuperscript{250} Patrizi, “Deca ammirabile”, 307-308. For Mazzoni’s assertion, see Mazzoni, \textit{Della difesa}, 409.
\textsuperscript{251} Patrizi, “Deca ammirabile”, 297. For wonder among the ancients, Patrizi’s investigation gathers statements mainly from Aristotle himself, Plutarch, Strabo, and Pseudo-Longinus.
\textsuperscript{252} Patrizi ends the seventh book of \textit{Deca ammirabile}, right next to the date of July 10, 1587—which may indicate the date of composition, but also of revision—, with the following statement: “This method of making poetry, even though Aristotle, Plutarch, and Longinus gave us certain dim little lights, we hold the opinion that it was our discovery. And especially the way of giving birth to it [sc. poetry] out of the wonderful” (“ora questo tutto indirizzo del poetare, come che certi deboli lumicini […] Aristotele ce ne desse, e Plutarco, e Longino, noi a credere ci diamo che sia nostro trovato. E specialmente la via di farla nascere dal mirabile”). Patrizi, “Deca ammirabile”, 326.
As he summarizes—without acknowledgement—Castelvetro’s refutation of the analogy of portrait and poetry contained in Aristotle’s *Poetics* 4, 1448b, Patrizi replaces the notion of imitation with terms like “fingere” in Latin and “πλάσσειν” in Greek, which emphasize creative and transformative activities and are therefore more appropriate to define the work of the poet. Rather than imitating in the sense of copy or repetition, the poet is expected to “shape” a poem so as to awaken wonder in the audience—something that, contrary to Mazzoni’s opinion, he does not see as requiring credibility in the subject.

While targeting Mazzoni, Patrizi also positions himself in direct opposition to Tasso’s persuasion that audiences are unable to wonder at something they do not believe. Patrizi builds a battery of examples for the opposite, and stands against a canon of scholars who champion visions clashing against what he considers the greatest mistake of the discipline of poetics as Aristotle’s followers have configured it. He denounces the ban that scholars have consistently imposed on impossibility, considered as a form of monstrosity. For this, Patrizi would lend voice to the claim by Hermogenes that impossible and monster-like creations are a source of delight, thereby opening up a paradigm that liberates poetry from the realm of likelihood and credibility—the prison, in Patrizi’s eyes, for which Aristotle’s *Poetics* was responsible.

By promoting monstrosity, Patrizi was only generalizing a license that a majority of authors already allowed. Examples of this include Robortello’s admission of “fabularia” among devices of embellishment. “Fabularia” are plots or metaphors based on things acceptable even if

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253 It was after “πλάσσειν” that Patrizi called *Deca plastica* the next series of books in his treatise *Della poetica*.

254 For one instance of monstrosity condemned, see the mention of Martin Antonio Del Rio in Chapter One, section four.

255 Patrizi’s reference is to Hermogenes’ *Περὶ ἰδεῶν*. A rhetor from the second century CE, Hermogenes of Tharsus gained relevance within sixteenth-century stylistic theory after his model of the seven ideas or forms of style was included in George of Trebizond’s *Rhetoric*. Patrizi alludes to Hermogenes’ prompting to “fabricate in a monster-like fashion” (“τερατεύεσθαι”) things that are impossible and incredible, making them become poetic and delighting. Patrizi, “Deca ammirabile”, 299.
openly false—such as, for instance, fables from ancient Greek and Roman mythology. In the wake of Giraldi Cinzio, Mazzoni had considered myths a case in which the impossible embraces the credible, for they tell stories that, unlikely though they are, partake of credibility insofar as habit and past authors have turned them into something common also to the opinion of non-heathens. Closer to Patrizi, Castelvetro allowed a space for monstrosity even without the disguise of credibility, and admitted that it might serve as a source of pleasure. Examples of this were for him Flemish paintings (“tele di Fiandra”), Pulci’s *Morgante*, and “some books written in Spanish” (“alcuni libri scritti in ispagnuolo”), in what seems to be a reference to books of chivalry, especially after the mention of Pulci’s burlesque epic.

However, it might be argued that Castelvetro still referred to monsters as the exception. Conversely, when Patrizi extolled a model based on monstrosity, he seemed to be thinking within a frame of mind, not entirely uncommon in his time, for which the exceptionality in question meant a stimulus to think beyond. As a tool oriented toward cognition, monstrosity would become central in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century attempts at considering what defies expectation as the gate to progress in knowledge, as famously proposed in Francis Bacon’s *Novum Organum* in 1613. Wonder, such as that provoked by monsters, requires us to be unaware of what something is:

>The credible always presupposes knowledge of that which needs to be believed; but wonder, and the son of wonder the wonderful presuppose precisely the opposite: ignorance.

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256 Robortello, *De artificio dicendi*, 12r-v. See above Girolamo Aleandro’s comment about heathen beliefs.
257 Castelvetro, *Poetica*, 41r.
259 “Il credibile presuppone sempre notizia di ciò che si fa a credere, ma la maraviglia, e il figliuol suo mirabile, presuppone per l’appunto la contraria ignoranza”. Patrizi, “Deca ammirabile”, 293.
Patrizi shows wonder to be proportional to the degree of incredibility of a thing: what is
dubious, unaccustomed, or greater than usual seems both incredible and wonderful.260 For
Patrizi, Mazzoni’s effort at disguising the impossible as credible was entirely misguided, since it
missed the fact that wonder cannot occur except through a component of ignorance, no matter
how small. To prove his point, he resorts to three moments in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*:
the first shows wonder as it results from a style made strange and foreign through the abundance
of loan words and metaphors; the second, discussed in Chapter One, refers to the greater space
that epic poetry allows for wonder in comparison with tragedy – because, as we do not see the
agents on the stage, we are also more ignorant of what happens; the third posits recognition
(“ἀναγνώρισις”) as one of the main sources of wonder in tragedy – and recognition, by definition,
is not possible unless preceded by ignorance of who someone actually is.261

Yet, Patrizi’s theory stands apart from Mazzoni’s more than anything else by opposing
the conception of poetics as sophistry. Patrizi contends that not everything that goes against
expectation is necessarily wonderful: if it fails to become reasonable or true once the process of
cognition involved in wonder has reached completion, what appeared shocking and initially
begot wonder ends up being despised. This is so, as later theoreticians of wit will postulate for
the form of wonder, because the intellect enjoys the form of reasoning and argumentation, and
Mazzoni’s poetry-as-sophistry offers, in the case of the wonderful, only the act of being deceived
by previously held beliefs in the place that should be occupied by the moment of learning.262

260 “Doubt is wonder’s brother”, writes Patrizi in relation to riddles. Patrizi, “Deca ammirabile”, 260; and, in
connection to grandeur, “everything that is out of usage is less credible, and more wonderful” (“tutto ciò che è fuori
261 Patrizi, “Deca ammirabile”, 301-302. The three moments in Aristotle are, respectively: *Rhetoric* 350-351, III.II,
1404b; *Poetics* 122-123, §24, 1460a; and *Poetics* 86-87, §16, 1455a.
262 A process of wondering that lacks culmination in the form of knowledge remains incomplete, inasmuch as it is in
want of what Sarbiewski will call “consentaneum”, and Gracián “fundamento”. See sections two and three below.
It takes a study of the method proposed by Patrizi for the formation of the wonderful in order to understand how exactly it differs from Mazzoni’s.

Patrizi describes the map of the understanding as divided into two orders – the one reuniting that which is “credible, possible, happened, true, or likely”, and the other composed of everything “incredible, impossible, not happened, false, or unlikely”. Audiences react to things partaking of the former alone by perfectly understanding them. Since these are things that they know and believe without something else teaching them, they lack novelty or surprise, and therefore bring no pleasure and have little effect upon the intellect. Things that belong to the second order appear incredible and impossible: as such, they are met with rejection and lack of interest, as they are found to be false.

Wonder, as a matter of fact, dwells in the crossroads where the two orders meet:

The wonderful, by its own nature, is born from neither the order of the credible, nor that of the incredible, but only when the one gets mixed with the other [...]. Therefore the mixture of both the credible and the incredible will give birth to wonder, and the wonderful will be nothing else than such union by which things are made credible from incredible, and incredible from credible.²⁶³

Small in appearance, the difference between Mazzoni’s position and Patrizi’s signposts two conceptions of poetry that it would be hard to reconcile. Patrizi thinks of poetry’s wonder as guiding the poets through a process of cognition, so that what they initially find incredible may be understood once they learn the reason underlying it. Likewise, what seemed impossible becomes possible, the unlikely likely, and so on.

²⁶³ “Il maraviglioso, per sua natura, nè dall’ordine solo de’ credibili, nè dall’ordine solo degli incredibili nasca, ma nasce allora quando l’un ordine si mescola con l’altro [...] Adunque il mescolamento di ambedue, credibile e incredibile, farà la maraviglia, ed il mirabile sarà non altro che un tale congiungimento, di che di incredibili divengano credibili, o di credibili divengano incredibili”. Patrizi, “Deca ammirabile”, 310.
The possibility for this transition to happen is a condition of the object that is expected to awake wonder, because fundamentally, in spite of the reaction of surprise and novelty that it begets, it is somehow true. The same cannot be said of Mazzoni’s poetics, which self-acknowledgedly present readers with a form of sophistry. Mazzoni’s method picks from Patrizi’s first order of things the impossible, and puts it in contact, from the second order, with the credible. Through deceit, it makes something impossible pass for credible: there is no cognition involved, but only deceit. In Patrizi’s model, as in Castelvetro’s description, Oedipus—and, with him, those spectators that place themselves in his shoes—is shocked as he knows that he is the killer of his father in spite of the measures taken to avoid the murder; yet understanding ensues as the character realizes that, as he was wrong about the real identity of his parents, he escaped from what he thought to be his family only to meet them, therefore committing the crime that fulfilled the prophecy that he was fleeing from. Conversely, while Mazzoni’s poet may resort to beliefs of any kind to make impossibilities pass unnoticed, as soon as educated readers consider them in depth, they detect the deceit, and find pleasure only insofar as they see the unlearned caught in the trap.264

Patrizi’s request for wonder based upon ultimately possible and likely statements is, moreover, a consequence of Patrizi’s opposition to the definition of poetry’s audience as popular, a notion that—as shown above—had been constant from Maggi to Castelvetro to Tasso and to

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264 Patrizi would discredit Mazzoni’s interpretation of Aristotle’s Poetics 24, 1460a, where the philosopher recommends poets to choose the impossible and credible over the possible and incredible, upon which Mazzoni had built his theory of marvel. According to Patrizi, Aristotle’s statement meant only that, once that the process of cognition involved in marvel is finished, it befits the good poet that the object in question may appear credible, and not the opposite, intended as a sort of comparison (“paragone”). Patrizi, “Deca ammirabile”, 300. After this, Patrizi adds a series of other unconvincing explanations. The fact that Mazzoni’s interpretation is more convincing for the passage under review derives from the fact that this is precisely the moment in which Aristotle, making Mazzoni right, seems to be actually allowing for deceit and dissimulation. Patrizi’s wonder, based on a process of cognition and therefore relying on a transition from the order of the incredible and impossible to that of the credible and the possible, fits more easily with the moments when Aristotle conceives of wonder in terms of unexpectedness in the outcome of logical processes of causality, such as in Oedipus’ story.
Mazzoni. To them, Patrizi responds with authorities, alleging that “Plutarch, Aristotle, and Plato”, among the wisest among men, stated that “in the audience of poetics find place the prudent and the philosophers”.

Patrizi describes the interaction of the orders of the credible and the incredible in terms that mirror the way in which Aristotle has form and matter relate to one another. Incredibility behaves like matter. It receives being when credibility –that which can be known– imposes a form upon it. Patrizi describes this as a process of understanding happening in time –that is, in the temporality of the poem being read:

The wonderful has a foundation mainly in the incredible; and the credible, either preceding, or accompanying, or following it generates the wonderful and gives it life and form.

This is not to be taken in absolute terms. The psychology of wonder contemplated by Patrizi requires a reader who is neither completely wise nor completely ignorant or incapable of learning. The former would not wonder at anything, for, as theoreticians of wonder from medieval times to Talentoni’s treatise of 1597 would often repeat, nothing would be new for him or her; likewise, s/he who is not able to experience learning would never notice novelty, sunk in a confusion of matter without form. Only in the space mediating between the two extremes – when knowledge, like ignorance, is partial– is it possible for wonder to take place; for then, in Patrizi’s terms, we know that something is but we are ignorant of the reason, or why it is: “It is true, therefore, [Patrizi concludes] that wonder is born out of knowledge, but not a full one; that

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265 “Plutarco, Aristotile […] che tra gli uditori di poetica si comprendessono e i prudenti e i filosofanti”. Patrizi, “Deca ammirabile”, 292.
266 “Nello incredibile ha principalmente fondamento il mirabile; ed il credibile a lui precedente, o accompagnante, o seguentel, genera il mirabile e gli dà vita e forma”. Patrizi, “Deca ammirabile”, 318.
is, [knowledge] of the fact alone, mixed with ignorance of the cause". The first moment is one of hesitation:

What the soul knows of the thing invites it to believe, while the part it is ignorant of causes it to hold back, and disbelieve: and so it hesitates full of doubt, until it gets fully acquainted with the thing.

The soul knows the existence of a certain object, but not the cause that accounts for it being what it is. Then the cause appears, which lends credibility to the incredible: “Once that certainty and distinctness arrive, wonder ceases”. Pleasure, for which wonder is sought and poetry esteemed, takes place through the consumption of wonder, as the soul learns the cause and the incredible stops being so. Poets are praised and held most excellent not because they imitate things – as painters do, according to Patrizi’s understanding of the term “imitation” – but because they bestow credibility upon the incredible.

It should come as no surprise that the modalities wonder adopts in a poem are those that had been previously considered by the commentators on Aristotle’s Poetics, with examples including reversals of fortune (“περιπέτειαι”), recognitions of people who happen to be other than imagined (“ἀναγνώρισεις”), and metaphors, in which a term means otherwise than the audience would expect at first according to the experience they have of the language. With reversal and recognition as features of the plot, and metaphor as a device of elocution, it may have seemed natural for Patrizi’s Deca plastica – the continuation to Deca ammirabile – to explore and make visible the connection between plot and trope. The two in fact share

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267 “Vero è adunque che la maraviglia nasca da notizia, ma non piena, ciò è del solo fatto, mescolata con ignoranza della cagione”. Patrizi, “Deca ammirabile”, 364.
268 “Muovesi dunque l’animo per la notizia a crederla, e per la ignoranza si ferma e la discrède, e ne sta in dubbio, finché piena conoscenza venga a farne”. Patrizi, “Deca ammirabile”, 365.
270 “Only things for which we never acquire a cause that may account sufficiently for them, such as the beauty of the sky, may keep us wondering at them, never satiated”. Patrizi, “Deca ammirabile”, 365-366.
mechanism and function, as they embody the feeling of wonder. Both afford a component of unexpectedness, of what is “inopinato” or “fuor d’opinione”, also called paradoxical – from “παράδοξον”, against opinion, or “παρὰ τὴν δόξαν”. 271 Patrizi was treading a path that would later become crucial for seventeenth-century theorists of wit: Baltasar Gracián’s 1648 treatise Agudeza y arte de ingenio emphasized, with notions like “repugnante” or “paradoja”, everything that Patrizi had reunited in the order of the incredible; likewise, Patrizi’s insistence on what is “inopinato” would resound with Maciej K. Sarbiewski’s use of “inopinatum” in his theory of wit in the 1620s, discussed below in section two. 272

As Mazzoni had done, Patrizi devised a method – what he too called “topica” – that somehow adapted to the search for marvel in poetics the system of places or topics used by rhetoricians for the invention of arguments. He established a machine of combination intended so that everyone “may shape for themselves the credible, the incredible, the poetic marvelous, and marvel”. 273 For that, they would cross three kinds of subject matter – divine, natural, and human –, with the orders of things credible and incredible, each consisting of five topics, as discussed above: credible, impossible, likely, not happened, and so on. Moreover, this is still to be arranged in combination with categories such as “time, place, and mode”, and with secondary predicaments “such as some masters of the topical method have called antecedents,

272 “It is interesting to note that the complete tragic fiction of the Poetics resembles the metaphor of the Rhetoric […] because it, like the metaphor, achieves its aim by means of a logical conclusion which nevertheless occurs contrary to expectation. Compare Rhetoric, 3.11.6 on the metaphor’s deceptive and paradoxical nature with the deception and paradox of tragedy, introduced by Gorgias and further refined by Aristotle”. Eden, Poetic and Legal Fiction, 71. According to Terence Cave, within Castelvetro’s or Denores’ frameworks, “dramatic structure, one might infer, is comparable with the structure of a Renaissance sonnet”, with the latter referring to the conceit which surprises the reader with a sudden turn of meaning in the final part of the poem. Cave, Recognitions, 59.
Patrizi goes on enumerating the list of categories that poets may put in relation to one another in order to obtain the marvelous in countless ways, and draws a diagram that renders the method visible to the eye. Patrizi does not hide that fact the creation of a method or “topica” for the marvelous owes much to Giulio Camillo Delminio’s adaptation of the topics of rhetoric for the creation of tropes, discussed above in Chapter One. As a matter of fact, this was not the first time that Patrizi had resorted to Delminio’s method, which he had applied as early as 1560 to the analysis of the sonnets published by the poet Luca Contile. Unlike then, however, Patrizi would now redraw and reorient Delminio’s method for different purposes, rather than merely putting it into practice.

Patrizi’s machine of marvels serves a conception of poetics that blends invention and wonder in a way that would appear rich of prospects in the decades to come. By restoring marvel, as it takes place in poetry, to the field of cognition, he minimized the role of deceit championed by Mazzoni and rescued poetics from the space of sophistry. Moreover, he proffered bridges to a perspective that would be advanced by the theoreticians of wit. It fostered a view of poetics as a space for invention, conceived as a challenge where both poet and audience explore the possibilities of

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275 For a study of the sources of combination and inventiveness contained in Patrizi’s method, see Lina Bolzoni, L’universo dei poemi possibili: studi su Francesco Patrizi da Cherso (Roma: Bulzoni, 1980).
276 See Chapter One, section two.
277 For Patrizi’s preface and analysis of Contile’s sonnets, see Luca Contile, Le rime di Messer Luca Contile, divise in tre parti, con discorsi, et argomenti, di M. Francesco Patritio, et M. Antonio Borghesi… (In Venetia: appresso Francesco Sansovino, et compagni, MDLX [1560]). Patrizi acknowledges his debt to Delminio in Deca ammirabile, as he writes: “Giulio Camillo, in a singular discovery, adapted [the topics] to oratorical and poetic figurative locutions; and so we, at present […] make them into sources of the poetic marvelous, and of poetic marvel, and then we will make them into sources of every poetic matter, and every poetic invention” (“Giulio Camillo, con pellegrin trovato, accomodò alle locuzioni figurate oratorie e poetiche, e noi ora […] gli facciam fonti del mirabile poetico e della poetica maraviglia, e poi gli faremo a proprio luogo fonti d’ogni poetica materia e d’ogni poetica invenzione”) Patrizi, “Deca ammirabile”, 316. I have emended Aguzzi Barbagli’s reading of “pellegrin” as “Pellegrin”, which he takes for a reference to the work of Camillo Pellegrino, author of a dialogue Del concetto poetico, which does not seem to fit either the syntax or the context.
arguing connections between things in ways that, however daring and wonder-inspiring, never lose sight of a foundation in probability or truth. In Patrizi’s view, poetics becomes a discipline where the stimulus to philosophical inquiry that Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* placed in wonder finds a place to exist, an event reoriented to beget pleasure in the audience. Patrizi appears somehow as a point of arrival for Vincenzo Maggi’s suggestion, advanced in 1550, that wonder corresponds to the part of delight in the purpose of “docere et delectare” that Horace—and, according to him, Aristotle too—had assigned to poetry. According to Maggi, wonder made audiences ready to welcome whatever kind of moral instruction poetry may provide.  

With something radically different in mind, Patrizi’s ideas imply a reconsideration of the link between poetry and cognition. Once these have become for the author of *Della poetica* little more than the ingredients required for wonder to take place, it might be fair to suggest that Patrizi culminates the line of inquiry into poetics as oriented to emotional response and wonder-related pleasure, that Castelvetro’s commentary had done much to promote.

It took a philosopher by trade to produce a work exclusively concerned with the feeling of wonder. A professor at the university in Pavia, Giovanni Talentoni would deliver a lecture on wonder’s nature and the modalities it adopts for the *Accademia degli Inquieti* of Milan on November 26, 1596. Talentoni’s speech *On wonder* (“Sopra la maraviglia”) was published in 1597, preceded by a dedication to Costanza Colonna Sforza in which the author assumed for himself the role of a pioneer.  

He acknowledged that he had drawn inspiration from the works

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278 As was suggested in the introduction to Chapter One, the principle that poetry aims at teaching and pleasing at the same time stemmed from Horace’s *Ars poetica*. In spite of what a great part of the commentators of Aristotle would maintain, the latter never speaks of instruction in connection with poetics—while it is far from immediately clear that the catharsis that tragedy aims at may be understood in terms of learning. This results from the superposition of Horatian and Aristotelian ideas—out of the conviction, common at the time, that Horace had summarized Aristotle’s *Poetics* in his poem. For the topic, see the bibliography provided above.

279 “There is no one who has written such a treatise on wonder, which may provide us with full understanding of it. For in fact, even if some authors, whom we quote, have scattered into their books some things pertaining to wonder, what they say is so scarce…” (“della maraviglia non è alcuno, ch’io sappia, che abbia fatto trattato tale, e tanto, che
of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy. These, according to Talentoni, touched now and then on wonder without ever reaching a theory that may be deemed satisfactory.  

In terms that are ultimately Aristotelian, Talentoni describes the wonder that occurs in the soul as “accident”, that is, as “affect”. Wonder, in fact, is “a state of suspension in which the soul is anxious to grasp the object”, involving a sort of “orbiting of the soul around the thing, and investigation of great intensity to know the cause that has produced it”. Yet, as soon as the soul becomes acquainted with the object, and understands the reason why it is so and so, then wonder ceases. As Aristotle had suggested, wonder instills in the soul a wish to thoroughly know objects partially understood, and acts as bait, leading inquiry toward the end of
As Patrizi had stated, wonder requires ignorance no less than ability to learn, with omniscience working as an impediment, much like the absence of reason. Reason, in fact, acts as the spark that makes the soul realize that there is something that escapes us, and that kindles a desire that longs for completion of the process of knowledge. Wonder, as a result, is relative to experience, and to the proportion of “the whole” that one has seen so far. Only God, being perfectly omniscient, is immune to it. Needless to say, this is as close to Patrizi’s position about wonder in poetry as it is problematizing for Mazzoni’s division of audiences between learned and unlearned. In fact, according to Talentoni’s position, one might easily argue that the former are more able to wonder than Mazzoni declared them to be.

On the authority of Cicero, Talentoni declares that things contrary to opinion strike as being new, and therefore arouse the desire to know further. Interestingly, Talentoni places wonder in a relation to truth that resonates with Patrizi’s notion of the kind of wonder needed in poetics, while clashing against the one, founded on deceit, which Mazzoni had proposed:

Novelty and wonder are so closely related that Marcus Tullius [Cicero] (in Lucullus, in the fourth book of De finibus bonorum et malorum, as well as in the Paradoxa Stoicorum) called wonderful certain propositions which are true in themselves, but contrary to opinion, which the Greeks call paradoxes [παράδοξα], as when one says that

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283 Talentoni quotes Aristotle in the first book of the Rhetoric, who wrote: “Τὸ θαυμαστὸν ἐπιθυμήτον, that is, the marvelous arouses desire” (“maraviglioso è quel, che eccita desiderio”). He did so, according to Talentoni, in reference to “that desire to learn, which goes together with it” (“quel desiderio d’imparar, che l’accompagna”. Taléntoni, Discorso, 42. Later on, Talentoni too refers to wonder as the origin of philosophy, a notion that, according to him, was shared by Plato in Theaetetus, Aristotle in Metaphysics, and Clement of Alexandria in Strommata. Taléntoni, Discorso, 49-50.

284 “He who wonders must lack knowledge of the object […] but […] he should have the light of reason, through which he may be able to judge that which is convenient or not. For a fool, deprived of any natural cognition, would be unable to make any judgment about the object, and consequently of wondering” (“che dell’oggetto scienza haver non debbia, chi si maraviglia, diciamo […] convien però, che habbia lume di ragione, per lo qual possa far giudicio di quel, che conviene, o no, perché se stolto fusse, e privo d’ogni cognizione naturale, non potrebbe dell’oggetto far giudicio alcuno, e per conseguente maravigliarsene”). Taléntoni, Discorso, 38.

285 Talentoni, Discorso, 37.
only the wise are rich; or that all the wise are free, and the mad are servants, and others alike.  

The insistence that paradoxes are indeed truth despite seeming odd when considered at first sight binds wonder to philosophy, erasing the suspicion of a connection with sophistry that Mazzoni had consistently evoked.

Poetry provides several of the materials used by Talentoni. In poetry, as he asserts, paradox is most conspicuous in the form of reversals of fortune. Sudden and unforeseen, they throw the soul into a suspension that will only vanish in light of some explanation:

Things that happen without preparation are marvelous […] Sudden things are marvelous too, like the transformations of things shaped by tragic and comic poets—the Greeks call them περιπετίαι [sic], and they happen whenever someone fortunate becomes suddenly miserable, or else when he becomes fortunate who first was unhappy. These mutations, as Aristotle says in the second book of the Rhetoric, and Cicero writing to Luceceius, bring wonder because, as they happen, they are unhoped for and unexpected, and, because of that, they are unknown [italics added].

Reversals, much like maxims marked by paradox, are wonderful because they follow the logic of causality and yet reach a conclusion that strikes as unexpected. Operating within the terms of epistemology rather than logic, Talentoni translates causality and the absence of it in terms of, respectively, what can be known and what cannot. Therefore, he defines paradox as the discovery of something unknown in the midst of what is known: wonder arises then because a void of knowledge is perceived such as may arouse the desire to fill it. If wonder demands that
there be causal connection in events, this is because chance or “casus” is not something knowable, and only relations of cause and effect define “forms” that the soul may learn. The idea that something happened by accident amounts to zero in terms of learning, and fails to satisfy the desire for knowledge involved in wonder. Chance naturally fails to meet the requirements of the intellect, as much as does a reason that does not logically apply: both leave the soul anxious and unappeased. What logic and discourse—as Gracián will explain in *Agudeza y arte de ingenio*—dismiss as lacking reason, Talentoni’s theory of knowledge rejects as non-existent for the soul. The latter only apprehends forms and looks therefore for necessity or, at least, probability in events: embodying causal connections, only these can serve as objects of cognition.\(^{288}\)

On a different note, Talentoni divided wonder into types. In doing so, he brought issues to the fore that had been at the center of debates on poetics for a while. First, he discussed the possibility that wonders of different kinds might provide scholars with criteria to define different genres; second, he addressed the relationship that wonder at the paradox present in present in plots, maxims, or tropes entertains with wonder at the work of the poet or speaker responsible for those.

Concerning the former, Talentoni aims at connecting wonder to effects such as pity or laughter. “If the thing that makes us wonder about someone brings someone harm, (he asserts) then [the feeling of wonder] would become pity”\(^{289}\). On the contrary, wonder at inconvenient or unsuitable actions—provided that these are harmless—would be accompanied by laughter.\(^{290}\)

\(^{288}\) “When [something] happens by chance, the soul will soon recognize it as lacking any reason, and as taking place with no purpose; and, as a consequence, it will not beget wonder, but rather scorn, or contempt” (“essendo egli fatto a caso, tosto dall’istesso animo sarà conosciuto, come cosa fuor d’ogni ragione, e temerariamente nata; e per conseguenza non maraviglia, ma o scherno, o sdegno […] in lui di se stesso partorirà”). Talentoni, *Discorso*, 43.


\(^{290}\) “Since man is provided with reason, with which he knows and distinguishes that which is suitable from that which is not, [things that are unfit] will produce in him not only wonder (which will arise from ignorance, as he does not know how is it possible that such great stupidity and unsuitability may have taken place), but will make him laugh as well” (“per esser l’uomo dotato della ragione, con la quale conosce, e distingue quel, che si conviene, da
kind of wonder experienced by the soul determines the form of the plot informed by it. For one thing, it marks tragedy off from comedy:

If those actions, sayings, or facts were foul, and brought destruction, or bodily pain, they would arouse pity rather than laughter […] and would serve the purpose of tragedy instead of comedy. 291

This coincides, though in a formulation richer in circumstances, with Pinciano’s idea that tragedy and comedy differ according to the kind of wonder that takes place in each. Considering that Philosophia antiqua poética was published in the same year that Talentoni delivered his speech, it is not an exaggeration to suggest that, by the turn of the century, wonder was perceived as being not only central to poetry, but also operative as a criterion to delimit the way each genre performs the effect at which it aims.

More importantly, perhaps, Talentoni would single out a kind of wonder intimately related to the connection, pointed out already by Castelvetro in 1570, with the value that audiences grant a poet insofar as s/he is a creator of wonder. First Castelvetro and later Denores had suggested that as the audience wonders at what seems paradoxical in reversals or tropes, they somehow wonder no less at the wit who was responsible for either coming into existence as a creation. Talentoni offers a formulation of his own for the continuity—and the difference—between the two kinds of wonder, which he labels as first and second type, respectively. 292 The former is the wonder at things of which the cause is unknown. The latter, more interestingly, takes place at that of which the cause is known, but which begets amazement at the way in which

291 “Se quegli atti, o detti, o fatti, fussero brutti, e recassero distruggimento, o corporal dolore, non riso, ma compassion concitirebbono […] e non alla commedia, ma alla tragedia servirebbono”. Talentoni, Discorso, 54.

292 “In turn, wonder accompanied by laughter is listed as the third type. Talentoni, Discorso, 50-57.”
cause and effect come together – or, for what interests us, at the way in which the artificer (the cause) was able to craft the piece of thought (the effect) that made the connection noticeable.\textsuperscript{293}

Whereas the first type implies a transition to a piece of cognition that the soul thereby obtains, the second type of wonder entails enjoyment at knowledge already possessed. The latter happens in a way both deferred and contingent upon the former. The first causes the subject to take a step further and grasp a cause for the effect: a connection that is unexpected yet logical. Then, upon a process of reflection made possible by simultaneously considering the cause and the effect, the second type of wonder occurs at the way in which the one leads to the other. Should the soul remain ignorant of the cause – and therefore fail to prove wonder of the first type –, it would also be unable to value the suitability between it and the effect, and therefore to enjoy the second type of wonder.

In poetry and paintings, the second kind of wonder allows spectators to notice the wit and the skill of the poet or the painter, as they gave origin to something primarily noticed as wonderful.

No longer a step toward something else not yet obtained, wonder of the second type is intransitive. While the first type ceases as soon as the intellect learns the cause it longed for, the second kind feeds upon itself – at least ideally – without limit, as long as the object is there for consideration. It does not look for anything beyond the feeling of wonder itself. Talentoni illustrated this with the anecdote of the painter Nicostratus looking at Zeuxis’ portrait of Helen:

> Of the second [type], wonder itself is the end. For, since it is born from certainty about the knowledge that one has about the object, wonder persists as long as certainty does. Witness the story told by Aelianus in Book XIV of his \textit{Varia historia} in connection with the painter Nicostratus. He says that Nicostratus was looking with great wonder at the

\textsuperscript{293} Talentoni speaks, for wonder of the second type, of a reaction at “the conjunction of the cause with the effect” (“ci maravigliamo del congiungimento della causa con l’effetto”). Talentoni, \textit{Discorso}, 50-51.
portrait of Helen painted by Zeuxis, and his perseverance gave occasion that someone asked him why he wondered so greatly. To this he answered that the other would not have asked that question if only he had had his own eyes, intending the cognition that he possessed of the perfection of the painting. And, because the cognition—which never diminished—, together with the painting—which remained in a state of perfection—gave perpetual occasion to discover and contemplate new splendors of the art, this made it impossible for him to cease watching it, or wondering at it.\footnote{Della seconda [specie di maraviglia] il termine è la maraviglia istessa, poiché, nascendo dalla certezza della scienza, che si ha dall’oggetto, non mancando questa mai, non mancherà ancor quella. Della qual cosa potrà far fede quel, che racconta Eliano nel 14. libro della varia istoria, che occorse a Nicostrato pittore, perché, guardando con maraviglia grande il ritratto d’Helena, fatto da Zeusi, perché perseverava in quella maniera, diede occasion a uno, che l’interrogò, perché tanto se ne maravigliase, a cui rispose, che ciò non gli haverrebbe egli già richiesto, se havesse havuto gli occhi suoi, intendendo per questi la cognitione, ch’egli haveva dell’eccellenza dell’opera, la quale perché non veniva in lui meno, e l’opera, come perfetta, sempre dava occasione di scuoprire, & osservar novi lumi dell’arte, non permetteva, che cessasse di guardarla, e di maravigliarsene”. Talentoni, Discorso, 53-54.}

With wonder of the first type, cognition performs the role of a horizon, equated with the fulfillment of the desire to know. That of the second type, on the contrary, is endless, assuming that we do not forget the cause behind the effect: it requires certainty, in Talentoni’s terms, as much as the first type needs doubt and hesitation.\footnote{Talentoni, Discorso, 54.} With the audience in possession of knowledge, wonder is “a judgment of a certain subtle understanding”, according to a formulation that Talentoni quotes from Giulio Cesare Scaligero’s response to Girolamo Cardano.\footnote{“Un giudicio di qualche sottile intendimento”, which, in turn, translates Giulio Cesare Scaligero’s “iudicium subtilis cuiuspiam intellectiones”. Talentoni, Discorso, 50-51. Scaligero had contemplated the two modalities of wonder, which he expressed as follows: “Sometimes, admiration takes place in ignorance of the cause, and then it is combined with doubt. But at other times one knows the cause, whenever we admire the connection between the cause and the effect. And then it is a judgment of a certain subtle understanding” (“Admiratio es interdum ignota caussa: tuncque est coinuncta cum dubitatione. Interdum est, cognita caussa. Quoties admiramur coniunctionem causae cum effectu. Tuncque est iudicium subtilis cuiuspiam intellectiones”). Giulio Cesare Scaligero, Exotericarum exercitationum liber quintus decimus de subtilitate, ad Hieronymum Cardanum (Lutetiae: ex officina typographica Michaelis Vascosani, MDLVII [1557]), 424r.}

To clarify the point, Talentoni adds examples such as Petrarch marveling at the beauty of Laura, as a creation of God, or Hermes Trismegistus wondering at the miracle of man as a link between heaven and earth. Likewise, he refers to how Democritus marveled at “Protagoras’ acuity of wit, and the greatness of his intellect […] seeing the bundle of sticks tied together that he was
bringing from the village into the city with a thin rope and great artifice”. The second type of wit is contingent upon the first, and appreciating cunning and artifice implies that, somehow, we possess them first.

The connection between acuity of wit (“acutezza dell’ingegno”) as the faculty that helps the artificer through his creations and the works that are the effect of it gives birth to wonder of the second type, identifiable with the feeling that, according to Castelvetro or Denores, is felt by audiences as they notice the poet’s work employed in a plot full of events happening in surprising and never before heard of ways.

Talentoni’s distinction between wonder without and with knowledge of the cause – or between the first and the second types – can be compared with the two ways in which sixteenth-century scholars tended to understand the occurrence of wonder in poetry. The first type refers to what Lope de Vega would call the desire to know how things end (“saber en lo que para”) and what more recently has been called “reading for the plot”. It has the audience wonder at reversals and recognitions – a pleasure exhausted when these take place, as they eventually understand who is who, in a way in which something initially enigmatic ends up making sense whenever the tangle of a plot is loosened and untied. It is reminiscent of the pleasure that Luis de Carvallo described for comedies in 1602, only five years later:

the story ought to go on through different events of the kind that one may devise, and through varied convoluted cases, as if tying knots, trying to always keep the soul of the audience in suspense, now happy and now sad, now marveled and full of desire to know

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297 “L’acutezza dell’ingegno, e la grandezza dell’intelletto di Protagora […] visto il gran fascio di legne, che con poco legame, e molta industria insieme legate portava dalla villa nella cittade”. Talentoni, Discorso, 51.
298 Castelvetro, Poetica, 102r.
how things will end. For the greater the suspense and desire, the more pleasant will be the outcome, for this is the nature of everything that is desired.\textsuperscript{300}

Unlike this, wonder of the second type accounts for a pleasure that is ultimately inexhaustible: it is a reaction to the way in which causes fit with effects in the artifact that begets wonder of the first type –or, in other words, to how artificers beget their works. Wonder becomes a notion able not only to explain the way in which poems work in order to accomplish the end for which they exist, but also how this relates to the pleasure that one obtains at pondering the quality and the excellence with which it is done.

Talentoni’s dissection of wonder into the first and second types provided a framework to understand how wonder at reversals or metaphors relates to wonder at wit and artifice. In what follows, I will show that the understanding of wonder, subtle and multifaceted, embodied in Talentoni’s treatise reflects a degree of consensus noticeable in various attempts in the seventeenth century to theorize the relationship between the wit of a poet or of a speaker, the acuity that s/he displays, and the pleasure that readers or audiences may obtain from it.

2. Seventeenth-century Jesuit theoreticians on “acuity of wit”

It would take a leap of slightly over two decades to find a mechanism identical to the one that Talentoni described for wonder in 1596-97 reconsidered as part of a theory oriented to show excellence in the argument of connections among things –what is usually known as “acuity of wit” or “acutum”. As announced in the introduction, “acutum” referred to a quality of speech – generally of a maxim, a trope, or the plot of a poem– that in turn became apparent thanks to the

\textsuperscript{300} “Hanse de proseguir la materia con diferentes sucesos de los que se pudieran pensar y otros varios y revueltos casos, como haciendo ñudos, procurando tener siempre el ánimo de los oyentes suspenso, ya alegres, ya tristes, ya admirados y con deseo de saber el fin de los sucesos, porque cuanto esta suspensión y deseo fuere mayor, le será más agradable después el fin, por serlo siempre lo que es más deseado”. Carvallo, \textit{Cisne de Apolo}, 261.
chance it gave the audience to notice excellence in creating connections logically valid and yet surprising, which resulted in pleasure of some kind.\(^{301}\) It was, as discussed above, what well-composed plots let audiences perceive, according to scholars of poetics like Castelvetro or Denores.

Even though it was not until around 1626 that the Jesuit Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski allegedly lectured on the nature of “acutum”, the notes prepared for the occasion and preserved to us in manuscript represent a revision of ideas that were already some years old.\(^{302}\) At any rate, the text from around 1626 represents the oldest extant attempt to theoretically explain “acutum” and to provide a method or “topica” that would help readers to display acuity of wit.

The manuscript of Sarbiewski’s treatise, entitled *De acuto et arguto*, was lost, remaining untraceable for more than three hundred years. Discovered in the twentieth century, it was published at last in 1958.\(^{303}\) It might be objected that a work that remained unpublished, and that

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\(^{301}\) The practice of wit permeated through poetry and conversation, and became highly popular with preachers, especially among Jesuits. These were also the first to theorize the nature of the phenomenon, starting with Sarbiewski and then following with Matteo Peregrini, Baltasar Gracián, Sforza Pallavicino, Jacob Masen, and others. However, not everyone was pleased with the idea of preachers who sprinkled their sermons with countless paradoxes, looking to inspire continuous marvel in their audiences. Signs of discontempt, and injunctions against the trend, came from inside the order almost since the first moment. See, for example, L. Stinglhamber, “Baltasar Gracián et la Compagnie de Jésus”, *Hispanic Review* 22, no. 3 (1954). In Spain, the satire against the use of wit in the language of preachers contained in the novel *Fray Gerundio de Campazas* (1758) by José Francisco de Isla would become paradigmatic.

\(^{302}\) The information is conveyed in Sarbiewski’s biography, written in the eighteenth century. Lebrecht Gotthelf Langbein, *Commentatio de Mathiae Casimiri Sarbievii S. I. Poloni Vita Studii et Scriptis*… (Dresda: apud Fridericum Hekelium, MDCCCLIV [1754]), LXXV. See also Woods, *Gracián meets Góngora*, 237.

\(^{303}\) Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski, “De acuto et arguto”, in *Wykłady Poetyki: Praecepta Poetica* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1958). Sarbiewski’s treatise on poetics *De perfecta poesi* did not fare better. As a matter of fact, it was published only in 1954, which contrasts radically with the abundance of editions enjoyed by Sarbiewski’s poetry (in Latin) well into the eighteenth century. For the manuscript of “De acuto et arguto”, Sarbiewski’s biographer Langbein created in 1754 a sort of crime fiction. According to Langbein, Michael Radau’s *Orator extemporaneus* (1640) would have taken the outline and even some excerpts from Sarbiewski’s “commentarium”; Daniel Morhof, who wrote in 1731 that he had been unable to see Sarbiewski’s text, would have accused Radau of copying too much *ad verbum*. Langbein suggests that the manuscript could indeed have been stolen from Sarbiewski through deceitful means (“dolo malo”). He finished with a wish that the Jesuit fathers in Vilnius might use diligence to bring to light the manuscript, “which perhaps lies hidden at some corner” (“in angulo forsitan quodam latentem”). Needless to say, all the characters mentioned in the story were Jesuits – a constant in the scholarly episodes which follow, where the members of the order seem to inhabit a world that allows for as great a degree of circulation within as it prevents from leaking to the outside. Langbein, *Commentatio*, LLXXVI-LXXVIII.
furthermore was the object of lectures only in universities in Eastern Europe, seems to have little to do with the theorization of wonder in the context of either Italian or Spanish poetic theory. This would be true except for Sarbiewski’s acknowledgement that his theory of wit underwent both deep discussion and severe modification during a stay in Italy that started in 1623, when he arrived in Rome on the occasion of Maffeo Barberini’s ascension to the papacy as Urban VIII.304

In fact, Sarbiewski presents us with a theory that he describes as having been shaped by discussions and negotiations carried out in both correspondence and conversations by Jesuits, of whom many were living in Rome at the time.305 Seven years earlier – some time before 1620, while he was a professor in Lithuania – Sarbiewski had held lectures on acuity of wit as part of a course on rhetoric. The inclusion of wit, defined as “this most beautiful little part of human eloquence”, within a course on oratory is less than surprising given the volume of discussion and dissent about the topic that he mentions while expounding his own ideas.306 Acknowledging the impact of the debates and discussions to which he had been exposed during his years in Rome, Sarbiewski presents his conclusions on the phenomenon of “acutum” by starting with a refutation of ideas advanced by three fellow members of the order: Denys Petau, Michael Rader, and Jakob Bidermann or Masen. Sarbiewski shows interest in making his audience aware that there is a conversation out there concerning acuity of wit and a clash in opinions across the continent. To emphasize this, Sarbiewski lingers on a list of “docti” with whom he shared his thoughts during the stay in Rome from which he has just returned at the time of writing the version we have of De acuto et arguto:

304 Crowned as “clarissimus poeta”, Sarbiewski would develop in Rome some projects for the Pope. Langbein describes Sarbiewski’s efforts to have the Pope and his nephew Cardinal Francesco Barberini as his patrons. Langbein, Commentatio, XLVII-LV.
305 The sphere of Sarbiewski’s references is wide but circumscribed to Jesuit circles. It serves as a reminder of the reliance on Jesuit sources that any investigation of seventeenth-century wit seems to require.
This used to be my mind about the nature of wit, a thought that all the learned men with whom I discussed it in Rome and face to face have approved of; the same did, through letters sent back and forth, Father Bauhaus, Father Rader, Father Caussin, and (through letters written to a member of the order in Belgium) Father Cornelius Hugo, and much more Famiano Strada, and Jean Baptiste de Serres, who confessed to be *acutus* in his speech, and Father Petrucci as well, Alessandro Donati, and Francesco Guinigi.307

Sarbiewski describes a network of minds –Jesuits communicating within structures that the order makes possible– gradually filling the gaps in the quest for the explanation of the reason and the circumstances under which metaphors, or maxims –and, we might add, plots– appear ingenious.

*De acuto et arguto* is a window to ideas more or less openly polemic to one another, discussed by literati and professors living in Rome under Pope Urban VIII, in a period that saw ingenuity and wit become a staple for professionals of speech and poets alike. Sarbiewski’s stay coincides with the activities of the *Accademia dei Desiosi*, a group sponsored by Cardinal Maurizio di Savoia, intimately connected with the curia and the Pope. Active in the 1620s, it hosted the gathering of figures that would one day have much to say in the debates and the literature about wit, like Virgilio Malvezzi, Agostino Mascardi, Matteo Peregrini, or Sforza Pallavicino. Mascardi and Malvezzi, for instance, would hold opposite positions in a debate about the laconic style and historiography, which I discuss below in Chapter Four, while Peregrini would publish in 1639 the first printed treatise on wit, *Delle acutezze*, a subject also

307 “*Haec est sententia vetus mea de acuti natura, quam omnes docti, quibuscum ore tenus contulti Romae, comprobarunt, atque adeo per litteras repetitas pater Bauhausius, pater Raderus, pater Caussinus, pater Cornelius Hugo per litteras ad quendam Belgam nostratem scriptas, multoque magis Famianus Strada, Ioannis Baptista Serranus, qui se acutum iam oratione profitetur, pater Petrucius, Alexander Donatus et Franciscus Guinisius*”. Sarbiewski, “*De acuto*”, 18. A comparison with Langbein’s enumeration of Sarbiewski’s friends in Rome bears a majority of coincidences, but also some new names. Among those added by Langbein, we have Tarquinio Galluzzi, Vincenzo Guinigi, Alessandro Gottifredi, or Francesco Benci. Langbein, *Commentatio*, LVII-LVIII.
addressed by Pallavicino (who was Malvezzi’s nephew) later in the 1650s. Sarbiewski’s conversations on the subject of wit seem to have taken place precisely at a time in which the generation to flourish in the two next decades – one who would massively engage in polemics on the topic – was establishing lasting connections and rivalries.

According to the theory that Sarbiewski presents us with as having endured the test of the fellow scholars of his order, acuity of wit results from the union of two lines of argument concerning one and the same subject. The one of them has to be “consentaneum” – that is, of such kind as to appear in conformity with the subject on which it is predicated. Conversely, the other has to be “dissentaneum”, or discordant with what the audience considers to be true about the thing in question. As a result, the maxim, or the metaphor – or the plot – becomes “a

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309 In light of Sarbiewski’s presence in Rome in the 1620s, and especially of the coincidences between Sarbiewski’s notion of acuity of wit and that of later members of his order, it should come as no surprise that recent scholars have tended to emphasize the similarity between his theory of wit and the one presented in Gracián’s treatises of 1642 and 1648. See Małgorzata Anna Sydor, “La concordia discors en Sarbiewski y Gracián”, in Edad de oro Cantabrigense: Actas del VII Congreso de la Asociación Internacional Siglo de Oro (AISO) (Robinson College, Cambridge, 18–22 de julio, 2005), ed. Anthony Close (Madrid: Iberoamericana-Vervuert, 2006); by the same author, and dealing with a more general aspect of the coincidences between Sarbiewski and Gracián, see “El humanismo jesuítico en Europa. Sarbiewski y Gracián”, Paralelo 50 (2005). See also Beata Waczyńska, “Dos epitafios a Roma sepultada en sus ruinas: un epigrama polaco de Mikolaj Sep Szarzynski y un soneto español de Francisco de Quevedo”, Scriptura 11 (1996). It is certainly true that Sarbiewski’s presence in Rome suggests that his way of understanding “acutum” may have taken hold among Jesuit scholars and discussions. The ideas advanced in his treatise may well have left a trace in the way professors treated related topics, a fact easy to believe in light of the enormous popularity of works by Sarbiewski’s acquaintances, such as, for example, Famiano Strada, author of a famous volume of Prolusiones academicae (1617), discussed in Chapter Three. This notwithstanding, I think one should be extremely cautious before inferring that Gracián actually may have had notice of Sarbiewski’s ideas in any kind of direct manner as suggested by Sydor, who argues that Sarbiewski’s notes could have reached Gracián through Spanish Jesuits who would have attended Sarbiewski’s lectures in Rome, or Vilnius, and, in general, as a consequence of the itinerant habits of the order. See Sydor, “El humanismo jesuítico”, 52-53.

discordant harmony” or “a harmonious discordance”.\textsuperscript{311} In a speech that contains “acutum”, what is contrary to the opinion we previously held about the subject appears as “inopinatum” in the wait for something that restores the meaningfulness. A process of cognition unravels, ending with the assimilation of what was initially perceived as “dissentaneum”.\textsuperscript{312}

“Dissentaneum” awakes wonder (“admiratio”) at that which is new for us and unfamiliar because apparently unfitting within the opinion that we hold of the way things are. As such, it is “inopinatum”.\textsuperscript{313} Conversely, the apprehension of “consentaneum” –that is, of the cause that restores reason to that which seemed strange or absurd– brings pleasure (“delectatio”); as “dissentaneum” gets assimilated and stops being so, then, wonder too comes to an end.\textsuperscript{314}

\textsuperscript{311} Sarbiewski’s definition reads: “Acutum est oratio continens affinitatem dissentanei et consentanei, seu dicti concors discordia vel discors concordia”. Sarbiewski, “De acuto”, 10. Henry F. Fullenwider considers the union of “dissentaneum” and “consentaneum” in the creation of “acutum” in light of Jean de Serres commentary on Plato’s complete works (Platonis opera quae extant omnia, published in 1578 from Henri Estienne’s printing press). He is the same Ioannis Baptista Serranus whom Sarbiewski mentions as interlocutor of his discussions about wit. Sarbiewski, “De acuto”, 18. Fullenwider recognizes the difficulty of conciliating Sarbiewski’s wit and Serres’ commentary, concerned with metaphysics rather than the logic and rhetorical forms which interest Sarbiewski. See Henry F. Fullenwider, “Concors discordia: Sarbiewski’s De acuto et arguto (1627) and Jean de Serres’ Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus (1587)”, Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance 46, no. 3 (1984).

\textsuperscript{312} As a term, “inopinatum” is typical of the language of school logic, used to refer to a sentence predicing something unexpected of a subject. The use of the term, however, is disseminated through writings of all kinds. Just to give an example, around the same time as Sarbiewski’s treatise, it was used in 1623, within the account of a poetic tournament celebrated in Seville, to refer to maxims that shock and seem ingenious to the audience: “Sentencias a cada passo agudas, varoniles, i inopinadas”. The author, moreover, was translating a reference by Justus Lipsius to “inopinata acumina”. Juan Antonio de Ibarra, Encomio de los ingenios sevillanos, en la fiesta de los santos Inacio de Loyola, i Francisco Xavier… (Impreso en Sevilla: por Francisco de Lyra, año 1623), 73r-v. This notion of “inopinatum” (mentioned in relation to Patrizi in section one, above) is synonymous with paradox. In fact, Quintilian writes in Institutio oratoria 9.2.23 about a speech that shocks expectations: “Παράδοξον ἀλλινominarunt, id est inopinatum”. Quoted in. Fernando Romo Feito, “El concepto de paradoja en Baltasar Gracián”, Conceptos. Revista de Investigación Graciana 8 (2011): 39. Sarbiewski’s “inopinatum” is therefore based on (or at least closely related to) Aristotle’s parallel notion of paradox (“παρὰ τὴν δοξὰν”) as a source of wonder, which I discussed above in Chapter One. Glossing it, Sarbiewski writes: “But wonder/admiration is born out of the paradoxical, for of course we hear something that we did not expect and of which the cause had been hidden from us, and therefore we did not think that it could happen” (“admiratio vero nascitur ex inopinato, quod nimirum audiamus aliquid, quod non expectabamus cuiusque causa nos latebat, ac proinde accidere illud non putabamus”). Sarbiewski, “De acuto”, 14. In the same passage, Sarbiewski is explicit in connecting this with Aristotle’s thought: “As Aristotle teaches, wonder (or admiration) is born from the ignorance of the causes” (“ut Aristoteles docet, admiratio nascitur ex ignoratione causarum”). Sarbiewski, “De acuto”, 14.

\textsuperscript{313} Sarbiewski, “De acuto”, 10-14. Sarbiewski resorts to the terms “dissentaneum” and “consentaneum” because these are common in the discipline of dialectics and rhetoric, and therefore would pose no problem to his students. They refer to arguments which seem respectively unsuitable, and suitable for a subject – this is what they do, for example, in Rudolf Agricola’s influential treatise De inventione dialectica. Cogan, “Agricola”, 183.
What Sarbiewski describes for “acutum” is, after all, the process of wonder, first aroused and then satisfied, as found in either Patrizi’s or Talentoni’s account. The mechanism is one and the same: one that contemplates the union of the familiar and the unfamiliar, resulting in desire and challenge as components of learning and eventually, the assimilation of the element perceived as alien, incredible, or absurd, giving pleasure as a result.

If there is something new in the description of wonder characteristic of Sarbiewski’s theory of the acuity of wit—as will be the case with Peregrini and Gracián—it is doubtless the emphasis on reasoning and argumentation, with the ability of both speakers and audiences to ratiocinate in a way that argues sharpness and penetration, for that is precisely the acuity of wit.

Sarbiewski explains in detail the encounter of familiarity and paradox in “acutum”. Together with “inopinatum”, that which is “acutum”

must have […] some likeness of a cause, not perceived until then, making us see why something happened, which we did not expect. And, in the same way that wonder is born more properly from what is incongruous [dissentaneum] (for we hear something that seems unsuitable [dissentaneum]), to the same extent a greater pleasure is born from that which is appropriate or suitable [consentaneum], certainly because we see that the same thing we considered to be incongruous [dissentaneum] in connection to the subject we speak about, now see as suitable [consentaneum] to this same thing. Therefore the conjunction of admiration and pleasure is fitly born out of the union of that which is “dissentaneum” and that which is “consentaneum”.

315 “Debet habere […] apparentiam aliquam causae illius, quae latebat, propter quam accidere illud videamus, quod accidere posse non sperabamus. Itaque sicut admiratio nascitur ex dissentaneeo magis proprie, quia nimirum audimus aliquid accidine dissentaneum, ita delectatio magis ex altera parte nascitur ex consentaneo, quia nimirum de facto tamen illud, quod putabamus rei, de qua sermo fit, esse dissentaneum, iam videmus id esse eidem rei consentaneum. Atque ita coniunctio admirationis cum delectatione nascitur adaequate ex conjunctione dissentanei et consentanei”. Sarbiewski, “De acuto”, 14. It is likely that Sarbiewski’s mention of “some likeness” of a cause (“apparentiam alium”) and not just “a cause” may be a reminder that wit is a kind of experience which has to do with opinion and not demonstration according to scientific principles: as such, it has no relation to truth and, rather than causes, it needs only things that one may perceive as such. Compare with Talentoni’s claim, through the quote of Cicero’s *Paradoxa Stoicorum* mentioned above in section one, that the reason for the soul to eventually accept what seemed to be against opinion is that it is true, even though it appeared initially odd due to the strangeness that it bears to what is usually thought.
Sarbiewski exemplifies the dynamics of “acutum” with the last distich, or *clausula*, of a famous epigram by the poet Marcus Valerius Martial, which presents us with a lion unexpectedly sparing the life of a hare.³¹⁶ A behavior hardly suitable for the beast, it becomes “consentaneum” or “reasonable” as we are told that the predator belongs to the emperor Domitian, and therefore has inherited the mercifulness that —though one may call this flattery— characterizes the ruler:

How is it possible that a hungry lion could spare its prey?
But they say it is yours [sc. Domitian’s]: then it can do so.

(Unde potest avidus captae leo parcere praedae?
Sed tamen esse tuus dicitur: ergo potest).³¹⁷

As Sarbiewski explains, the poem builds a climate of “dissentaneum” by predicating something apparently unfitting about a certain subject —namely that a hare can actually manage to escape the gaping jaws of a lion. This shocks the expectations that the audience holds about the fierceness of the animal, especially if hungry.³¹⁸ The strangeness of the fact has readers wonder how this could be so. To save the situation, a cause provides “consentaneum” to what thus far seemed absurd, or at least enigmatic: the lion belongs to Domitian, whom Martial presents as a mild emperor, reluctant to shed blood.³¹⁹ It seems reasonable for animal and owner to share a trait of mildness, even if this may be considered, in Sarbiewski’s terms, rather “some

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³¹⁶ As the subtitle of Sarbiewski’s treatise makes clear, Seneca and Martial became models for wit in prose and verse respectively. Martial’s relevance in seventeenth-century poetics could hardly be exaggerated. He embodies, in opposition to Catullus, one of the two models of the epigram available in early modern poetics. Gracián’s *Agudeza y arte de ingenio* (1648) gives proof of Martial’s importance: among Latin poets, he is quoted more often than anyone else. For the fortune of Martial in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain, see Juan Gil, “Marcial en España”, *Humanitas* 56 (2004).
³¹⁸ Sarbiewski, “De acuto”, 6-8.
³¹⁹ “Nempe illud leonem quidem fuisset, sed tamen Caesaris mansueti et ad sanguinem effundendum tardi fuisset leonem”. Sarbiewski, “De acuto”, 8. Sarbiewski himself rewrote Martial’s epigram as *contrafactum*, replacing the hare with a martyr spared by the lions. See Nedzinskaitė, “‘Finis epigrammatis est anima eius’”, 287-288.
appearance of a cause” than a real one. With the reason revealed – or with the audience oriented towards guessing it –, the feeling of wonder ceases and consumes itself in the form of pleasure. The listener, or the reader, enjoys having made sense of a statement that had threatened to be utterly absurd. The link (“unio”) between “dissentaneum” and “consentaneum” is what one calls “acutum”.

Sarbiewski’s view was innovative in that it confronted the reactions that take place in the mind of the audience with unprecedented detail. Anticipating objections or perhaps contesting retorts that occurred in the discussions in which he had engaged with scholars inside and outside Italy, Sarbiewski explained that the claim that wit operates to unite “consentaneum” and “dissentaneum” does not meant that either of the terms have to be taken in absolute terms. On the contrary, they only need to be so relative to one another: for instance, what acts as “dissentaneum” does not need to be actually unfamiliar to us, or to shock our opinion. If this were so, a speech containing “acutum” would have no effect when heard for a second time. By then, both sides of the argumentation would be equally “consentanea”, supposing that once that wonder is consumed, the absurd vanishes as we learn the reason that it was after all not absurd but rather true and fitting to the thing on which it is predicated.

The transformation of wonder into pleasure, therefore, has to leave something that remains untouched so that, as the audience encounters a metaphor, or a maxim, or a plot again, they may still wonder at it. A speech with “acutum” reenacts a difference between something more and something less well known. In the simultaneity of both, the latter comes to be perceived as “inopinatum”. In Sarbiewski’s terms, in light of what looks more obvious, the

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320 Sarbiewski, “De acuto”, 8. Sarbiewski wrote a treatise on poetics dealing with epic as well, De perfecta poesi, sive Vergilius et Homerus. The work is remarkable for the reduction to the method of inquiry of the rhetorician of each of the principles present in Aristotle’s Poetics. For a study of Sarbiewski’s aesthetics, see Anna Li Vigni, Poeta quasi creator. Esthetica e poesia in Mathias Casimir Sarbiewski ([Palermo]: Centro internazionale studi di estetica, [2005]).
counterpart hides (“latere”), with the result that wonder and pleasure are born anew. This is so because the audience notices the gap between what is “dissentaneum” and “consentaneum” in the piece in question, and the way the two harmonize:

Notice very carefully that it is not necessary to be actually ignorant of the things that appear “dissentaneum” or “consentaneum”, but only to be virtually so –that is, that “consentaneum” may behave in relation to “dissentaneum” in such a way that, with the one being known, the other needs to hide by nature, and, as a consequence, that it may be capable of not being known. Therefore an actual, or formal lack of knowledge, is not required [...] For this is why, for instance, when we have read a thousand times the extremely witty conclusion of an epigram, even if we have an actual knowledge of the cause supporting it, and having often meditated over it –and, as a consequence, that neither its part of “consentaneum” nor the one of “dissentaneum” is unexpected any longer–, the result is nonetheless witty. Therefore, the essence of wit does not reside in the unexpected (“inopinatum”) existing formally and actually, but only virtually and fundamentally. For virtual and fundamental inopinatum is precisely dissentaneum and consentaneum conjoined. This is the cause and the ultimate ground why something may be “unexpected” and nonetheless appear suitable to the thing [italics added].

This may have motivated Sarbiewski’s rejection of Denys Petau’s idea that “acutum” depends on the audience and results exclusively from the way they react. Sarbiewski acknowledges that the reader needs to cooperate in order for “acutum” to come into existence, but for this to happen, acuity needs to inhere in the speech (“in dicto”) such as it was begotten by the speaker. Considered in light of the paragraph above, Sarbiewski might be suggesting that, even if the readers experience something as surprising or “inopinatum”, this is not ultimately dependent on them. As shown above, they may have already experienced the piece containing

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321 “Nota autem diligentissime non esse necessariam non praecognitionem actualem dissentanei vel consentanei, sed tantum aptitudinalem vel fundamentalem, hoc est, ut consentaneum ita se habeat respectu dissentanei, ut uno cognito alium ex natura sua latere postulet et consequenter aptum sit non cognosci. Itaque non est necessaria ipsa actualis non cognitio, seu ipsum formale inopinatum [...] Ratio est, nam v. g. millies lecta conclusio epigrammatis alicuius vere acuta, etiamsi actualiter in illa iam sit cognita ratio, et quidem saepius considerata, tam dissentanei quam consentanei, atque adeo etiamsi utrumque iam non sit inopinatum, tamen adhuc re vera acuta est. Ergo non consistit essentia acuti in esse inopinatum formaliter et actualiter, sed in esse inopinatum virtualiter et fundamentaliter. Virtuale autem, seu fundamentale inopinatum est ipsum dissentaneum et consentaneum coniunctum. Hoc est enim causa et fundamentum ultimum, cur aliquid nobis sit inopinatum, etiamsi ad rem attineat”. Sarbiewski, “De acuto”, 18.
“acutum” and therefore know the argument and fail to be surprised. Moreover, any apt reader would react appropriately to the acuity of wit that inheres in the speech – something that happens whenever the latter contains a form of argumentation in which something less and something more familiar is predicated or suggested about a subject.322

Sarbiewski’s notion that wonder takes place even if the cause turning “dissentaneum” into “consentaneum” fails to be actually unknown brings Sarbiewski’s notion of acuity of wit in connection with what Talentoni had called wonder of the second type some decades earlier, at the turn of the sixteenth century. Wonder of the second type, much like Sarbiewski’s wit, was said never to be exhausted precisely because it did not require audiences to remain ignorant in order to experience the feeling: once they know the cause for something initially unexpected happening to be the way it is, they continue to ponder on the way in which the cause responds well to the effect. They see the bravery of the argument that turned reasonable something that appeared to be far from being so, and they still marvel at the gap that has been bridged, as at difficulties that one is able to overcome. I suggest that what Talentoni called wondering at the connection between effect –known but, in Sarbiewski’s terms, “dissentaneum”– and cause –initially unknown, but “consentaneum” insofar as it restores meaning at the end of the process of wonder– refers to one and the same process as Sarbiewski: namely the wonder we experience at the acuity of wit of poets, or artificers of any kind.

Aiming at the same phenomenon but using different jargon, Talentoni and Sarbiewski advanced the notion that, rather than just a stimulus leading to knowledge, wonder also provides us with

322 "The reader himself takes part in the unexpected insofar as perceived as unexpected, but “acutum” belongs to the saying, and is inherent to it; so that for it to contain anything of wit does not depend on the reader. In general terms, ‘acutum’ is born from the speaker” (“ad inopinatum, ut inopinatum est, concurrit etiam ipse lector, at acumen inest dicto et inhaeret, ut non dependeat in ipso esse acuti a lectore. Absolute enim acutum est partus dicentis”). Sarbiewski, “De acuto”, 6.
the foundation for a framework in which the perception of beauty or accomplishment in a work of art may be theoretically accounted for. It is precisely by means of the ingredient of reflexivity on the difference of familiarity and credibility that both scholars appended to wonder that “acuity of wit” gained definite contours and, with that, a certain degree of independence from the process of cognition that nonetheless makes it possible.

Before I move forward, it is worth reflecting on Sarbiewski’s choice of the epigram as the genre that begets wonder thanks to the acuity of wit of the poet. The focus on the epigram is symptomatic of a process that, starting in the sixteenth century and culminating in Sarbiewski’s days, would turn the genre into the epitome of the acuity of wit. Epigrams became a space to capture the feeling of wonder in the smallest form of poetry, eventually replacing genres like tragedy as the field of study in which to hunt for the marvelous.

Of itself, the idea of isolating wit and getting rid of everything accessory has to do with several mid-sixteenth-century interpretations of what the essence of the genre actually is.

Robortello—who, unlike others, did not consider wit a trait essential to the epigram—would make the first attempt at situating the genre within the parameters of Aristotle’s *Poetics*—a text that, to start with, never mentions it. In the brief essay that he appended in 1548 to his commentary on the *Poetics*, Robortello would famously suggest that epigrams are “parts” of larger genres.323 This means that they may be, so to speak, tragic, epic, or comic.324 It comes as

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323 “The matter of the epigram is manifold for, with it being a very small part of each of the individual genres of the poetic faculty—for it belongs now to one, now to another—, it would follow necessarily that according to what the matter is in each genre, so it will be in the epigram” (“materies epigrammatum multiplex est, nam cum sit particula quaedam exigua singulorum generum poëtices facultatis, nunc huius, nunc illius; plane necesse est, ut qualis in singulis generibus fuerit materies, talis quoque sit in epigrammate”). Francesco Robortello, “Eorum omnium quae ad methodum et artificium scribendi epigrammati spectant, explicati. Ex Aristotelis libro de Poetica; magna ex parte desumpta”, in *In librum Aristotelis de Arte Poëtica Explicationes* (Florentiae: in Officina Laurentii Torrentini ducalis typographi, 1548), 36. Pagination starts anew after the end of the treatise proper, so that the pages given do not follow those provided for the commentary on the *Poetics*. Scholarship on Robortello’s theory of the epigram is extensive. See Jürgen Nowicki, *Die Epigrammtheorie in Spanien vom 16. bis 18. Jahrhundert. Eine Vorarbeit zur Geschichte der Epigrammatik* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1974); see also Blanco, *Les Rhétoriques de la*
no surprise that when looking for a definition of the kind of acuity of wit that takes place in epigrams that are a part of tragedy, Robortello defines nothing other than reversal, or “περιπέτεια”, the device in which commentators had located the wonder obtained in tragedy. A tragic epigram, Robortello writes, would depict a sad case bringing pity and fear, but also wonder whenever the events happened “against our expectations and yet depending on one another, as one may see in the life of Oedipus”.325

Robortello’s much criticized consideration of the epigram as a compendium of, alternatively, tragedy, comedy, or the epic shows nonetheless that for scholars working within the framework of Aristotle’s Poetics there was continuity between genres like tragedy and what one day would become the search, then autonomous and self-contained, for the acuity of wit. More importantly, it reveals that it was precisely the centrality of wonder as a constituent of poetry that made such a connection so immediate. On the other hand, in light of later developments –such as Pinciano’s declaration that wonder may be either tragic, comic, or a species that is neither of them–, there seems to exist a connection between Robortello’s position and the idea that, if epigrams are not parts of one of the three genres, at least they enact one of the types of wonder associated with each of them. This, in fact, results when we consider simultaneously both Robortello’s view of the epigram and the theories of Giulio Cesare Scaligero or Tommaso Correa, which gained currency after the 1560s and suggested that

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325 “Multo magis admirandae sunt si praeter opinionem fuerit alid ex alio dependens, quod cernere est in Oedipodis vita”. Robortello, “Eorum omnium quae ad methodum et artificium scribendi epigrammatis spectant”, 36.
epigrams were treatments of a subject through brevity and wit rather than miniatures of other, generally larger genres.  

In the early seventeenth century, a scholar like Baltasar de Céspedes would settle for the neutrality of the epigram in terms of matter—a notion that Jürgen Nowicki referred to as *Gattungsneutralität*—, favoring a characterization of the genre that builds on the presence in it of acuity of wit.  

He writes that:

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326 The great contribution to defining the nature of the epigram is no doubt Giulio Cesare Scaligero’s Chapter III.CXXVI in *Poetices libri septem* (1561). Scaligero reasserted brevity as a quality inherent to the epigram, but went on to distinguish between a simple and a complex kind of the genre. While the former describes or narrates a certain subject, the latter “infers” or “deduces” something from it. In doing so, it shows “argutia”, which is precisely the ability of the poet to logically argue, and therefore to show acuity of wit. The form of the epigram is precisely “argutia”, according to Scaligero, rather than the condensation of a larger genre. Without quoting Robortello’s name, he contested his theory: “Epigramma igitur est poema breve cum simplici cuiuspiam rei, vel personae, vel facti indicatione: aut ex propositis aliquid deducens […] Brevitas proprium quiddam est. Argutia, anima, ac quasi forma. Quare non est verum, epigramma esse maioris poematis partem”. Scaligero, *Poetices libri septem*, 170. As Nowicki writes, the division into simple and complex epigrams reappears in theoreticians like Tommaso Correa or Jacob Pontanus Spanmuller. Nowicki, *Die Epigrammtheorie in Spanien*, 83. This deemphasizes the link between epigrams and the patterns or subject matter usually associated with one genre implied in most cases, placing wit at the core. Replying to Francisco Cascales’ idea that sonnets are predominantly lyric, González de Sepúlveda argued that those, as modern epigrams, may deal with every kind of subject. Even as late as the 1620s, he would divide the genre according to Scaligero’s distinction: “The sonnet is always an epigram […] a brief poem simply expounding some fact, person, or thing, or deducing something out of what it narrates or expounds. Its virtues are brevity and acuity of wit; others add smoothness. It has no particular matter, for it generally embraces subjects of any kind” (“el soneto siempre es epigrama […], un breve poema, con exposición simple de algún hecho, persona o cosa, o que de lo narrado y expuesto deduce algo: las virtudes son brevedad y agudeza, y otros añaden la suavidad; materia particular no tiene, pues abraza generalmente cualquier sujeto”). Nowicki, *Die Epigrammtheorie in Spanien*, 84. As González de Sepúlveda follows his argument, he somehow even pushes forward Robortello’s position. Sepúlveda writes: “The sonnet […] is simply an epigram which it is impossible to reduce to a determinate kind of poem—for it takes place in every one of them. Therefore, a genre cannot be assigned in bulk to all its class, but individually on a case-by-case basis: the heroic one to epic poetry, the comic one to comedy, the tragic one to tragedy, and this in the rest, each one clothing itself with the color which is due to each kind of poetry (“el soneto […] es meramente epigrama imposible de reducir a especie determinada de poema, porque en todas ha lugar: y así, que su reducción no ha de ser a bulto de toda la especie, sino de cada soneto en individuo; el heroico a la epopeya, el cómico a la comedia, el trágico a la tragedia, y así en los demás, vistiéndose del color que a aquella poesía se debe”). Quoted in Nowicki, *Die Epigrammtheorie in Spanien*, 87. So Sepúlveda harmonized, somewhat eclectically, Robortello’s and Scaliger’s definitions of the epigram. The genre would become synonymous with a quality that seventeenth-century scholars often referred to as “the epigrammatic” (“lo epigramático”). This, as in Sarbiewski’s theory of wit, is less a genre itself than a device performing across the boundaries of genres.

327 Born in Granada, Baltasar de Céspedes became a professor in Salamanca, where he had students like Lorenzo Ramírez de Prado, editor of Martial’s epigrams in 1607, a work in which polemic wanted Céspedes to have had a hand. Céspedes was son-in-law to Francisco Sánchez de las Brozas. Nicolás Marín suggests that he wrote his treatise on poetics between 1605 and 1615. Nicolás Marín, “La poética del humanista granadino Baltasar de Céspedes”, *Revista de Literatura* 29, no. 57 (January, 1966): 123-125. For Nowicki’s notion of “Gattungsneutralität”, see Nowicki, *Die Epigrammtheorie in Spanien*, 39 ff.
What it is necessary to observe, and without which there would be no epigram, is *that it contains some maxim, or maxims full of acuity and wit* – and these so brief and densely packed as to leave the mind of the reader not beaten, but punctured. This is why those that are briefer receive praise, and especially those that *keep in suspense the mind of the reader to the end, until they conclude sharply and in a way that prompts wonder* [italics added].

On the way to getting rid of everything superfluous, the epigram seemed to be free of the sorts of constraint to which genres are usually bound. From subject to form, it remained a kind of blank page where the only thing that counts in most sixteenth- and seventeenth-century definitions is the requirement that wonder at the acuity of wit takes hold of the reader. There was hardly a step from this to asserting that the genre existed exclusively to host and isolate a certain quality – the epigrammatic – that may well happen elsewhere. This is, after all, what was already implied by Robortello’s idea that the epigram created out of tragedy captured, as in a nutshell, the moment of reversal for which tragedy had to prepare the audience for the duration of the play.

Conversely, but pointing to the same phenomenon, there are testimonies that witness a series of far-reaching effects that the fashion of looking everywhere for the acuity of wit, so to speak distilled and separated from anything accessory, had upon the ability of audiences to react to poems other than epigrams. As a matter of fact, it was commonly remarked and complained about that the public would attend a comedy or read a story while looking only for the punctuation of the scattered moments of wit, as if hunting for moments of “epigrammatism” across the experience of the poem. According to a text by Antonio López de Vega mentioned above in section one, audiences would make abstraction from the virtues or “primores” found in a poem, while “only paying attention to the acuity of some conceit – perhaps those which the poet

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cared less about”. Yet this would, in turn, serve as an incentive to poets to care almost exclusively for the noise and fanfare aroused by a wit intent on sparkling as often as possible. In the meantime, the criticism goes, they would become incapable of providing anything but “some little conceit, woven in their sophistic manner, which they tend to praise as a most important thing”.

Sarbiewski’s case is a symptom of this. Part of a course on rhetoric, *De acuto et arguto* theorized the phenomenon of acuity of wit by means of Martial’s epigram of the lion and the hare. Across the disciplines, Sarbiewski grants autonomy to the study of the ability to arouse wonder, which had traveled so far under numerous bodies and vests, from reversals, to recognitions, to tropes. *De acuto et arguto* is symptomatic of the change in reading habits that informs new and renewed genres, but which also advances notions and mechanisms that would reappear in later works that aim at understanding the nature of acuity of wit.

The connection between wit and wonder would come to the fore most prominently in Matteo Peregrini’s *Delle acutezze* (1639).

Despite the claim—advanced in 1646 by Vincencio Juan de Lastanosa—that Peregrini had plagiarized the work of Baltasar Gracián, who was at the time Lastanosa’s protégé, *Delle acutezze* remains the first treatise on the nature of wit ever to have appeared in print. Like Sarbiewski, both Peregrini and Gracián were Jesuits. In addition, Peregrini had been active in

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329 “Repararán, o en lo agudo de algún conceto, de que el autor hizo quizá menos caso”. López de Vega, *Heráclito i Demócrito*, 182.
330 “No tenemos al fin que esperar más dellos, que […] quando mucho, de los más agudos algún concetico hilado a lo sofístico, de que suelen hazer la mayor estimación”. López de Vega, *Heráclito i Demócrito*, 183.
331 Lastanosa’s accusation seems odd, considering that Gracián’s first work on wit, *Arte de ingenio, tratado de la agudeza*, appeared in 1642, three years later than *Delle acutezze*. Peregrini would counter the charge later in the preface to his work *I fonti dell’ingegno* (1650). The issue proves that it was only natural for scholars in seventeenth-century Spain and Italy to imagine their counterparts as being well informed of recent events taking place across the sea. On a different note, it is not impossible for Gracián’s treatise to have circulated in manuscript earlier than 1642—something that may lend some kind of credibility to Lastanosa’s claim—but any evidence for this is lacking so far.
Rome in the days when the ideas of De acuto et arguto had allegedly resonated in discussions held under the vaults of the Jesuit headquarters of the Collegio Romano.

Peregrini’s treatise appeared in 1639, at a time when the author was holding office in the republic of Genoa. The name in the title, “acutezza”, much like Gracián’s counterpart “agudeza”, refers not only to the acuity of wit perceived in maxims, tropes, or plots, but also to the products themselves – that is, maxims and tropes that are perceived as excelling in acuity. Within the context of rhetoric that concerns Peregrini, plots – the object of poetics – are left aside. However, insofar as I am concerned here with the faculty of wit rather than with the specificity of the different embodiments it may adopt, the conclusions drawn by Peregrini might be applicable to fiction as well, something that Gracián would make explicit later on.\footnote{In connection with this, it is worth advancing that one of Gracián’s contributions in Agudeza y arte de ingenio (1648) would be the reincorporation of plots within the examples of acuity of wit, and this in terms that could not be more explicit.}

Peregrini’s stance towards wit appears in part more cautious than that of Sarbiewski and Gracián. He emphasizes the distinction between a kind of “acutezza” built on the foundations of logic and argumentation, and which deservedly awake wonder, and a version based on mere wordplay. Even though both Sarbiewski and Gracián are greatly concerned to promote a notion of wit rooted in argumentation and logic rather than what the latter calls “the material part” of words, Peregrini’s attitude is polemic and cast in particularly negative terms.\footnote{Sarbiewski had devoted the second part of his treatise to “argutum”. According to him, this covered a range of cases with only the appearance – or “the clothes” – of “acutum”. The agreement of “consentaneum” and “dissentaneum” does not happen there unless accidentally, and the impression of a tension like the one found in “acutum” results merely from the play on words, through the use of alliteration, play on etymology, and similar devices. Sarbiewski, “De acuto”, 30-40. Similarly, Gracián would insist that it is crucial for “agudeza” to be the result of connections argued upon solid logical connections: they ought to be “con fundamento”. See, for instance, Gracián y Morales, Agudeza y arte de ingenio, 76 and 158.} He presents readers with a diagnosis and a medicine, arguing that his book is a sort of antidote against the illness represented by a bad kind of wit. Peregrini’s treatise starts with a response to a letter from Vincenzo Renieri, disciple of Galileo Galilei, who had asked for the opinion of the author.
concerning “the many witty sayings (‘acutezze’) and spirits (‘spiriti’) widely introduced in the writings of some modern authors, especially those who write romances”. Renieri seems to be pointing at a tradition closely associated with the name of Gian Francesco Biondi, who had somehow revived and transformed chivalric romance with his *L’Eromena* (1624), *La donzella desterrada* (1627), and *Il Coralbo* (1632). In 1636, Tommaso Stigliani had attacked the genre as the equivalent in prose of the corruption of style that he perceived in Giovanbattista Marino’s constant use of far-fetched metaphors. This is a sign, as suggested by Clizia Carminati, that contemporaries of Peregrini were more aware than are many present-day scholars concerning the identity of mechanism underlying both metaphor and maxim when it comes to inspiring wonder at what seems new, and unfamiliar—and therefore the effect that Sarbiewski, Peregrini, and Gracían call acuity of wit. Stigliani ascribed to all of them “the blind desire for novelty” proper of the times. In a more flattering light, when the editor Clemente Ferroni reedited Peregrini’s treatise some months after the first edition, he alluded to the currency of the topic by calling wit “a subject that these days is no less curious than useful”.

Peregrini concludes a survey of ancient Greek and Roman writers by determining that all their attempts at describing the nature of wit ended up in failure. What is even worse, he contends that most of them proved unable to determine satisfactorily whether a thing was ingenious or not, at least according to what seventeenth-century men understand by that. At a

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337 As it might be expected, Peregrini seems to be unaware of Sarbiewski’s treatise. See above for Langbein’s hypotheses concerning the circulation, often controversial and apparently circumscribed to Northern Europe, of *De acuto et arguto* around the mid-seventeenth century.
moment in which wit has become ubiquitous, the author arrogates to himself the right to decide what is witty in order to investigate, once it has been delimited, why it is so. The list of examples that alternatively have and lack “acutezza” illustrates the expectations that Peregrini, and perhaps a majority of his contemporaries, held about a piece that excels in ingenuity. As he reviews pairs of sayings, Peregrini is highly consistent in calling the example that has acuity of wit “more beautiful” than the counterpart deprived of it. Far from accidental, this points to a connection between acuity of wit and beauty that Peregrini would repeatedly confirm through the rest of his treatise.

Aiming right at the link between wonder and wit, Peregrini points at what he calls “wonderful wit” (“acutezza mirabile”) as being, among the different species of “acutezze”, the one most liable to fall prey to the kind of corruption of taste current in his time. This is so because wonderful wit exists in sayings in which the main object that brings pleasure is the wit of the speaker, which shines in the artifice they show, or the figure they make use of. […] A saying with wonderful wit is one that, because of the wit that becomes wonderfully evident from the artifice that appears in it, results in great pleasure.

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338 “The corruption and ruin triumphs only, or mainly in wonderful wit […] For this reason wonderful wit remains the main object of my reasoning” (“la corruttela, e guastamento, nelle acutezze mirabili solo, o principalmente trionfa […] Però le mirabile sole si rimangono per oggetto principale del mio discorso”). Peregrini, Delle acutezze, 32. For a study of Peregrini’s treatise, see for instance Emilia Ardissino, “Diletto e conoscenza nelle ‘Acutezze’ di Matteo Peregrini”, in Figures à l’italienne : métaphores, équivoques et pointes dans la littérature maniériste et baroque, ed. D. Boillet and A. Godard (Paris: Université de Paris III Sorbonne nouvelle, 1999).

339 “Ne’ quali il principale oggetto del diletto si è l’ingegno del dicitore, brillante nell’artificio, o figura loro […] Acutezza mirabile è un detto, che per la virtù d’ingegno nell’artificio d’esso maravigliosamente campeggiante, riesce molto plausibilmente dilettevole” [italics in the text]. Peregrini, Delle acutezze, 31. See also: “A pleasure like this does not depend upon learning, or seeing many things in a few words (even though this condition is found there as well); but it depends rather upon the particular virtue of the wit of the poet, which shines admirably in the saying” (“simil diletto non dall’imparar, o veder molte cose in poche parole, ancorché questa conditione non vi manchi; ma principalmente dalla particolar virtù dell’ingegno del poeta, che ammirabilmente risplende in esso chiaramente depende”). Peregrini, Delle acutezze, 66; and: “Aristotle said that a saying which is agreeable because of a preceding deception is pleasant because we learn much. But, in truth, pleasure is born because of the shrewdness of wit which shines in it. And the ability to deceive tends to be considered a quality of a shrewd wit” (“Aristotele disse che’l detto venusto preso dall’imanno precedente havea la sua gratia, a cagione dell’imparar molto. Ma veramente il diletto nasce dall’accortezza speciale d’ingegno, che sfolgoreggia in esso. E communemente l’attitudine ad ingannare è stimata qualità propria d’ingegno molto accorto”). Peregrini, Delle acutezze, 113.
Wonderful wit begets pleasure by presenting the audience with the chance to notice “artifice” in the way in which the speaker has crafted a maxim, or any piece of speech. Under the term “artifice”, Peregrini seems to comprehend the two notions that Castelvetro usually placed as representative of the kind of “work” performed by a poet – namely wit and knowledge of the art – embodying respectively what is inborn and what learned in the artificer. The danger incurred by those too fond of wonderful wit results from the possibility that one may speak in order just to make one’s wit evident, while uttering ideas that are unlikely to resist careful consideration, as was the case with Mazzoni’s idea of wonder, canalized by sophistry, and addressed to the unlearned.  

Peregrini went further than Castelvetro in addressing the question as to why noticing “artifice” should be pleasurable at all. As I will explain below in section three of Chapter Four, the pleasure of “artifice” lies, for the author of Delle acutezze, less in the praise of contemplation of the craft in itself than in the satisfaction and self-love of the audience at realizing that, as they follow the process of reasoning involved in a maxim, or trope, containing wonderful wit, they have been equal to the wit of the author. They have also overcome the gap of unexpectedness present there, and therefore congratulate themselves on their prowess, feeling somehow co-authors of what they look at as being theirs as much as it results from the work of the author.

Peregrini was careful to lay a distinction between operations that are satisfactory according to logic, and those that, in addition to this, are also ingenious. This is also relevant

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340 “When the weight of things accompanies the acuity of words, so that the latter may become the counterpart of the former, then elegance may become virile, and efficacy replace charm” (“quando all’acutezza delle parole si aggiunga il peso delle cose, le quali vengano ancor’esse a far contraposto l’una all’altra; la leggiadria potrà divenir virile, e sottoentrar la efficacia in luogo del vezzo”). Peregrini, Delle acutezze, 36.
insofar as it provides us with hints to better understand Gracián’s theory, which takes for granted some of the ideas that Peregrini carefully delimits.

We are reminded first of all that acuity has to do with wit begetting a connection expressed through language, such as may show that the speaker has penetrated the reality of things. In allusion to the etymology of the term (from “acuto”, meaning simultaneously sharp and acute), “acutezze” are called so “because they are the offspring of wit, which shows to have penetrated deeply, a condition of sharp things”. 341

As Gracián would famously state three years later, the wit connects terms by establishing a proportion between them –a link that Peregrini calls “legamento”. This needs to be done with artifice (“artificiosamente”) and in such a way that it may join fittingly (“acconciamente”) two things between which a transition does not seem immediate. Going back to Sarbiewski’s example of Martial’s poem about the hare and the lion, we have there two terms that seem to disagree with one another: first, a hungry lion, and second, the action whereby it does not take the opportunity to eat a hare. This is the scenario in which the wit of the poet links the two extremes syllogistically through a means that he may deem suitable for the purpose. 342 The wit of the speaker shines in proportion to the extent to which the terms were initially disparate –for this implies that the artifice detectable in the choice of the means is proportionally more alien to the way we commonly think about things. 343 Peregrini, as Gracián too would do, insists that rarity is a requirement for the link of proportion to be noticeable: things that harmoniously fit with each other according to the expectations of everyone provide us, indeed, with sound reasoning; yet,

341 “Acutezze, perché sono parto d’ingegno, che nell’haverle formate si fa conoscere d’haver felicemente penetrato assai, condizione propria delle cose acute”. Peregrini, Delle acutezze, 28.
342 Peregrini, Delle acutezze, 33.
343 “The invention—or the finding—of the term is noticed as being so far-fetched, and the terms are seen to suit one another so well that the artifice shows a particular excellence of wit” (“si vede il trovamento del contraposto esser tanto da lontano; e le cose congiuntamente cader tanto in acccono l’una dell’altra che l’artificio viene a mostrare particolare virtù di ingegno”). Peregrini, Delle acutezze, 36.
insofar as the link between the terms appears evident to everyone, they are not appropriate as material for the wit to show acuity.\textsuperscript{344}

Marking the link between wit and rarity, and in order to clarify what makes arguments show “acutezza” in addition to a reasoning that abides by the laws of logic, Peregrini adds that acuity of wit requires “una tacita virtù entimematica”.\textsuperscript{345} Enthymemes seem to be evoked in reference to something that is left unsaid but that nonetheless can be inferred with some effort from the two terms available to the audience. This is opposed to a syllogism, in which the means has to be explicitly contained in the two terms for the argument to “follow” for everyone able to reason logically.\textsuperscript{346} At the core of Peregrini’s theory of “acutezza” lies precisely the enthymematic virtue, or what remains unexpressed, and which requires, as a consequence, that the audience may reconstruct the means invented by the speaker as a link between terms. The adjective “enthymematic” refers to a misunderstanding concerning the definition of enthymemes or rhetorical syllogisms which originated as early as the 6th century AD, when Boethius took them to be syllogisms in which one premise is missing, therefore calling for the audience to

\textsuperscript{344} Wit requires that the artifice at work be “greatly rare” (“grandemente raro”, “una rarità di proporzione”). Peregrini, \textit{Delle acutezze}, 33-34. For this, wit finds out a suitable reason, a proportion that stands out in the way it links terms initially at odds with one another (“la proportione tanto campeggiante”). Peregrini, \textit{Delle acutezze}, 33-34. In connection with the term “campeggiante”, and even though it is not rare in the day, the frequent use of the verb in Gracián’s \textit{Agudeza} may point to familiarity with Peregrini’s treatise. See, for instance: “Otras veces \textit{campea} esta correlación entre los efectos del sujeto” [italics added]. Gracián y Morales, \textit{Agudeza}, vol. 1, 46. Also in treatises on logic and dialectic, rarity had been a requirement for the work of wit to receive praise. See, for instance, Rudolf Agricola’s assertion that “tenuis enim esset ingenii laus, si passim posset ex obvio sumi”. Rudolf Agricola, \textit{De inventione dialectica libri tres...}, ed. Lothar Mundt (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1992), 156.

\textsuperscript{345} According to Michael J. Woods, for Peregrini, “a trope tacitly links the thing literally referred to and that figuratively referred to. The tacit nature of this process makes it akin to the enthymeme, a form of deductive argument in which, unlike in a formal syllogism, part of the reasoning is suppressed but is to be understood”. Michael J. Woods, \textit{Gracián meets Góngora: the theory and practice of wit} (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips, 1995), 24.

\textsuperscript{346} “Such a link cannot enunciate the reasoning, but it will always necessarily contain a silent enthymematic virtue, for it links two things by means of a third” (“simile legamento non può mai essere semplicemente enunciativo; ma sempre necessariamente conterrà una tacita virtù entimematica, perché lega due cose diverse mediante una terza”). Peregrini, \textit{Delle acutezze}, 40. Leo Catana has suggested that Peregrini’s link between wit and fantasy as faculties that cooperate in the search for a kind of truth influenced Giambattista Vico. Leo Catana, \textit{Vico and Literary Mannerism. A Study in the Early Vico and His Idea of Rhetoric and Ingenuity} (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1999), 12-13 and 53.
supply it.\textsuperscript{347} To illustrate, we never read in Martial’s poem that the emperor Domitian is compassionate, but we are led to argue so when the conclusion stating that the hare belongs to him is juxtaposed with the paradox that the lion chooses to spare the life of a hare running in front of him.

Peregrini’s point is that wit requires something more than soundness of logic, which guarantees truth rather than wonder. Syllogisms, Peregrini writes, are useful to teach (“dottrinalmente insegnare”), but are not pleasant unless, accidentally, the object they speak about is pleasant of itself. In logic,

the intellect does not truly shape a reasoning, but only unveils, and presents [that which is shaped of itself]. This is the reason why the work it performs does not become the main object of consideration for someone else’s intellect, which focuses on the truth being demonstrated alone.\textsuperscript{348}

For the argumentation to bring the attention of the audience both to the form and the process instead of the content of truth, it should avoid the appearance of immediate reason.

In a proposition by Euclid, the intellect “finds” things in the quest for truth. Conversely, wit or “l’ingegno” actually “makes” them. While they need to have some truth in them in order not to appear light and despicable, the argumentation aims instead at beauty.\textsuperscript{349} With this in mind, it is fair to conclude that a statement has “acutezza” when it links two terms, not because

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\textsuperscript{347} See Chapter Four below for more on the enthymeme. According to Aristotle’s \textit{Rhetoric}, enthymemes are rhetorical syllogisms, composed of premises that are probable rather than necessary, as befitted a discipline that deals with the uncertainty and the contingency of human behavior. Since the 6th century, however, Boethius popularized a way of understanding enthymemes as syllogisms in which a premise is missing. This survived throughout the medieval period, as, for example, in Petrus Hispanus’ \textit{Summulae}, the textbook on logic in many universities. The incompleteness of the enthymeme thus conceived prompted audiences to cooperate in order to infer the meaning, presumed and yet unsaid, which can be surmised from the rest of the argumentation.
\textsuperscript{348} “L’intelletto qui non forma veramente, ma solo discopre, e porge: però l’opera sua non si rende principal oggetto dell’animo altrui: ma oggetto è la sola verità dimostrata”. Peregrini, \textit{Delle acutezze}, 41-42.
\textsuperscript{349} “In somma l’artificio ha luogo solamente, o principalmente, non già nel trovar cose belle; ma nel farle; e l’oggetto del plausibile a nostro proposito non s’appartiene all’intelletto; che solo cerca la verità, e scienza delle cose: ma si bene all’ingegno, il quale tanto nell’operare, quanto nel compiacersi, ha per oggetto, non tanto il vero, quanto il bello”. Peregrini, \textit{Delle acutezze}, 42.
\end{flushleft}
they logically follow, but rather in proportion to the rareness shown, which translates into a degree of novelty in the perception of the reader. What is new, of course, did not exist before, and therefore appears to be something made by the author, and brought to the world by him.\footnote{“Dunque la rarità dell’artificio nel legamento entimematico al nostro fine non si spiega tanto nel trovare una perfetta congiuntione del mezo con gli estremi, quanto nel formare una vicendevole molto rara, e campeggiante, acconcezza”. Peregrini, \textit{Delle acutuzze}, 42. As Peregrini would explain below, the notion of rareness is measured against what common, average intellects are able to think: “This readiness [of the wit] is meant in comparison to the popular intellects and wits. The roots of the wonderful may be noticed in this as well, for it consists of this being removed the common” (“questa presteza […] s’intendono necessariamente in paragone di quello, che sarebbono gli intelletti, e gl’ingegni popolari. Si vede ancora la radice del mirabile la quale è questo esser lontano dal comunale”). Peregrini, \textit{Delle acutuzze}, 45.}

Peregrini reaches the heart of the distinction when he explains that wit becomes creative in the process of linking terms precisely because it uses connections that are not immediate and proper, but which involve figuration:

\begin{quote}
When the means that links the terms, and these themselves remain in the condition that is proper to them, nothing rare gets shape there, and since there is no artifice involved, there is nothing else to be expected except for some good and clear syllogistic connection, such as would greatly satisfy the intellect, but would scarcely touch the wit. It is therefore necessary, that the means, or the extremes, or both, be full of artifice, or, as rhetoricians say, figurative.\footnote{“Dove il mezo congiuncente, e le cose congiunte stiano nella natural condition loro, non si può formar cosa alcuna, di raro, e mancando affatto l’artificio altro di pregio non può sperarsi, che una buona, e chiara connessione silogistica, e così all’intelletto molto soddisfare, ma non già punto all’ingegno. Egli è dunque mestiere, che ‘l mezo, o gli estremi, o tutti, siano artificiosi, e come direbbe il retore, figurati”. Peregrini, \textit{Delle acutuzze}, 42-43.}
\end{quote}


Peregrini’s distinction between logic and wit, or between reasoning and being ingenious for the sake of beauty, may be summarized as a difference between arguing in literal terms (\textit{recte}), or metaphorically. Logic –wishfully, at least– argues through syllogisms in which terms are meant “properly”.\footnote{That this was only a postulate rather than a reality is suggested by criticism leveled against logic since milestones like Francis Bacon’s \textit{Of the Proficience and Advancement of Learning, Divine and Human} (1605). Bacon, as others would do, complained that logic was useless insofar as words do not mean univocally, and turn uncertain the process of argumentation.} Equivocity and displacements of meaning are a threat to the soundness of argumentation, and not in vain does Aristotle’s \textit{Topica} start with a course on how to avoid getting trapped by them. However, for the rhetorician who seeks to appear witty and to fill
audiences with wonder, there is nothing like twisting the meaning of terms, so as to test, so to speak, the elasticity of which they are capable. For a piece of argumentation to become “acutezza”, a term

is judiciously transported from its native meaning to one that is alien. In this case, things are tacitly linked to things, for the thing newly signified is tacitly linked to the one that the term properly means – not only because of the words made common to both, but because of the reason that suggested pairing them.

Wit demonstrates shrewdness in the readiness to connect through figuration –that is, through language used metaphorically rather than according to the proper meaning of things. “Acutezza” may be defined, in conclusion, as “a happy finding of a means that figuratively links different things through a saying in a wonderfully fitting way”.

3. Baltasar Gracián’s Agudeza y arte de ingenio (1648)

Gracián’s theory of wit is, in a certain sense, a point of arrival for the itinerary that links poetics and wonder through the mediation of seventeenth-century theories of wit.

In 1642, Baltasar Gracián (1601-1658) published in Madrid a treatise called Arte de ingenio, tratado de la agudeza. After several years of research and a quest for examples that would allow him to supplement and illustrate the ideas of his work, he published in Huesca in

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353 “La voce, o la locuzione, sia giudiciosamente trasportata dal suo nativo significato ad un alieno. In questo caso vengono anche tacitamente legate cose con cose; perché la cosa nuovamente significata viene tacitamente a legarsi con quella, che nativamente suole significarsi; non solo per la voce fatta comune, ma insieme per quella ragione, che ha fatto luogo a simile comunanza”. Peregrini, Delle acutezze, 37. Despite Peregrini’s aim to save wit from the realm of sophistry and of mere play on words, he is aware that the kind of reasoning that results from what he calls “legamento figurato” is of the order of similitude and appearance, especially when compared to logic. On this note, he acknowledges that wit is more about appearance than about truth, and that “what is wonderful is more wonderful inasmuch as it relies more on appearance than substance” (“tanto più il mirabile è mirabile, quanto ha più di apparenza, e meno di sussistenza). And yet, even appearances can be better or worse founded, and it is here that wit ought to link terms with well-sought connections, built “with a great support of reality”, in order to avoid appearances that are affected or childish (“dell’affettato, del fanciullesco”). Peregrini, Delle acutezze, 46.

354 “Un felice trovamento del mezo, per legar figuratamente in un detto con mirabile acconcezza diverse cose”. Peregrini, Delle acutezze, 45.
1648 a version featuring new chapters and entitled Agudeza y arte de ingenio. It is the latter that will form the object of study in what follows.\(^{355}\)

Gracián claims that his is a method that enables poets and orators to produce and judge conceits.\(^{356}\) Conceits (“conceptos”) correspond to Peregrini’s “acutezze”. They are embodiments of the activity of wit as it connects terms by means of a proportion, which corresponds, in turn, with Peregrini’s “legamento”.\(^{357}\) A conceit shows “exquisite agreement, harmonic correlation of two or three knowable terms, expressed by an act of the intellect”\(^{358}\)

\(^{355}\) Respectively Baltasar Gracián y Morales, Arte de Ingenio. Tratado de la agudeza: en que se explican todos los modos y diferencias de conceptos (En Madrid: por Iuan Sánchez, 1642). Also Agudeza y arte de ingenio: en que se explican todos los modos y diferencias de concettos (Impreso en Huesca: por Iuan Noguéys, 1648). The scholarship on Gracián’s treatise is extensive. A survey of different stages may be encompassed in the following list: Edward Sarmiento, “Gracián’s ‘Agudeza y Arte de Ingenio’”, The Modern Language Review 27, no. 3 (Jul., 1932); Terence E. May, “Gracián’s Idea of the Concepto”, Hispanic Review 18, no. 1 (Jan., 1950); Hugh H. Grady, “Rhetoric, Wit, and Art in Gracián’s Agudeza”, Modern Language Quarterly 41 (1980); Emilio Hidalgo-Serna, “Origen y causas de la ‘agudeza’: necesaria revisión del ‘conceptismo’ español”, in Actas del IX Congreso de la Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas: 18-23 agosto, 1986, Berlín, ed. Sebastián Neumeister, vol. 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert, 1989); Michael J. Woods: Gracián meets Góngora: the theory and practice of wit (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips, 1995); Robert D. F. Pring-Mill, “Revisiting Gracián: the Linkages of Wit”, in Culture and society in Habsburg Spain, ed. Nigel Griffin et al. (London: Tamesis, 2001). Pursuing a line of argument already popular with Peregrini, Gracián glosses on the distinction between logic and wit, this time in connection with the difference in their respective fortunes when it comes to the abundance of literature on the topic. Whereas arts of logic circulated everywhere, the ancients condemned wit to depend on the inborn qualities of each orator or poet: “The ancients reduced the syllogism to method, and the trope to art; however, they locked the acuity of wit, either not to offend it, or to cast it away, sending it to the bravery of nature” (“hallaron los antiguos método al silogismo, arte al tropo; sellaron la agudeza, o por no ofenderla, o por desahuciarla, remitiéndola a sola la valentia del ingenio”). Baltasar Gracián y Morales, Agudeza y arte de ingenio, eds. Jorge M. Ayala, Ceferino Peralta, José Mª Andreu, vol. 1 (Zaragoza: Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza; Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 2004), 15. I always quote Gracián’s Agudeza y arte de ingenio from the edition here cited. Gracián y Morales, Agudeza, 7. The notion of concetto or concepto (in Italian and Spanish) undergoes a series of transformations, rather difficult to track in a linear way, until the moment when it eventually becomes a name for the instrument of wit that would give name to the theory of discourse known as conceptismo, which signals the triumph of wit in speech. Camilo Pellegrino’s dialogue Del concetto poetico, set in Naples and datable around 1598, may be considered the first text that focuses on this notion. However, in Pellegrino’s text, the meaning of concetto appears undefined between psychology – when it is taken for a conception of the mind that mirrors things exterior to it, as in the notion of “concept” found in Juan Huarte de San Juan’s 1575 Examen de ingenios para las ciencias – and Tasso’s definition of “concetti” as units of arranged matter that are the subject of lyric poetry, and thus play in it the role acted by the plot in tragedies or comedies. Tasso, “Dell’arte poetica”, 30r and passim. It is worth mentioning that the same ambiguity was already present in Tasso, who, not in vain, is the main inspiration for Pellegrino’s dialogue. Tasso, “Dell’arte poetica”, 26r. How the poetic notion of concetto, as a certain matter that has been given form in order to become part of a lyric poem, became synonymous with a piece of argument showing excellence of wit is something difficult to explain. García Berrio and others have suggested that it has to do with the fashion of religious maxims collected under the name of concetti, among which those by Girolamo Garimbeto, published since the 1550s, were well known. The alliance of metaphor and sententiousness might have prompted the use of the term in poetry, until it became equivalent to any trope where the trace of wit at work becomes perceptible. Antonio García Berrio, España e Italia ante el conceptismo (Madrid: CSIC, 1968), 18-20. In my view, a key to the transition
Conceits differ from one another according to species, or type. While the treatise maps the features characteristic of each with criteria that sometimes overlap, what unfolds before the reader is a study in depth of the ingredients that are constitutive of wit, which betrays the extent to which someone like Gracián was involved in a modality of thought in which the paradoxical, in different degrees, covered the totality of thought. In fact, there are types of conceit that differ from one another according to the degree to which they contain what Sarbiewski called “dissentaneum” – that is, the inappropriateness that a statement seems to bear in connection with a subject. Instead of a single term that would cover the meaning of “dissentaneum”, Gracián resorts to denominations that range from what is only slightly below the level of opinion (called “difficult”) to what the mind refuses to believe in a first moment (called “repugnant”) to statements that appear to incur direct contradiction.

In addition to the degree of “dissentaneum” or incongruity that the wit has to bridge and restore to likelihood in order to spark a conceit, Gracián also characterizes types of “agudeza” according to the modality in which a speaker chooses to present the audience with the work of

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appears in Fernando de Herrera’s *Obras de García Lasso de la Vega*, as he writes that “a conceit […] is that through which we declare the thoughts of the soul. It truly means what *sententia* means in Cicero” (“conceito […] es aquello, con que se expresa, i declara el pensamiento del ánimo, en su verdadero significado es lo que sentencia cerca de Tulio”. Herrera, *Anotaciones*, 466. Herrera makes “concepto” the equivalent of “sententia” in Latin, a term that had experienced, according to Quintilian, a similar displacement in meaning. In fact, according to Quintilian, “the ancients used the word *sententia* to mean what they felt in their minds” (“sententiam veteres quod animo sensissent vocaverunt”). This coincides with the first meaning, so to speak psychological, that appears in Huarte and coexists in Pellegrino’s treatise. However, Quintilian goes on to add that in his day “the usage that has come to prevail is to call mental concepts *sensus*, and bright thoughts, especially at the ends of passages, *sententiae*” (“sed consuetudo iam tenuit ut mente concepta sensus vocaremus, lumina autem praeципueque in clausulis posita sententias”). Marcus Fabius Quintilian, *The Orator’s Education*, Trans. Donald A. Russell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 406-407, §8.5.1-2. I quote Russell’s translation. For a related, and partially parallel change of meaning in relation to *sententiae* and the correspondent term in Greek (“γνώμη”), see Jesús Alemán Illán, “Plutarco y Aristóteles en Francisco Cascales: evolución del conceptode διάνοια en la teoría literaria del humanismo”, *Myrtia* 20 (2005).

358 “Una primorosa concordancia, en una armónica correlación entre dos o tres cognoscibles extremos, expresada por un acto del entendimiento”. Gracián y Morales, *Agudeza*, vol. 1, 27.

359 The following is a case, among many others, where the three kinds of incongruous here mentioned are listed: “It is not required that there be difficulty between the extremes, and even less repugnance, or contradiction” (“no se requiere que haya dificultad entre los extremos, y menos repugnancia o contradicción”). Gracián y Morales, *Agudeza*, vol. 1, 76.
wit. This is interesting insofar as Gracián emphasizes factors like time and deferral in the coexistence of proportion and disproportion, or what Sarbiewski called “dissentaneum”. The wit may well operate in the use of a metaphor, or in a maxim; and yet, what matters for Gracián in a way unheard so far, is the notion that proportionality and incongruity frequently take place in a sequence of time. This means that the one happens before or after the other, or at the same time. Gracián has “agudeza” unfold so that it builds expectation and suspense, causing wit to become a source of desire that keeps audiences in suspense. The fact that the work of wit as it accomplishes a process of argumentation may be protracted in time means a first step toward bridging the distance between reasoning and the plot of a tragedy or a comedy. Not in vain, Gracián would end up making explicit a notion that had been looming over the work of many of the theoreticians studied so far: namely the fact that poetic plots and maxims, which belonging to rhetoric, are analogous when considered as embodiments of the use of acuity of wit.

How does “agudeza” make use of temporality, and how does it control delay? If, instead of surprising the audience with a metaphor –which they will sooner or later understand and consider full of acuity insofar as it goes against expectation– one starts rather with a statement, or perhaps with a metaphor, the reason for which does not lend itself to be guessed, this makes it possible for the speaker to build a frame of suspense –what Gracián calls “to raise mystery” (“levantar misterio”). This means awakening the curiosity of the reader through the promise that there is a justification that will eventually turn “consentaneum” what had seemed to be against opinion, and even reason:
To raise mystery concerning the connection between the ends or correlate terms of the subject [...] and, once that the coincidence and the linkage have been pondered, one provides a subtle and adequate reason that may account for it.\textsuperscript{360}

Gracián develops a language to explain how the delay of the part containing “consentaneum” keeps the attention of listeners and readers:

Full of suspense, the audience looks for the outcome. This shows greater artifice than simply stating everything from the start, and therefore it is more pleasant. This is what happens whenever you leave in pawn (empeño) a part of the argument; for, in that case, as difficulty grows, the end becomes more enjoyable.\textsuperscript{361}

The term “empeño” (“pawn”) belongs to the sphere of economy. As defined by Covarrubias in 1611, it refers to something that is temporally put on hold, to be recovered only once the debt is resolved.\textsuperscript{362} As Gracián resorts to the metaphor as a key term throughout the book, he implies that the meaning of the paradox—that is, the cause that turns reasonable what apparently is not—is placed “in pawn”. When the speaker releases the cause through “desempeño”, the balance is eventually re-established, and the expectations of the audience, after a process of carefully sequenced delay, come to a state of fulfillment.\textsuperscript{363}

\textsuperscript{360} “Levantar misterio en la conexión de los extremos o terminos correlatos del sujeto [...] y después de ponderada aquella coincidencia, y unión, dáse una razón sutil y adecuada que la satisfaga”. Gracián y Morales, \textit{Agudeza}, vol. 1, 73. Concerning cases with a greater degree of “dissonanteum”, Gracián writes: “To raise some opposition or dissonance between the two correlates, which means rendering it severely difficult [...] One ponders the lack of harmony, and then the wit provides a subtle and appropriate solution” (“levantar alguna oposición o disonancia entre los dos correlatos, que es rigurosamente dificultar [...] Pondérase la discordancia, y luego pasa el ingenio a dar la sutil y adecuada solución”). Gracián y Morales, \textit{Agudeza}, vol. 2, 559.

\textsuperscript{361} “Va con sus pensión el auditorio aguardando en que ha de venir a parar, que es de más arte que el declararse luego al principio, y así de mas gusto, como sucede en los empeños, que cuanto más se van dificultando, se goza más de la acertada salida”. Gracián y Morales, \textit{Agudeza}, vol. 2, 559.

\textsuperscript{362} “EMPEÑAR, to leave a thing in pawn. To fall in debt, or obligation [...] To give one’s word in pawn about doing something; which, as it is done, releases the pawn [“desempeña”] (“EMPEÑAR, dexar alguna cosa en prendas. Empeñarse, obligarse [...] Empeñar su palabra, dar palabra de hazer alguna cosa: y esta desempeña quando la cumple”). Covarrubias, \textit{Tesoros}, 344r.

\textsuperscript{363} As discussed below in Chapter Four, Aristotle had referred to the fact that smart sayings—connected with acuity of wit by Peregrini, among others—surprised the audience in such a way that they did not understand immediately the form of certain tropes and arguments, but “a little later”. Aristotle, \textit{Rhetoric}, 396-397, §3.10.4, 1410b. This may be considered in connection with the notion of “delayed conceptualization” advanced by scholars who advocate a
It is through “reparo” that the meaningfulness of speech is placed in pawn. “Reparo” refers to the act of noticing that something conflicts with our opinion in any of the degrees of “dissentaneum” listed above. The speaker notices (“repara”) that something looks incongruous, either in the argument or perhaps in the object s/he is dealing with. For a moment, the edifice of reasoning treats ruin.

Even though Gracián describes wit as a process that solves problems as it releases meaning placed in pawn, the author acknowledges such a view to be contrived: the speaker enacts a paradox full of difficulty, but s/he holds the solution from the beginning. S/he merely displays the opposing sides of conflict and harmony, theatrically staging the work of wit in order to keep the audience in search of something that may restore the meaningfulness they see threatened, and eventually releasing the cause that has been placed in pawn. For the speaker to receive praise, the cause with which the audience is eventually presented has to be of a kind that appears unpredicted and new so as to openly bring to the attention of the listeners the wit of the speaker. It is paradox, set as the basis of argumentation in Gracián’s theory, which allows the speaker to guide the audience through the meanders of discourse. S/he has the task of fabricating problems with a solution prepared beforehand. S/he places meaningfulness on the border of collapse, only to restore it with virtuosity. The speaker

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Covarrubias, Tesoro, 8v.

364 For a study of paradox in connection with Gracián’s theory of wit, see Romo Feito, “El concepto de paradoja”, especially 58-59.

365 In fact, the problem prepares the stage for the solution, which nonetheless precedes in the inventive process: “Although [in paradoxes] the proposal goes first when we refer them, the reason comes first in invention; for it is, so to speak, both the cause and the origin from which the proposal is born” (aunque al referirse va primero la
concludes by uniting, even if he starts by dispersing. With this he adequately satisfies the expectation, which looks forward to know where it is going to end.367

Throughout the treatise, Gracián develops the problem of the modalities in which proportion and disproportion –reason and incongruity– meet in a conceit: from a metaphor, to a maxim, to argumentations carried in a sequence of time within a speech. Gracián’s sensitivity towards the implications of temporality in the phenomenon of wit reaches a peak when he conceives what we know as fiction –that is, narrative plots–, as a form of displaying wit through time.

Gracián addresses fiction by postulating that a conceit harmonizing proportion and disproportion may happen either in a simple or in a composite form – as “agudeza simple” or “compuesta”. He devotes to the latter the second part of *Agudeza y arte de ingenio*.

Part Two of the treatise starts with a series of chapters that deal with the formation of series or systems of metaphors that build meaning upon one another, followed by a part about the notion of cohesion or “acolucía”. All this supports the possibility of composing and harmonizing sparks of wit into large and complex conceits. At a certain point, however, when nothing seems to presage it, Gracián incorporates fiction under the heading “agudeza fingida”, directly related to the root “fingo” (Latin for “shape”) that Patrizi had used to refer to poetics, as a replacement for Aristotle’s term “imitation” or “µίµησις” as characteristic of poetry.

Dealing initially with fiction “in general” (“en común”), Gracián then devotes several chapters “en especial” to each of the genres or species that may somehow embody “agudeza

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367 “Concluye uniendo, si comienza enramándose, y con eso satisface adecuadamente a la expectación, que le va atendiendo y aguardando dónde vendrá a parar”. Gracián y Morales, *Agudeza*, vol. 2, 560.
fingida”. Dismissed by critics in the past as unsystematic and useless, Gracián’s treatment of the genres of fiction is greatly illustrative of the conditions under which narrative plots may be considered as forms of conceit.

Gracián starts his treatment of fiction with a fable extracted from Mateo Alemán’s *Guzmán de Alfarache* – published in 1599, with a second part in 1604 –, a work he is extremely fond of quoting. In a nutshell, it depicts the allegory of Truth no longer able to fight Falsehood unless through the veil of artifice. Unable to appear unclothed as before, Truth resorts to inventions, talks circuitously, and uses stratagems in order to attain the goal it proposes to itself.  

The intellect of man looks for truth in order to feed itself, but today it is found clothed in fiction. Gracián writes:

> Truths are forbidden merchandise. The ports of attention and disillusionment refuse to let them in. This is why they need to use such a disguise to find a way to the reason, which holds them in such high esteem.

While apologues are the most immediate way to disguise truth, and make it fitting to reason, every genre of fiction pursues a valid path toward “the truth” of philosophy. Fiction replaced the latter once that (syllogistic) argument, with its straightforward clarity, has yielded to the charms of invention and wit.  

This is Gracián’s reenactment of Aristotle’s assertion that

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368 “Dio desde entonces en andar con artificio; usa de las invenciones, intrudúcese por rodeos, vence con estratagemas [...] y por ingenioso circunloquio viene siempre a parar en el punto de su intención”. Gracián y Morales, *Agudeza*, vol. 2, 563.

369 “Son las verdades mercadería vedada, no las dejan pasar los puertos de la noticia y desengaño; y así, han menester tanto disfraz para poder hallar entrada a la razón, que tanto las estima”. Gracián, *Agudeza*, vol. 2, 575.

370 Gracián y Morales, *Agudeza*, vol. 2, 569. To a certain extent, Gracián’s notion that fictions are shaped to fit the intellect is a reinterpretation, in terms of the psychology of wit, of the ancient idea, generally quoted by sixteenth-century scholars in connection with Horace, and even more frequent in medieval texts, that poetry makes precepts – the useful – easier to digest as in a medicine coated with sugar. The difference would be that, instead of resorting to something exterior to learning, what makes fiction compelling for Gracián is the fact that it is somehow a conceit – that is, a form of argumentation that pleases because of the way the thought itself that is to be conveyed has been crafted.
poetry is somehow philosophical –and especially more so than history–, insofar as it refers to the universal by means of the particular.\textsuperscript{371} Now, poetry is also varied, and has multiple faces:

Of the wise, all hit the same target, that is, the truth of philosophy. But they came to do so through different paths: Homer with his epics, Aesop with his fables, Seneca with his maxims, Ovid with his metamorphoses, Juvenal with his satires, Pythagoras with his riddles, Lucian of Samosata with his dialogues, Alciato with his emblems, Erasmus with his proverbs, Boccalini with his allegories, and Prince don Manuel with his tales.\textsuperscript{372}

Fiction, as a modality of wit, is also based on a kind of proportion, which Gracián calls “similitude” or “semejanza”:

Similitude is the basis for the invention of any fiction; and the transfer from the false to the true is the soul of this kind of wit. First, one suggests a fable, or an emblem, or an allegory, which is then applied while maintaining the proportionality.\textsuperscript{373}

Similitude is a kind of proportion, and therefore the form that results from it qualifies as embodiment of wit.\textsuperscript{374} As a matter of fact –and this is at the core of Gracián’s interpretation of the way in which tropes and plots are analogous inasmuch as they are wonder-inspiring devices–, fiction culminates the process that leads from speaking plainly and in proper terms, to resorting to a simile, to— as things evolve even more—— creating a plot. Gracián summarizes the progression of complexity when he writes:

\textsuperscript{371} Gracián’s description of epics confirms that it is the link to the universal that he had in mind in calling narrative plots philosophical. In epics, the poet narrates mostly fabricated events, and through them “he builds an idea of those that happen to every mortal” (“va ideando los de todos los mortales”). Gracíán y Morales, Agudeza, vol. 2, 572.
\textsuperscript{372} “A un mismo blanco de la filosófica verdad asestaron todos los sabios, aunque por diferentes rumbos de la invención y agudeza: Homero con sus epopeyas, Esopo con sus fábulas, Séneca con sus sentencias, Ovidio con sus metamorfosis, Juvenal con sus sátiras, Pitágoras con sus enigmas, Luciano con sus diálogos, Alciato con sus emblemas, Erasmo con sus refranes, el Bocalino con sus alegorías, y el príncipe don Manuel con sus cuentos”. Gracíán y Morales, Agudeza, vol. 2, 569.
\textsuperscript{373} “La semejanza es el fundamento de toda la invención fingida; y la traslación de lo mentido a lo verdadero es el alma desta agudeza: propóñese la fábula, emblema, o alegoria, y aplicase por la ajustada conveniencia”. Gracíán y Morales, Agudeza, vol. 2, 570.
\textsuperscript{374} Among the types or species of “agudeza simple”, Gracíán had devoted “Discurso” IX to conceits by similitude.
What a vulgar man would say plainly, and the erudite, at most, with a simile – that same thing the ingenious one expresses with one of these works of inventiveness.\footnote{Lo que un vulgar dijera llanamente, o a todo estirarse por un simile el erudito, el ingenioso exprime por una destas obras de la inventiva’. Gracián y Morales, Agudeza, vol. 2, 570.}

Gracián’s notion of the convertibility between trope and fiction is explicit as he discusses the genre he calls “metamorphosis”. Adducing Apuleius’s \textit{Asinus aureus} and Ovid’s \textit{Metamorphoses} as examples, Gracián explains that “the artifice” of the genre resides in “the similitude of the natural and the moral, explicated through the transformation or fictional conversion of the subject into the assimilated term”. As a body is turned into something else, this is a trope turned into a narrative, which in turn becomes a tool to debate issues of morality.\footnote{La semejanza de lo natural con lo moral, explicada por transformación o conversión fingida del sujeto en el término asimilado; de donde es que cualquiera simile se pudiera convertir en metamórfosi’. Gracián y Morales, Agudeza, vol. 2, 573.} It is then that Gracián eloquently concludes that “any simile might be turned into a metamorphosis” – that is, a form of fiction.\footnote{La semejanza de lo natural con lo moral, explicada por transformación o conversión fingida del sujeto en el término asimilado; de donde es que cualquiera simile se pudiera convertir en metamórfosi’.} The issue is about the way in which a similitude conceived by the wit of the poet is cast into language. As it happens with metaphors too, there is always with a plot the possibility that the audience fails to understand the proportion or the similitude at the basis of the fiction, and therefore fails to understand it.\footnote{Gracián’s example of a lack of understanding of the wit of the poet is also Apuleius’s book. There were readers who failed to understand the similitude between natural and moral truth, and they thought that the story of a man turned into an ass was the object of a vulgar story: “As they failed to understand the latent morality, they condemned it to the category of the stories that children learn from old women” (“no entendida su recóndita moralidad, lo relajaron muchos a los cuentos que van heredando los niños, de las viejas”). Gracián y Morales, Agudeza, vol. 2, 573.} Hieroglyphs – another genre in
Gracián’s classification of “agudeza fingida” are yet another way of conveying the result of a similar process of thought.\textsuperscript{379}

Gracián summarizes his ideas on fiction by defining “agudeza compuesta fingida” as “a body, a whole fabricated with artifice that, through representation and similitude, depicts human events”, and concludes by listing the genres he has already proposed.\textsuperscript{380} It is difficult not to see the definition above as Gracián’s translation into his own language of Aristotle’s characterization of poetics contained in the book of the same name: Aristotle spoke of the poem as a form of living creature (“ζῳον”) with body and soul that, through imitation, brought forth human events.\textsuperscript{381}

To this, Gracián would add that verse and rhyme are not consubstantial with poetry, for both the quantity of syllables and the cadence are “material”, and only what is “formal” may be part of the definition of a substance.\textsuperscript{382} Even though Gracián cites Horace’s \textit{Ars poetica} in connection with this, the idea belongs to Aristotle’s \textit{Poetics}, and as such had been discussed and criticized repeatedly by sixteenth-century commentators and other scholars. It seems fair to infer that although Gracián never refers to Aristotle’s \textit{Poetics}, either the text itself or intermediaries like Pinciano’s treatise were intensely present within Gracián’s horizon. However, right after that the author of \textit{Agudeza} shows himself rather free in the list of what actually makes a piece of writing into a poem. The latter needs to feature

\textsuperscript{379} Gracián y Morales, \textit{Agudeza}, vol. 2, 573.
\textsuperscript{380} “Un cuerpo, un todo artificioso fingido, que, por traslación y semejanza, pinta y propone los humanos acontecimientos”. Gracián y Morales, \textit{Agudeza}, vol. 2, 570.
\textsuperscript{381} Aristotle, “Poetics”, 54-55, §7, 1450b.
\textsuperscript{382} Pinciano had already declared that poetry may be written in prose, and conceived of Greek romances such as Heliodorus’ \textit{Historia Ethioipica} as epics. López Pinciano, \textit{Obras completas}, vol. 1, 213. Gracián seems to make no difference, as for the genre, between Homer’s \textit{Odyssey} or Vergil’s \textit{Aeneid}, and Heliodorus’ book, or even Mateo Alemán’s picaresque \textit{Guzmán de Alfarache}. The distinction between the first and the second group is “accidental”, and “material” rather than “formal”. Gracián y Morales, \textit{Agudeza}, vol. 2, 572.
propriety in the way it speaks, invention of intricacies, sublimity in the subject, courage of the poetic spirit, bravery in the style, eminence in erudition, consecution among the events […] subtlety of thought […] artifice in discourse, in the depth with which one asserts. Gracián’s concept alters significantly Aristotle’s notion of poetics. At the end of the day, what remains is unity, or the logical consecution of events –and, in style, the reference to rising above the common level of speech. What looks new, conversely, is the reference to subtlety and artifice in the way we think and argue.

In conclusion, what does it mean for poets to make use of wit in the fabrication of fictions? Considering that “agudeza” is the ability to argue a connection between terms, poets are said to be ingenuous when they speak about something in terms of something else—in what seems certainly a notion of fiction deeply modeled upon allegory– in a way that somehow appears new and surprising to the audience. Innovation, therefore, takes place in the choice of the alternative world that is going to serve as a way to speak of things happening in the world of the every day. Fiction, conceived as disillusionment or “desengaño” at Truth’s ability to obtain

383 “De la propiedad en el decir, de la invención de los empeños, de la sublimidad de la materia, de la valentía del espíritu poético, de la bizarria del estilo, de la eminencia de la erudición, de la consecuencia de los asuntos […] en la sutileza del pensar […] en el artificio del discurrir, en la profundidad del declarar”. Gracián y Morales, *Agudeza*, vol. 2, 571.

384 Juan Díaz Rengifo’s enormously famous *Arte poética española* (1592) already showed ambivalence about the way in which poetry’s ability to bring things to life was to be understood. Rengifo’s view oscillated between emphasizing allegory, which personifies things that, as they are abstract ideas, are normally lifeless, and –closer to Aristotle’s meaning in the *Poetics*– plot, as the enactment of a sequence of actions in which the poet instills life, rescuing them from a state of latent possibilities: “It belongs to the poet not only to speak of true things, but also, and even more, to fabricate them. And this is so to such a degree that Aristotle says in the *Poetics* that only those who fabricate and shape new things are truly to be called poets. And he did not mean by that that the poets have to lie, but rather that they have to write, and to paint things so full of life, that they would bestow life, so to speak, in what was dead, and they would make as though fame, envy, the republic, and other things that are neither alive nor people were actually such. Or else he meant that they should fabricate entanglements and plots of such a kind that, even though they had not actually happened, would be greatly similar to those that usually take place. For from fictions like those men usually learn the way things go in everyday life” (“al cual pertenece no solo el hablar de cosas verdaderas, pero mucho más el fingir, y aun esto en tanto grado que dize Aristóteles (In *Poët.*) que solos los que fingen son propriamente poetas. Y no quiso decir que los poetas avían de mentir, sino que avían de escrivir y pintar tan al vivo las cosas, que diessen como vida a lo que estava muerto y fingiessen ya la fama, ya la embidia, ya la república, ya otras cosas que no son vivientes ni personas, como si realmente lo fueran. O que fingiessen marañas y fábulas tales que, aunque no uviessen assí passado, fuessen muy semejantes a las que suelen acaecer. Porque de

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anything through transparency, always speaks as though of something else.\textsuperscript{385} In Gracián’s terms,

> It paints in the distance that which is near; it speaks of the present through things past; what it wants to criticize in someone present it represents in him who is absent; it aims at one person, and hits another.\textsuperscript{386}

Any of the transfers just mentioned requires a foundation on similitude if the poet wants the audience to “argue” appropriately for themselves the connection s/he has previously devised, and therefore understand what —in the world before the eyes— s/he is referring to. As it happens with metaphor, this —as the commentators of Aristotle’s \textit{Rhetoric} had glossed— implies learning that the two terms thus paired have something in common. Gracián’s connection between wit or “agudeza”, and poetry —considered as plot or fiction— rests upon the ability that the two share to look for similarities and thus to transcend from the particular to the universal. As Gracián would state, “inventiveness […] finds one way or another to express his thought”.\textsuperscript{387}

Gracián’s incorporation of poetics within a theory of the acuity of wit or “agudeza” brings us full circle to the start of Chapter One, and Ordóñez’s 1626 translation of the passage of \textit{Poetics} 9, 1451b. There, the translator had replaced Aristotle’s assertion that poetics is “more philosophical and elevated than history” (“φιλοσοφώτερον καὶ σπουδαίότερον”), with a mention of poetry’s intimacy with the work of wit:

\begin{quote}
semejantes fictiones suele aprender el hombre lo que en la común vida passa”). Juan Díaz Rengifo, \textit{Arte poetica española: con una fertillíssima sylva de consonantes...} (En Salamanca: en casa de Miguel Serrano de Vargas, año 1592), 157-158.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{385} Quoting Mateo Alemán’s \textit{Guzmán de Alfarache}, Gracián presents Truth as having realized that she will never obtain anything without disguising herself: “Truth opened its eyes, and decided from that moment on to use cunning” (“abrió los ojos la verdad, dio desde entonces en andar con artificio”). Gracián y Morales, \textit{Agudeza}, vol. 2, 563.

\textsuperscript{386} “Pinta lejos lo que está muy cerca, habla de lo presente en lo pasado, propone en aquel sujeto lo que quiere condenar en este, apunta a uno para dar en otro”. Gracián y Morales, \textit{Agudeza}, vol. 2, 563.

\textsuperscript{387} “La inventiva […] halla uno y otro modo de ficción para exprimir su pensamiento”. Gracián y Morales, \textit{Agudeza}, vol. 2, 585.
poetry is more involved with philosophy and acuity than history is, for the former deals with things in general, while the latter treats them as particulars [italics added].

In the case of Ordóñez, as discussed above in Chapter One, the assertion is most likely to be a reminiscence of Castelvetro’s translation and gloss on the passage, dating back to 1570. Rejecting that poetics has the duty to imitate particulars in the way a painter paints a portrait, Castelvetro had described the work of the poet as involving ingenuousness insofar as poets, unlike portrait makers or historians, “compete” with nature to come up with events that, however compliant with the way things usually happen, and without challenging assumptions about cases that have actually happened, may appear new and fill the audience with wonder. This, as such, would serve as proof of the acuity of wit of the poets, which in turn would become the object of wonder for the spectators.

Gracián’s framework, no longer rooted in the language of the commentaries of Aristotle’s Poetics, appears somewhat different. What seems remarkable, however, is that he translates in terms of acuity of wit the core of the ideas popularized by Castelvetro’s interpretation of the Poetics, which had pioneered to a certain extent the use of the notion of acuity.

For Gracián, moreover, there is more to the wit of fiction than coming up with alternative worlds that respond by “similitude” to the course of things that the audience knows by experience. In fact, Gracián’s view of acuity of wit as it deploys itself though time in terms of meaning placed “in pawn” (“empeño”) and then released (“desempeño”) is explicitly applied to plots of adventures. For example, the artifice exercised in writing apologues, according to Gracián,

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388 “La poesía tiene más de lo filósofo, y de agudeza que la historia, porque la poesía trata las cosas más en lo universal, y la historia las trata en particular” [italics added]. Ordóñez das Seyjas y Tovar, La poética (1626), 23v.
389 See Chapter One, section two.
relies upon similitude or equivalence; but in addition to this, what appears excellent there is a fiction that is amusing, full of *empeños* and suspense, for which the poet then reserves a solution that results in the extraordinary.  

The correlates “empeño” and “desempeño”, formerly used by Gracián in connection with paradoxes protracted in time through a speech, refer now to the complication of events, and to the solution respectively. The latter solves and unravels the entanglement that threatened to render impossible the finding of the issue, which in turn needs to be “extraordinary”—that is, surprising and unpredictable: in a word, paradoxical. Otherwise, it would be judged of little value, and the work of a poet in want of wit. Poets, in sum, are trained to “invent and plot events out of ‘empeños’ and ‘desempeños’” (“invención y traza de empeños y desempeños en el suceso”).

In this way, Gracián is able to conciliate and reunite the two kinds of wonder. Difficulty and complication through “empeños” and “desempeños”, as a matter of fact, arouse marvel insofar as the reader wants to know how the plot is going to lead to a solution. But the succession of difficulties also prompts the audience to enjoy the craft displayed by the author. In fact,
Gracián writes that to the charms of “similitude” that underpin any fiction, one still has to add the way in which “empeños” and “desempeños” make the wit of the poet as inventor lend itself to be appreciated, and this the more so when s/he turns possible what everyone had perceived as difficult. The spectators enjoy, therefore, also on account of

the thrill of the narration of the plot, which is difficult because it has to be invented with “empeños”, interwoven with moments full of obstacles and tight spots; and when it becomes more complicated, the invention and the artifice become proportionally more pleasant too. 394

It is interesting to see how the task of the poet as a contriver of “empeños” relates to wit’s role as a tool to react to and solve inconveniences as they come up in everyone’s daily life. The latter has to do with what Gracián calls “wit of action” (“agudeza de acción”), in reference to the faculty of speaking or acting in order to overcome obstacles or situations that present themselves before us so as to hinder the course of our actions. Inasmuch as they do so, they are a sort of “empeño” that puts at risk the feasibility of what we aim at, and it is here that wit looks for something to say or do in order to turn into harmony what makes the connection of causality between our intentions and outcomes seem unfitting or “dissentaneum”. By choosing the right path of speech or action, wit resolves the issue, so that the situation may end through “desempeño” of the inconvenience that menaced us. Gracián describes the actions that operate “desempeño” through ingenuity as being “mysterious” to look at, and appearing to the onlookers as “executed similes” and “executed imprese or hieroglyphs” (“símiles ejecutados”, “empresas

394 “Se añade lo entretenido de la narración fabulosa, en que está la dificultad de saberla inventar bien empeñada y entretejida de dificultades y aprietos; y cuanto esta más se va empeñando, hace más gustosa la traza y el artificio”. Gracián y Morales, *Agudeza*, vol. 2, 573. The praise of difficulty as begetting pleasure is common in Gracián. See, for instance, the idea that a metaphor that involves “effort gives life to speech” (“hace animado el verbo la traslación que cuesta”. Gracián y Morales, *Agudeza*, vol. 2, 616.
The continuity between action and poetics lies precisely in the fact that the poet acts for Gracián as a creator that simultaneously brings trouble and resolves it, fabricating “empeños” that s/he then resolves in “desempeño”, using his/her ingenuity to imitate a world where s/he makes and unmakes as s/he wishes. With poems turned into conceits, the wit of the poet becomes the faculty that creates expectations and then fills the audience with surprise in a plot conceived in terms of enthymeme and logic.

This is how Gracián inscribes within a theory of the acuity of wit the principles that Castelvetro had advanced more than seventy years earlier in the process of interpreting Aristotle’s Poetics. Castelvetro had pointed at poetry as a device committed to bringing pleasure. According to the scholar, it did so by displaying to the audience—at the expense of history, which only records things as they are—the acuity of wit of a poet who competed with nature and the course of things through arguing new difficulties resolved in new ways. In symmetry with him, Gracián ends up proposing a theory in which the notion of poetics is characterized as the most refined and convoluted embodiment through which the faculty of wit is able to become so to speak visible to audiences in the form of “acuity”.

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396 That Gracián is codifying through his theory of wit ideas that are common in treatises of poetics appears clearer through a comparison with an idea by López Pinciano. In fact, the latter characterizes as cold a plot that employs any sort of *deus ex machina* in order to untie the knot previously woven by reversals and changes of fortune. López Pinciano, *Obras completas*, vol. 1, 213. Coldness or frigidity (in Greek “τὸ ψυχρόν”) is a notion commonly used within the tradition of rhetoric, and more particularly in the part devoted to the study of style, and metaphors. Familiar to readers of Pseudo-Longinus and Pseudo-Demetrius, respectively authors of the treatises *On the sublime* (*Περὶ Υψίου*) and *On style* (*Περὶ Ἐρμηνείας*), frigidity refers to a metaphor that fails to satisfy the curiosity that it evokes because of a lack of proportionality between the terms that it pairs together; see Alessandro Piccolomini, *Piena, et larga parafrase, di M. Alessandro Piccolomini, nel terzo libro della retorica d’Aristotele, a Theodette….* (In Venetia: per Giovanni Varisco, & compagni, 1572), 57-59 for a picture of frigidity in metaphors. Likewise, if a plot is unraveled in a frigid way, this means that the wit of the author has been unable to find a proportional solution—that is, one operating through the kinds of causal process that usually or always happen, and without *deus ex machina*. The poet fails to find a cause bridging the gap between “empeño” and “desempeño”, in Gracián’s terms, and the result is a failed attempt at arguing a connection; in other words, something “dissentaneum” remains without the required dose of “consentaneum”.
CHAPTER THREE

WIT AND THE HISTORIAN:
INTERIORITY, INTENTION AND “PRUDENCE”

In Chapters One and Two I have described the link between poetry, wonder, and acuity of wit progressively naturalized by a tradition that starts with sixteenth-century commentaries of Aristotle’s *Poetics* and reaches a peak with Baltasar Gracián’s treatise on ingenuity *Agudeza y arte de ingenio* (1648). Taking occasion from the claim advanced by Aristotle in 9, 1451b that poetics is “more philosophical” than history, the latter, assimilated by some to a register of events, became a sort of straw dog that helped commentators explain, by contrast, the reasons that made for poetry’s appropriateness to inspire wonder in the audience at the exercise of wit performed by the poet. Scholars like Castelvetro, Denores, and Patrizi in Italy, and Ordóñez or Pinciano in Spain conceived of poetics as synonymous with “making”. They did so, however, at the expense of perpetuating a view of the historian as a passive recorder of events, entirely deprived of any occasion for argument or conjecture in which s/he might somehow demonstrate excellence of inventiveness, or ingenuity.

Yet the distinction outlined above was born to a world in which the latest trends in historiography would render it immediately problematic, and even obsolete. As a matter of fact, ongoing changes were turning history writing into a kind of activity in which the struggles and pleasures of wit would matter for the historian as much as they did for the poet; but this, as might be expected, occurred in the intersection of different trends, and seldom without conflict.

In what follows I will show that the request for the historian to exercise invention and, with it, the occasion for him to demonstrate acuity of wit came hand in hand with the growing
popularity of a pattern of history writing that, unsatisfied with a mere account of events, increasingly promoted, for the sake of meaningfulness, conjecture as to the causes that had led to the effects. The allocation of spaces for probability and argumentation would open a window for the wit of the historian to operate. The process became unleashed and out of control with the popularity obtained by Tacitus’ writings, which led to the interpretation of the work of the historian in terms of scrutiny of the depths and the intentions of rulers and men in general to be conceived as devious in a world in which dissimulation makes motivations always appear different from what they really are. As such, the trend that came to be known as Tacitism caused the gap between the secrecy of intentions and the actions public to all to become central to the task of the historian, who fills readers with wonder at the discovery of what had remained in latency. Yet, resorting to conjecture in order to guess the intention that led to a path of behavior was seen by many a critic as a method more appropriate to obtain a reputation of cleverness and of sharp wit than to fulfill the expectations of research seriously conducted in books and archives. The conflict in perspective here outlined would never fade from the background in the love story that, for some decades and through the pretext of accessing the interiority of man, linked history writing with the pleasures of wonder and wit.

I will focus on the process through which access to the intentions of the ruler came to epitomize the kind of causality sought for the narration of a historian. Amidst the conflict that opposed using documentation and research against conjecture as a path to reach the interiority of the ruler, I will study how late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italian and Spanish scholars –with a focus on Baltasar Gracián’s Agudeza y arte de ingenio (1648)– promoted the unveiling of dissimulation as the way for the historian to demonstrate acuity of wit. In doing so, they would
lay the foundations for a genre of biographies or “particular histories” aimed at inspiring wonder in the audience as they discover the inner lives of rulers and heroes, seen against the appearances as displayed for the eyes of men.

1. History between truth and verisimilitude: intention and interiority as a form of causality

Defining the object of history in the first book of De historia para entenderla y escribirla (1611), Luis Cabrera de Córdoba resorts to a comparison with poetics inspired in Aristotle’s Poetics 9, 1451b. The poet, he writes,

with no limits to his jurisdiction and as it pleases his fantasy, considers the actions within his soul, and modifies them: he makes them bigger and smaller, introduces variations and ornament, and amplifies them […] he looks for things outside the subject […] in order to make them more outstanding, wonderful and splendid, and therefore more pleasurable. 397

Things look rather different for those who write history. According to Cabrera,

the historian has boundaries, and these are borders set for the matter he has chosen; he cannot cross beyond them, nor change anything whatsoever; as a consequence, he neither adds nor removes anything, but narrates instead the truth of the fact. 398

Tightly bound to factuality, historians have no rights over the matter they deal with. They narrate particular events with no room for alteration, and it might therefore seem fair to conclude

397 “No teniendo límite alguno en su jurisdicción, como le passa por la fantasía, pone en el ánimo, muda las acciones, las crece, las menora, las varía, las adorna, las amplifica […] busca fuera de la materia […] para que salgan más, parezcan maravillosas, y más estupendas, para que deleiten más”. Luis Cabrera de Córdoba, De historia, para entenderla y escribirla (En Madrid: por Luis Sánchez, año 1611), 12v. For the poet who contemplates actions within his soul in order to apply his surgery to them, the source is likely to be Aristotle, “Poetics”, 86-69, §17, 1455a.

398 “El histórico tiene sus términos, y dentro dellos sus confines de la materia que ha tomado a escribir, y no puede salir dellos, ni mudar cosa alguna: y así, ni la pone, ni la quita, mas narra la verdad del hecho”. Cabrera de Córdoba, De historia, 12v. Cabrera’s emphasis on poetry’s transformative ability sets a stark contrast with history, much in the line of Denores or Pinciano. See Denores, Poetica, 2v; López Pinciano, Obras completas, vol. 1, 174.
that they simply do not invent anything. Cabrera’s opinion maps onto that of many of his contemporaries who also referred to Aristotle’s work. He is hardly more innovative when he writes that the poet

works with universality […] and this is why Aristotel preferred poetry [sc. to history] in his Poetics. The historian works with particulars, representing things as they are. He is like a life painter who refers things as they were done: but the poet expresses them as they should be, or as they might be according to either verisimilitude or probability.

The distinction here outlined had become ubiquitous along with the dissemination of Aristotle’s Poetics within scholarly circles in the mid-sixteenth century. As mentioned earlier, Aristotle described the task of the historian as concerned with events told the way they actually took place. Poetry, which imitates a plot of actions according to the way things are known to be either usually (“κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς”), or necessarily (“κατὰ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον”), had been judged to be “more philosophical” (“φιλοσοφῶτερον”). The poet invents, for s/he conjecturally argues surprising and yet reasonable ways in which events may have taken place: this is a space granted to the operation of wit, which allows the challenging of expectations of those who listen. Therein lies the ability of the poet to inspire wonder in the audience, who eventually may consider him

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399 As early as Leonardo Bruni’s preface to his translation of Plutarch’s Life of Marc Antony in the fifteenth century, we find the assertion that in history “there is no invention” (“in historia […] nulla est inventio”). Arnaldo Momigliano, “Polybius’ Reappearance in Western Europe”, in Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 84.

400 “[El poeta] obra cerca de lo universal […] (y por esto la prefirió [sc. la poesía] en su poética Aristóteles); el historiador a lo particular, representando las cosas como ellas son, qual pintor que retrata al natural, refiriendo las cosas como fueron hechas: el poeta, como necesariamente avían de ser, o como podrian verisimil, o provablemente”. Cabrera de Córdoba, De historia, 11v.

401 For a summary of the diffusion of Aristotle’s Poetics in Italy and Spain, see section one of Chapter One.

402 See Chapter One, section two.

403 Aristotle, “Poetics”, 58-59, §9, 1451b. See Chapter One, section two for recent scholarship on Aristotle’s distinction between poetics and history.
with praise due to the inventiveness noticed in the imitation of the plot, for the latter is perceived as *made*, in opposition to the actions that the historian *simply* records.\footnote{See López Pinciano, *Obras completas*, vol. 1, 174 for the etymology of poetry grounded in “making” as opposed to history. See, however, Chapter One, section two and the references to the articles by Silvia Carli. Carli shows that, against Castelvetro, or Pinciano’s emphasis on transforming things as a requirement to become a poet or a maker, Aristotle had considered it enough for the poet to make a plot of events that actually happened whenever these occur in mutual interrelationship according to probability or necessity.}

Bound by factuality, the historian seems to find no room within such a framework to elicit wonder in his readers.\footnote{Cabrera de Córdoba admits that there might be events that have actually taken place of the kind that fill us with wonder. However, as he remarks, any pleasure resulting from this is accidental to the art of the historian, who simply relates things as they happened. In consequence, he ought to receive for that neither praise nor blame: “Delight takes place in connection to […] accidents the events bring with themselves, and which incidentally delight the reader” (“el deleitar es compañía […] de los accidentes que traen los sucessos y los tiempos, que deleitan incidentemente al lector”). Cabrera de Córdoba, *De historia*, 19r. Concerning different ways in which history may be pleasant, and the degree of involvement of the historian in them, see Virgilio Malvezzi “A’ lettori”, in Discorsi sopra Cornelio Tacito (Venetia: presso Marco Ginami, MDCXXII), n.p.}

If the purpose here is to chronicle the way in which historiography found a space for wit to lawfully operate, and given that wit –as demonstrated in Chapters One and Two– works by arguing a mean or a connection between terms apparently unfitting, Cabrera de Córdoba ought to be credited for explicitly delimiting the role played in history by either probability or verisimilitude over a passage of the *Poetics*, such as 9, 1451b, too often misconstrued. Verisimilitude, after all, was the first and foremost condition for wit and argument to replace the tyranny of the facts to which the historian seemed to be condemned.

Cabrera’s contribution would take place in the context of momentous transformations that reshaped the face of historiography throughout the sixteenth century.

As a matter of fact, the question of whether history could –and even should– deviate from mere factuality became a topic of debate in the mid-sixteenth century. These were years that, not coincidentally, witnessed the rise in popularity of the ancient historians Polybius (c.200-c.118 BCE) and Tacitus (c.56-117).\footnote{For the popularity enjoyed by ancient historians among early modern readers and the transformations taking place across the sixteenth century, see Peter Burke, “A Survey of the Popularity of Ancient Historians, 1450-1700”, *History and Theory* 5, no. 2 (1966).} Aristotle’s restriction of the rights of history over universality –
more partial than most interpreters would take it to be—had become a repeated truth precisely at the same time that readers started to extol the work of two historians who, each in his own way, transgressed that principle. This, as it could not be otherwise, brought contradictions that would feed some of the most productive discussions of the period.407

Polybius and Tacitus had remained backstage in the canon for as long as eloquence or exemplarity had served as the scale by which to weigh history writing. Greeted from Petrarch to Machiavelli as princeps historicorum, Livy would yield his preeminence only when readers fell for a trend that looked not so much for the grandeur of the events, or examples of virtue, as for a form of writing that laid bare the mechanisms behind the theater of history.408 Polybius and Tacitus were at the center of momentous discussions in the late sixteenth century, and it was they, of all the historians, that the exiles from Florence Jacopo Corbinelli and Baccio del Bene allegedly read after dinner to Henri III of France, tickling the enthusiasm of the king for plotting against his enemies.409 By unveiling the ins and outs of the government—as Tacitus was supposed to have done—, with all the subtleties and artifices of dissimulation, history become a model of behavior, but in a different way from how it had been so in the past.

407 Aristotle claimed poetics to be “more philosophical” than history, meaning precisely that the latter still maintained a relation to causes and to the universal. For a study of this, see Carli, “Aristotle on the Philosophical Elements of ‘Historia’”, passim. In truth, proponents of history’s link to universality have always made themselves heard in spite of the voices that subscribed the opposite. As early as 1445, Lorenzo Valla would assert in Gesta Ferdinandis Regis Aragonum that history is about the universal because of the exemplarity of the cases it portrays. See Eraldo Bellini, Agostino Mascalci tra ‘ars poetica’ e ‘ars historica’ (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2002), 157.
408 For the rediscovery of Polybius, see Momigliano, “Polybius’ Reappearance”. For the nuances in the succession to the throne of the historians from Livy to Tacitus, see J. H. Whitfield, “Livy > Tacitus”, in Classical Influences on European Culture, ed. R. R. Bolgard, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).
409 Richard Tuck, Philosophy and Government 1572–1651 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 42; see also Alexandra Gajda, “Tacitus and political thought in early modern Europe, c. 1530-c.1640”, in The Cambridge Companion to Tacitus, ed. A. J. Woodman (Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 258. Polybius and Tacitus were coupled in several instances, proving that sixteenth-century scholars saw them as part of the same, then innovative conception of historiography. See, for example, Benedetto Varchi’s injunction to imitate Polybius among the Greeks, “much like Tacitus among the Latins”. Quoted in Momigliano, “Polybius’ Reappearance”, 90.
Generally speaking, Polybius’ reputation remained confined to scholars: a historian’s historian, in Burke’s formulation. Even then, his proposal of a so-called “pragmatic history” that would take into account the causes of events from a military and political point of view – subjects in which Polybius was well versed, and experienced, because of his position – provoked impassioned debates, as readers got caught between fascination for a history that provided more than unreasoned account and diffidence towards a model that, if weighed against Aristotle’s Poetics 9, 1451b as understood by many of the commentators, might be considered to be invading the jurisdictions of poetics and philosophy. Quoted ad nauseam, Polybius’ creed about the explanation of causality was given the status of law in the manifesto signed by one of the most eloquent late sixteenth-century proponents of history’s investment in the teaching of politics, Baltasar Álamos de Barrientos, author of a work derived from Tacitus, written in prison after 1590, and eventually dedicated to the Duke of Lerma in 1614:

According to Polybius, when someone removes from history for what cause something has been done, and in which way, and to what end, and whether the outcome corresponded with the plan and method that had been traced – it does not matter if he maintains all the rest, for the whole will amount to just mockery, playfulness and entertainment rather than learning.

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410 Burke, “A survey”, 141.
411 Even though he deeply appreciated Polybius, Francesco Patrizi called him a philosopher rather than a historian in Della historia dieci dialoghi (1560). This is so because Polybius dealt with causes, while history should be only about effects. Lipsius in his Notae (1589) also vacillates between praise and distance in terms of genre when he asserts that Polybius “digresses, interrupts himself, is diffuse, and often explicitly teaches rather than tells a story. But his lessons are always worthwhile ones”. I quote from Burke, “A survey”, 145. Concerning the definition of “pragmatic history”, see John Thornton, “Pragmatic History”, in The Encyclopedia of Ancient History, ed. Roger S. Bagnall et al. (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010). For the transformations in history writing in which Polybius played a crucial role, see also Anthony Grafton, What Was History? The Art of History in Early Modern Europe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 70-78.
412 “Como enseña Polibio, quien quita de la historia, por qué causa se aya hecho una cosa; y de qué manera; y con qué fin; y si ha correspondido el sucesso a la cuenta y discurso, que se aya hecho; todo lo demás que en ella dexare, más servirá de burla, juego, y entretenimiento, que de doctrina”. Baltasar Álamos de Barrientos, “A don Francisco Gómez de Sandoval y Rojas, Duque de Lerma…”, in Tácito español ilustrado con aforismos (En Madrid: por Luis Sánchez, 1614), n.p. In about the same years, the royal chronicler Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas repeated the same quotation when he explained that, according to Lipsius, “legitimate history” required the addition of a “declaration” of causes to the narration of events. See Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas, Discursos morales, políticos e históricos inéditos de Don Antonio de Herrera, cronista del rey don Felipe II..., vol. 1 (Madrid: Imprenta
Unconcerned with the motives behind the events, history would remain a mere account of effects; yet it did not take long for scholars to realize that the ascription of causes to actions involved a degree of conjecture that directly challenged what they understood to be Aristotle’s ban against history relying on verisimilitude. Cabrera de Córdoba was among those who called the latter into question as simplistic: the true and the verisimilar are categories that, as a matter of fact, leave grey spots as they intersect, while there are things that partake in varying degrees of both of them. Cabrera’s example for things verisimilar but basically impossible to be asserted as true is symptomatic of the change in expectations undergone by historiography in recent decades, and, at the same time, helped in setting a program for the genre. More verisimilar than true, Cabrera writes, is

that which is written about the conversations in a Council of State, or a Cabinet: in what the king proposed, and his words, and that which the voters said, their arguments and replies to them – a difficult thing to know. In this way, one writes that which is verisimilar, drawn from the effects, and from some circumstances, and the way in which business is done and campaigns are set.413

If one compares the list of indeterminacies worth investigating for the sake of explanation and meaningfulness with that Juan Páez de Castro had proposed for the historian in 1555,
Cabrera’s selection, elaborated more than half a century later, seems to place emphasis on those that relate to the machinery of the state. It is also at them that the royal chronicler Lupercio Leonardo de Argensola seemed to be hinting as he wrote from Naples on December 28 1612 that there were causes and circumstances of events that are difficult to access “due to the secrecy in which they are concealed, or which must be kept about them”.

It is certain, on the one hand, that Cabrera wanted to make a case about the futility surrounding the trope of the eyewitness, which dominated much of the theory of the time, by insisting that the historian had to trust what others may contribute to his knowledge, by definition incomplete. However, this is just one way in which verisimilitude had to be taken into account, for Cabrera’s focus on the secrets of the state as exemplifying the kind of things that the historian is unable to obtain certainty about seems to be highly motivated, and surrounded by a great deal of interest. Here and there, Cabrera introduced distinctions that are typical of the literature

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414 In 1555, the royal historian Juan Páez de Castro had explained what is to be understood by the causes of an event: “To explain the causes that moved those in counsel to start the action; then, which means were used to obtain the end that was sought: in which the historian has the duty of explaining in which aspects there was success, and in which there was failure, and for what reason, and writing how things were effected, which is a great part of the history; and lastly, the effect of all this” [italics added] (“Explicar las causas que en el consejo movieron a que comenzasen; después, qué medios se tomaron para conseguir el fin que deseaban: donde el historiador es obligado a tratar en qué se acertó, y en qué no, y por qué razón, y escribir cómo se pusieron por la obra, que es grande parte de la historia, y al fin el efecto, que hizieron” [italics added]). Juan Páez de Castro, “Memorial. De las cosas necesarias para escribir Historia”, Revista agustiniana 29 (1893), 27. This, however, was already in Aristotle, who holds that we can understand the nature of actions only if we identify the motive of the agent, as well as the outcome of actions. Aristotle, Ethica Nicomachea, §2.4, 1105a, and §2.6, 1106b. Quoted in Carli, “Aristotle on the Philosophical Elements of Historia”, 348.


416 As a finite being, the historian cannot see everything of an action: “Not even the most accomplished [historian] can see in its entirety everything that takes place in a long and diverse narration. A history containing exclusively that which the historian could see would be a short one, and therefore he is forced to believe what others tell him” [italics added] (“el más principal no puede por entero ver todo lo que se haze y pone en una larga y varia narración. Sería pequeña la historia, que de lo que vió solamente se hiziesse, y forçosamente ha de creer lo que le dizen”). Cabrera de Córdoba, De historia, 10v-11r. With the exception of historians like Pedro Labrit de Navarra, (who, as I will show below, advocated the absolute need for presence, not only to the events, but to the mind of the prince), it was generally agreed that a part of the subject remained arguable. Bartolomé de las Casas had persuaded his readers some decades earlier that his eyewitness account depended nonetheless on other people’s stories precisely because of the shortcomings of human existence, confined to place and time and unable to see the whole. Authority was therefore displaced from the presence of the historian to the experience that availed for his judgment in discerning
deriving from Tacitus’ works as interpreted by Justus Lipsius and his followers, and that, as I will show later, tended to narrow the spectrum of circumstances interesting to historiography to the link between the psyche of the agents and the choices they make: in practical terms, this entailed the need to investigate the connection between the concealed intentions of the ruler and the outcomes resulting from them.

Attesting to the permeation of a language derived from Tacitus’ works is Cabrera’s distinction between “cause” and “counsel” (“causa”, “consejo”), which refer, respectively, to good reasoning versus passion and self-interest as the justifications for decision making. While the two differ from one another, they have in common their root in the interiority of the subject, as opposed to “necessity”, or a constraint coming from outside.417

The contrast here alluded to evokes immediately one of the most pressing issues in ethical and political debates at the time, which has to do with the content of the secrets of the state that the historian would unveil as causes for the actions –namely, why there are secrets in the way princes rule, and what is the kind of content they conceal. However, before we turn to that, it seems convenient to address a different question implied by Cabrera’s take on the role of accounts of others: “And if I should refer things that I did not see with my own eyes, or which I saw but remember badly, or that I heard differently told by different people, I will always conjecture, by means of a very long experience that I have of all these things, that which I see to approach truth in a more verisimilar way” (“Y si algunas [sc. cosas] refiriere, que por los ojos no vide, o que las vide y no bien delas me acuerdo, o que las oí, pero a diversos, y de diversas maneras me las dijeron, siempre conjeturaré por experiencia larguísima que de todas las más dellas tengo, lo que con mayor verisimilitud llegarse a la verdad me pareciere”). Bartolomé de Las Casas, Historia de las Indias, ed. André Saint-Lu, vol. 1 (Caracas: Ayacucho, [1986]), 17. Verisimilitude was the criterion observed by the historian whenever he had to compare sources. See Herrera y Tordesillas, Discursos, 14-15, and Luis Tribaldos de Toledo, “Al lector”, in Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, Guerra de Granada hecha por el rei de España don Philippe II… (En Lisboa, por Giraldo de la Viña, año 1627), n.p. 417 Cabrera warned his readers that even though causes and counsels may seem one and the same thing, a counsel is “a well pondered reason to do or not to do something” (and therefore refers to a process of meditation and choice), whereas a cause would be “a passion of the soul” that provokes one into action due to self-interest, a desire for preservation, or power (“las causas y consejos, que aunque parecen lo mesmo, porque los hechos proceden dellos, son en la razón diversos. El consejo es razón bien pensada, de hazer, o no hazer una cosa. En la causa bien hay que advertir, la pasión del ánimo, y la razón con que se obra por evitar daños, alcanzar comodidades, desseo de señorear, de vengarse, de injuriar, o temiendo mayor peligro, mal y odio, y todo lo que nos induce y condueze a obrar. En lo que es de voluntad ay juicio, no en lo que se haze por fuerça, o caso: refiérese a la divina, que llaman hado, o fortuna con licencia antigua”). Cabrera de Córdoba, De historia, 32r.
that verisimilitude plays in history writing: the means for the historian to have access to the secrets in question. When considered through the lens of Tacitus, the answer appeared to contemporaries as a question contingent on the possibility of looking inside the king. Giovanni Botero famously wrote in 1589 that only the ruler, or someone with his support and communicating with him, would be able to write history:

it would be extremely convenient for the king to make sure that the wars and other deeds undertaken by him or under his protection are accurately written [...] and the Castilians, in fact, have failed in this point [...] But writing history is the task of a prince (for there is no other one that may have entire notice of the causes, outcomes, and circumstances of the actions), or of whoever has the support of the prince, with his authority, his favor, and his money. Otherwise, nothing of any value will result from it.418

By the time of Botero’s treatise, the notion of a historian in official duty, somehow working at the expense of and for the sake of the ruler, had been important for a while. In 1547 and in the presence of the future Philip II, the Cortes of Aragón had famously met in Monzón to decree the appointment of a chronicler (“coronista mayor”) in order that he might make available “the public truth of the kingdom” out of the recollection of “papeles de estado”.419 The archive

418 “Molto a proposito sarebbe, che il principe si prendesse cura di fare scrivere accuratamente le guerre, e le imprese fatte da lui, o sotto gli auspicij suoi [...] nel che in vero hanno mancato grandemente i castigliani [...] Ma lo scrivere historie è cosa da prencipe (perché altri non può sapere pienamente, e le cagioni, & i successi dell’imprese, e le circonstanze loro) o da chi sia portato dal prencipe, e con l’autorità, e col favore, e col denaro; altramente non si fa cosa, che vaglia”. Giovanni Botero, Della ragion di stato libri dieci... (In Venetia: appresso i Gioliti, MDXXXIX [1589]), 255-256.
419 In the “Acto de Corte sobre el Coronista” of April 6, 1547, the archbishop of Zaragoza Hernando de Aragón requested “the famous fuero of the chronicler” so that “there might exist in Aragón a chronicler regularly appointed, who might write the deeds of the past, as well as the present events” (“el famoso fuero del coronista, y que en Aragón huviesse perpetuamente historiador, que escribiesse las hazañas de los passados, y los successos presentes”). The Cortes decreed that “due to the lack of written testimonies, the deeds and the ancient things of the Kingdom of Aragón have fallen into oblivion: His Highness, with the will of the Cortes, statutes the assignment of a salary, such as the Deputies would think appropriate, to some person of experience and wisdom, knowledgeable in chronicles and histories, and natural from Aragón: so that he might fill the special duty of writing, compiling, and placing in order all the things worthy of mention in Aragón, both past and present, as it suits the chronicles of such a kingdom” (“por falta de escripturas, los hechos, y cosas antiguas del Reyno de Aragón están olvidadas: su Alteza, de voluntad de la Corte, estatuece, que se dé un salario, qual pareciere a los Diputados, a una persona experta, sabia, y próvida en corónicas, y historias, natural del Reyno de Aragón; el qual tenga especial cargo de escriver, recopilar, y ordenar todas las cosas notables de Aragón, assi passadas, como presentes, según que a corónicas de semejantes Reynos
represents the path to learn about the causes. Truthful to this, officially appointed historians both in Castile and Aragón would often lay claim to the right they held to what one of them once called “the monuments [...] like the original consultations of the Councils of State and War, with the agreements of His Majesty, the copies of His letters, and the responses from particulars”.420 Treated as a part of those in confidence of the secret, the death of officially appointed chroniclers was followed by the seizure by officers of the king of up to the last piece of documentation found in his possession.421

The archive, though access to it was a privilege reserved to a few, would allow historians to make of the secrets of the state something closer to truth than to conjecture. When someone other than the ruler sets to write history, the procedure entails seeking communication with him. To minimize interference, Páez de Castro had suggested to Philip II the transmission of the secrets of the state, by means of “commentaries”, to the chronicler in official duty. Páez had been appointed to the charge on June 1 1555. Following Charles V’s abdication in favor of his son, Páez presented the new king with a set of instructions concerning the establishment of a

420 “Los monumentos [...] habiendo sido las consultas originales de los Consejos de Estado i Guerra con los acuerdos de su Magestad, las copias de sus cartas, i las respuestas de los particulares”. Tomás Tamayo de Vargas, Restauración de la ciudad del Salvador, i Baía de Todos-Sanctos (En Madrid: por la viuda de Alonso Martín, año 1628), n.p.
421 Upon Tamayo de Vargas’ death, the historian Gerónimo de San José writes in a letter of September 24 1641 to Aragón’s Coronista Mayor Juan F. Andrés de Uztarroz: “Sus papeles [de Tamayo] todos tiene en caxones con llabe, por orden del Rei, el Protonotario, i su testamento las llabes dellos, i así no se ha perdido cosa”. Gerónimo de San José, “Cartas de Fray Gerónimo de San José al cronista Juan F. Andrés de Uztarroz”, ed. José Manuel Blecua, AFA (1945), 44. The same was the case with Páez de Castro, for whom see Arantxa Domingo Malvadi, Bibliofilia humanista en tiempos de Felipe II: la biblioteca de Juan Páez de Castro (León: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2011), 46.
As he projected the place for each of the materials, Páez assigned a room to serve as an archive. It would contain, in addition to volumes and documents concerning government, the commentaries that your ancestors wrote concerning their businesses, and those which Your Majesty will eventually write, with the particular causes of each of His enterprises, and of other important matters [emphasis added].

It seemed only reasonable to make that room into “the most secret part of the library”. A remedy for the ills of conjecture, the archive would be restricted to those who, like Páez, were deputed to write a history of the kingdom. Like Botero decades afterwards, Páez may have had good reason to propose a plan like this from a point of view that transcends the desire to preserve memories of the past. Access to documentation, in fact, was often perceived as politically and morally effective, as one may see when Cabrera de Córdoba introduced Charles V, justifying

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423 Páez de Castro, “Memorial...sobre las libreries”, 37.
424 “Los comentarios, que vuestros antecesores escribieron de sus cosas; y los que V. M. escribirá andando el tiempo, con las causas particulares de cada una de sus empresas, y de otros negocios de importancia”. Páez de Castro, “Memorial...sobre las libreries”, 39-40.
425 “La tercera sala será como Archivo, y parte más secreta, en la qual se pondrán las cosas, que tocan al estado, y gobierno”. Páez de Castro, “Memorial...sobre las libreries”, 37. Secrecy and religious mystery went hand in hand when it came to describe the papers of the state. In 1628, a successor of Páez in the office like Tomás Tamayo de Vargas (1589-1641) would define the secretaries of the councils as sacred spaces: “El sagrado de las secretarías de aquellos Consejos en las Coronas de Castilla i Portugal”. Tamayo de Vargas, Restauración, n.p. The historian becomes the complement of the secretary. In a sort of reciprocity, the latter preserves the secret that the chronicler would presumably unveil in a history that, otherwise, would present only mute, meaningless facts. For the secretary in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain, see Alexandra Merle, “Les hommes du secret. La figure du secrétaire dans la littérature politique espagnole à l’époque moderne”, in Le partage du secret : cultures du dévoilement et de l’occultation en Europe du Moyen Age à l’époque moderne, ed. Bernard Darbord and Agnès Delage (Paris: Colin, 2013).
426 Páez had stated this in the earlier memorandum, quoted above, that Páez addressed to Charles V in September 1555 concerning the writing of history. As Páez elaborates on the knowledge required from the historian, he gives pride of place to the personal papers of the king: “It will be necessary to confer many things with Your Majesty in order to learn that which caused them. In ancient times almost all of the emperors used to write down records of their businesses, which they called commentaries, and which they gave to the historians. Julius Caesar’s commentaries, which we have now, were of that kind” (“será también necesario consultar con V. M. muchas cosas para saber las causas dellas. Antiguamente casi todos los emperadores hazían memorias de sus cosas, que llamaban comentarios, los cuales daban a los historiadores: tales eran los comentarios de Julio César, que agora tenemos”). Páez de Castro, “Memorial ... para escribir Historia”, 36.
himself for having written memoirs like the ones evoked by Páez: the emperor would have thus provided true causes and motives to build a history such as would prove false those written by enemies that were so far available. Sealed in the emperor’s handwriting, truth would defeat slander and falseness, which originated in the idleness of foreign historians wildly abandoned to the freedom of conjectures.\footnote{In a letter dated January 30 1569, Páez asked for help from Jerónimo Zurita. Disappointed with the conditions in which he was developing the task of royal chronicler, Páez lamented in a bitter tone the gap between the materials at his disposal and the expectations described in his memorandum mentioned above: “I cannot base my account on letters from soldiers, or the gossip of public squares, but on solid and proven foundations” (“no es razón que yo escriba por cartas de soldados, ni por lo que se dice en las plazas, sino por muy buenos fundamentos autenticados”). Domingo Malvadi, 	extit{Bibliofilia humanista}, 449. A history, if it is to deserve that name, requires access to secrets that, regretfully, remain such to his sight: “If this were a work of invention […] I would have made great progress […]”} In a state such as the one imagined by Páez, the equation holds by which the historian has a choice between the truth of the archive and the malice of divination and guess—a method for “rogue” or “picaresque” historians, ideologically associated with the enemy and ill will.

In truth, even officially appointed historians would meet a reality that rendered problematic the duality just exposed. As a matter of fact, conjecture and guess would often be less the result of choice than of necessity, as when the king refused to Páez de Castro access to the archive at Simancas. Bartolomé Leonardo de Argensola would partake in Páez’s misfortune, as he repeatedly failed to obtain the documents he had requested to write a history of Philip II, which he wanted supported by evidence that nonetheless stubbornly escaped him, despite being nothing less than Aragón’s “coronista mayor”.\footnote{[Charles V] had written all his campaigns, and the causes and motivations prompting him to start those. He did so in order that the truth might be made public, because he thought that the historians of our times whom he had met and read had obscured it, because either […] they did not know it, or they wanted it to be that way” (“él avía escrito todas sus jornadas, causas y motivos para emprenderlas, para que se supiesse la verdad: porque los historiadores de nuestros tiempos que él avía conocido y leido la escurecían, o por no saberla, o por afición”). Cabrera de Córdoba, 	extit{De historia}, 7v. See also Kagan, who states that Charles V would have written his memoirs “on the grounds of political expediency”. Kagan, 	extit{Clio}, 98. The story would repeat itself when the so-called 	extit{Junta Grande} or 	extit{Junta de Noche} suggested to Philip II in 1592 that he might a history of his reign, carried out by someone deputed officially for the task and with access to the papers of state. Kagan, 	extit{Clio}, 127, quoting from 	extit{consulta} of January 30 1592, ABZ, carpeta 160n54. In the same line, Esteban de Garibay presented a project or “traça” for a history, in which resorting to official documents would provide the true causes of the events, as opposed to those assigned by enemies. Kagan, 	extit{Clio}, 140.}
However, it would be an exaggeration to conclude that the mere absence of documents springing directly from the government forcefully entailed that the historian needed to play guessing games. In fact, Cabrera’s reference to conjecture seems to imply, before anything else, a process of collation among multiple sources that deal with the same event: at this point, the historian needs to judge among different and often diverging versions which one is likely to approach closest to the truth:

[The historian] is forced to believe what others tell him—not just one person alone, but many, among whom he will not find the perfect narration that he assumes to be uniform. On the contrary, since variation is customary and inevitable, he will argue according to probability among the diversity of facts referred to him, so that the force of truth may surface, and establish that which will look to him truer, or more verisimilar.  

Unless the papers containing counsels and dispositions of state come to my hands, this will be a soulless body” (“si fuera cosa de invención […] hubiera hecho mucho […] Si las cosas de los consejos de Estado e instrucciones no vienen a mi poder, solamente será cuerpo sin alma”. Malvadi, Bibliofilia humanista, 449. The correspondence of Bartolomé Leonardo de Argensola, coronista mayor of Aragón between 1615 and 1631, betrays his anxiety about not obtaining the materials necessary to accomplish his work. In a letter sent from Zaragoza in 1629, he complains that the deputies of Aragón had failed to comply with their obligation to provide him with documentation, “even though it was their duty to bring them to me from China, if necessary” (“los diputados, no me han dado papeles con estar obligados a traérmelos, si fuera menester, de la China”). Bartolomé Leonardo de Argensola, Obras sueltas, vol. 2, 338. Bartolomé’s requests were in vain, and his Anales appeared in 1630 without him having been able to see the papers. He complained that “due to the want of ancient registers and other papers necessary for the history I have not completed it the way I wanted. For this you can provide, having them sent to me” (“la pena, que me causó, el ver, que por falta de registros antiguos y de otros papeles necesarios para la historia no la tengo en el estado que quisiera. Esto pueden V. SS. remediar, mandando que se me comuniquen”). Bartolomé Leonardo de Argensola, Primera parte de los anales de Aragón (En Çaragoça: Juan de Lanaja, 1630), n.p. Criticism of archives or libraries that hide rather than communicate was common from the mid-sixteenth century. In fact, there seemed to be a tendency to applaud projects that centralize the availability of texts, such as that of Philip II, which are eventually condemned as having destroyed the fluid network of borrowing among scholars that characterized humanistic scholarship. See, for instance, Antonio Agustín’s complaints, in a letter to Jerónimo Zurita, about the confiscation of books for Philip II’s library, as he writes to his friend that “by collecting here so many good books, and banning them from being shared, one does more harm than good” (“recoger allí tan buenos libros, y no comunicarlos, se haze más daño que provecho”). Agustín, Opera omnia, vol. 7, 214.

429 “[El historiador] forçosamente ha de creer lo que le dizen; no uno sino muchos, en quienes no hallará la perfeta narración que él presupone uniforme. Antes porque es ordinario y cierto el variar, avrá de argumentar sobre provables en la diversidad de los hechos que le refieren, para sacar en limpio la fuerza de la verdad, y establecer lo que más verdadero, o verisimil le pareciere”. Cabrera de Córdoba, De historia, 10v.
Thus characterized, conjecture remains circumscribed to scholarly work, concerned with alternative versions—either published or unpublished, written as well as oral—of what no one but the king and his counselors know for certain.

However, Cabrera had envisaged something bolder and entirely severed from the shadow of either texts or the archive. In a passage already quoted, he wrote that “one writes what is verisimilar, drawn from the effects and some circumstances, and the way in which business is done and campaigns are set” [italics added].

Inference about the inner processes of the government appears as the result not so much of sources compared against one another, but of conjecture about how certain causes led to certain outcomes judging by the way in which things are generally done. The historian may guess what were the intentions contemplated by those who rule just by taking into consideration the effects known and public to everyone and, most importantly, by making use of his experience of affairs—of “la manera de hazer”. If Páez de Castro listed the variety of learning—from geography, to engineering, to law—that would place the events narrated in meaningful frameworks, Cabrera depicts a historian who has, above all, experience of affairs and familiarity with the circles of power. It takes a courtier and a politician to understand successfully the motivations concealed to the sight.

The distinction between a scholar who collates sources s/he has been communicated by those in power and a man of affairs who conjectures from the effects what his experience tells him to be the cause had become both prominent and controversial way before Cabrera’s days. It had resulted, generally speaking, from interpretations of Tacitus that popularized what some saw as a trend in which historians unlawfully played speculation and guess as they pompously put on
the attire of the politician. The duality in question was already at the center of a text written in the mid-sixteenth century, such as Pedro Labrit de Navarra’s *Dialogues concerning the qualities of the historian*, written around 1565.\(^\text{431}\) Labrit’s text speaks directly to the ambiguities hinted at by Cabrera about the conflict and simultaneously the forceful overlapping between scholarly, officially commissioned history writing and the work of the man of affairs who avails himself of the penetration of his wit, which he supplements with the experience of power and of the society with courtiers.

Alternatively to Páez de Castro’s mediated model of commentaries written in the hand of the king, and archives curated under the supervision of the latter—and as if intuiting how easily such a pattern of communication might be broken—, Labrit (c.1504–1567) proposed a paradigm based on “presence” in which the historian becomes the shadow of the prince and does not leave anything to intermediaries. It is “from his conversation and treatment” that he obtains what it takes to “infer the true meaning of his acts and his life”. Conversation enables the historian “to accurately narrate the nature of the prince of whom he writes”.\(^\text{432}\)

Reshaped as “conversation”, “presence” is no longer a guarantee that no event escapes the notice of the eyewitness, but rather a path to accurately grasp the psychology of the ruler. Remaining by his side, the historian gains the ability to express “the practice and conceptions of the mind of his prince […] without which no writer would ever be able to refer any action or

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\(^{431}\) Pedro Labrit de Navarra, *Diálogos, quá débe ser el chronista del príncipe* (Tolosa: I. Colomerio, [1565?]).

\(^{432}\) “Siempre debía andar el cronista con su príncipe. Porque de su hablar, y tratar, podría inferir la verdadera inteligencia de sus actos y vida: porque las palabras son el concepto del corazón. Y si el cronista no tiene cierta y verdadera noticia dellas, mal podrá narrar que tal es el príncipe de quien escribe” [italics added]. Labrit de Navarra, *Diálogos*, 11r. The notion of the historian as the shadow of the ruler is reminiscent of the perception evoked by the count Virgilio Malvezzi among the courtiers in Madrid as he arrived there in 1636 to serve Olivares. See Elleonora Belligni, *Lo scacco della prudenza: precettistica politica ed esperienza storica in Virgilio Malvezzi* (Firenze: Olschki, 1999), 15-16.
anything unless in a confused and doubtful way”.\textsuperscript{433} The historian will be able to declare without error “the state of mind, inclinations, nature, ends, the good and the bad about the prince”.\textsuperscript{434} He “should be a private counselor, or a secretary of the prince’s thoughts, and the essential causes of every action, thing, and event that has to be written should be communicated to him in due time, however secret they may be”.\textsuperscript{435}

In confirmation of the model just described, Labrit provides a variation of the example of Julius Caesar’s commentaries. While most scholars hold Caesar to be the author, Labrit “has read somewhere” that he did not write them, but a learned man did so, with whom he communicated every day all his counsels and actions, and who wrote them in the most faithful way, as we now have them. I have also heard some people assert that in our times that great emperor Charles V, most deserving of eternal memory, did the same with his favorite, Luis de Ávila, who wrote the commentaries of the campaign of Germany. And I could even tell you that with yet another man the Pope Paul III used to do the same. And this is so important, that a writer who lacked such knowledge and intrinsic communication could not write without errors and confusion.\textsuperscript{436}

\textsuperscript{433} “La práctica e inteligencias del ánimo de su príncipe […] sin lo qual ningún escritor podrá referir acto ni cosa que no sea confusa y dudosa”. Labrit de Navarra, \textit{Diálogos}, 12r.
\textsuperscript{434} “El ánimo, inclinaciones, natura, fines, y lo bueno y malo del príncipe”. Labrit de Navarra, \textit{Diálogos}, 12r.
\textsuperscript{435} “El chronista a de ser un consejero privado, o secretario de los conceptos del príncipe, e (a sus tiempos) se le an de comunicar (por secretas que sean) las causas essenciales, de todos los actos, cosas y casos que son de escribir”. Labrit de Navarra, \textit{Diálogos}, 12v. The access to the secret and the vicinity to the prince make of historians and secretaries two figures that frequently overlap. Remarkable in this respect is the treatment granted in historiographical and political literature of the period to the four evangelists. On the one hand, Labrit depicts them as four chroniclers expressly appointed by Christ in order to record his life and deeds. Labrit de Navarra, \textit{Diálogos}, 1r-v. However, almost a century later, Saavedra Fajardo would call them “secretarios de Dios”. Saavedra Fajardo, \textit{Empresas políticas}, 660-661. Far from accidental, the interchangeability between the professions of secretary and official historian points to the share of the secret and the access to the interiority of the prince that characterizes both.
\textsuperscript{436} “No la escribió sino un otro varón docto, con quien él cada día comunicaba todos sus consejos y actos, el qual fidelíssimamente los escribía como agora los tenemos. También e oyo afirmar que en nuestros tiempos aquel grande emperador Carlos V digno de inmortal memoria, hazía lo mismo con su favorido don Luis de Ávila que escribió los commentarios de la jornada de Allemána, y aun con otro que yo te podría deziez hazía lo mismo el papa Paulo III, lo qual es tan essencial que el escritor que careciere desta noticia y comunicación intrínseca es impossible que escriba ... sino errores y confusión” [emphasis added]. Labrit de Navarra, \textit{Diálogos}, 13r. The idea that the chronicler should have been part of the actions, and, insofar as possible, in a charge of responsibility, becomes commonplace and is often supported with an abundance of examples. For an overwhelming instance, with both ancient and modern cases, see Cabrera de Córdoba, \textit{De historia}, 26v-27r.
However, in order for the historian to be the prince’s *alter ego*, he ought to be “prudent and wise” (“prudente y sabio”).\(^{437}\) Only this would make him able to understand the thoughts of the prince and the affairs with which the latter is concerned:

If you ask a peasant and even many a courtier what does the prince do when he is waging a war, they will tell you that he is waging a war: but they will be unable to tell you the intrinsic causes that moved the prince to wage that war. What I mean is that it is not enough for the historian to learn and write of the effects that his prince brings about, but he also needs to be perfectly aware of the causes why he does that.\(^{438}\)

Even though Labrit’s “intrinsic communication” is less precise than Páez de Castro’s suggestion for the king to set an archive and a practice of “commentaries”, it demonstrates somehow a greater awareness of the nature proper to the secrets surrounding the exercise of power. The need for the chronicler to have *prudence* and *wisdom* in order to scrutinize the king implies for Labrit that, unless he is already noble and therefore acquainted with such matters, he needs to have experience of the court. This is the only way in which he may acquire the mind-set enabling him to infer causes from effects according to the way things usually happen.\(^{439}\) Labrit’s description of the historian is that of a courtier. If “intrinsic communication” serves to make him part of the secrets, his training in the way things are conducted in the circles of power enables him to conjecture accurately about that which he does not know for certain. “Princes are difficult to treat, and seldom communicate their inner thoughts with anyone”, and this makes it necessary to supply with guess where certainty is missing.\(^{440}\) This necessitates an alternative, like the one present in Cabrera between communication and inference. The interlocutors hold contrasting

\(^{437}\) Labrit de Navarra, *Diálogos*, 11v.

\(^{438}\) “Si preguntas a un plebeyo, y aun a muchos cortesanos, qué hace el príncipe, estando en la guerra, dirán que hace guerra: pero no sabrán dezir las causas intrínsecas que mobieron al príncipe a hazerla. Quiérote dezir, que no basta que el chronista se contente con saber y dezir los efectos que hace su príncipe sino que también tenga perfecta inteligencia de las causas por que los hace”. Labrit de Navarra, *Diálogos*, 12rv; see also 15v.

\(^{439}\) Labrit de Navarra, *Diálogos*, 8r.

\(^{440}\) “Los principes difíciles de contratar, pocas veces comunican a nadie sus intrínsecos conceptos”. Labrit de Navarra, *Diálogos*, 15v.
opinions as to the course of action to be taken whenever a cause fails to be communicated to the chronicler:

C. The physician who heals the patient through knowledge of the symptoms and is ignorant of the essential causes does not escape from making mistakes. However, you can infer those causes from the actions that you see.
D. It is not fitting for a wise writer to guess, but to assert what he knows and to write that which he has heard and seen.\textsuperscript{441}

Labrit’s diffidence towards inference contrasts, if only partially, with his assertion that the presence of the chronicler at the side of the king would make him able to guess his thoughts more accurately. Even though the recourse to externalities as a source for conjecture is, at least formally, rejected, the fact that it comes naturally to the mouth of Labrit’s interlocutor, and that experience and conversation have received a great deal of attention as ways to become acquainted with the psyche of the prince, makes Labrit’s position ambiguous.\textsuperscript{442} In addition to this, it is not coincidental that the parallel with medicine invoked by the interlocutor would be one of the terms of comparison used by Álamos de Barrientos in the 1590s. Álamos presented a device for scholars and rulers in which human affects serve as a basis for a science of politics. This would be “a science of contingents” that, like medicine, would allow practitioners to infer conclusions that do not necessarily apply, but which at least do so “usually and in relation to generality”.\textsuperscript{443} Much like the materiality of the body for the physician, man’s freedom makes it

\textsuperscript{441} “C. El médico que cura por solos los accidentes al enfermo, e ignora las causas essenciales de la enfermedad, no escapa de hazer mil yerros. Pero tú las puedes inferir por los actos quele vieres hazer. B. No es de sabio escritor, adivinar, sino afirmar lo que sabe y escribir lo que él mismo oye y vee”. Labrit de Navarra, Diálogos, 15v.
\textsuperscript{442} However, Labrit concludes with what seems to be a requirement for certainty rather than conjecture: “[The historian] has to be admitted and instructed in all the secrets of the prince, so that he may narrate his actions on good grounds and wisely: for he who does not know the beginning and the cause will not be able to judge only from the effects”. Labrit, Diálogos, 19r.
\textsuperscript{443} “Ciencia de contingentes”; “por lo más ordinario, y respeto a lo universal”. Álamos de Barrientos, “A don Francisco Gómez de Sandoval y Rojas, duque de Lerma”, n.p.
impossible for the scholar of politics—and thus for the historian—to have certainty of what he infers.444

Among the paths that open up before the historian who looks for the causes behind the actions, in what follows I will focus on the development of a tradition, rooted in certain interpretations of Tacitus’ histories and exemplified by Álamos’ case, which proceeds through the inference of motives concealed in the ruler’s mind, thanks to the historian’s experience of worldly matters, politics, and—which matters here for us—his acuity of wit.

The sixteenth century was witness to several endeavors aspiring to a reliable version of Tacitus’ text, which had been transmitted incomplete and full of lacunae. After the publication of his edition in 1574, the name of Justus Lipsius (1547-1606) acquired the status of a legend.445

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444 Others would seek for alternatives between accessing truth through communication and through inference. This is the case of Bartolomé Leonardo de Argensola’s disenchanted version of Labrit’s “intrinsic communication”. In 1590, Argensola asserted that in order to write about the present, “it is important to have acquaintance with grave men, respectable in learning and social rank; the historian needs to behave in consequence with the truth that he seeks—that is, being gentle, and without making visible any disorder, and showing restraint— for in this way he will learn the matter of his history from a worthier mouth than that of the common people, as it befits to his writing” (“importa mucho que la conversación privada sea con gente grave, de sciencia y calidad, y que el historiador haga profesión decente a la verdad que busca, ayudándose de trato apacible, sin desorden que le descomponga, porque desta manera sabrá la materia de su historia de más digna boca que la del vulgo”). Bartolomé Leonardo de Argensola, Obras sueltas, vol. 2, 272-273. In Argensola’s version, the historian is degraded from intimacy with the king to the role of “pretendiente”, begging for information, much as he would look for favor.

445 On January 11 1600, Manuel Sarmiento de Mendoza (c. 1580-1650) wrote to Lipsius in order to suggest a series of emendations to the text that the latter had published in 1574. Lipsius’ edition remained authoritative, and as late as 1634 it was still given preference by the house of Elzevir for the edition of Tacitus in the extremely successful series of duodecimo pocket books. Almost none of Sarmiento’s contemporaries would have thought that he was exaggerating when he asserted that Lipsius had rescued Tacitus’ works for the present: he had examined them with utmost care and insight (“perspicacissimis oculis”), and had illustrated them for everyone so as to make Tacitus appear in the eyes of the scholars as a creature of Lipsius himself: “You set Tacitus free from the countless defects of which he was full, and showed him to us illustrated. You brought him light and health. He is all of yours” (“Tacitum ab innumeris, quibus scatebat mendis, asseruisti, illustratum nobis exibuisti, lucem illi, atque salutem attulisti. Tuus totus ipse”). Alejandro Ramirez, Epistolario de Justo Lipsio y los españoles (1577-1606) (Madrid: Castalia, 1966), 281-282. This would also be Herrera y Tordesillas’ opinion. Herrera wrote that in spite of earlier interest in Tacitus, his extant production “did not come to perfection until Justus Lipsius […] considering that Tacitus excelled among the other historians, put together his works and emended them, commending them with utmost care in order to become a mirror of the political government” (“nunca llegaron á perfeccion, hasta que Justo Lipsio, que se dio mas a esta profesion que a otra, viendo que en ellas no había otro mas eminente que Tácito, juntó y emendó sus obras con gran cuidado, encomendándolas con sumo afecto para espejo del gobierno político”). Herrera y Tordesillas, Discursos, 48. Lipsius was aware of the role he had played in popularizing Tacitus,
Lipsius was successful because he provided readers with a text of greater quality. However, he did more than that. In the dedication to the emperor Maximilian II with which he opened the first edition, Lipsius explained the importance of Tacitus for the public in a way that, even if only partially, was new in relation to the appraisal that the historian had received so far.446

In his letter, Lipsius compares Tacitus’s works with those of three other historians: Sallust, Julius Caesar, and Livy. He then argues that the writer of histories needs to be trusted (“fides”) to delight his audience (“delectatio”) and to be useful to moral and civil life (“ut ad vitam dicat”).447 Caesar stands out for the purity of his language, even though his Commentarii are entirely deprived of the third ingredient just mentioned, which makes of history a tool to improve on ethical and political matters. They are, by Caesar’s own admission, commentaries, not histories.448 This is so because Caesar does not instruct about the way in which causes build as it appears from the assertion contained in the posthumous edition of 1607 that after him many had come like flies to the smell of the good reputation of his edition: “Multos deinde, quasi muscas, ad odorem bonae famae convolasse”. Justus Lipsius, “Adlocutio iterata”, in C. Cornelii Taciti opera quae extant (Antuerpiae: ex Officina Plantiniana, apud Ioannem Moretum, MDCVII), n.p. The 1607 edition of Lipsius’ Tacitus was the last of eight supervised by him, to which several others were to be added during his lifetime, and countless ones after his death. For the entire list of editions, see Robert W. Ulery Jr., “Cornelius Tacitus”, in Catalogus translationum et commentariorum, ed. Paul Oskar Kristeller et al., vol. 6 (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1986).

446 Spaniards dwelling in different places showed interest in Tacitus. Some, like Fadrique Furió Ceriol or Benito Arias Montano, lived in Flanders; others were or had been in Italy, like Jerónimo Zurita, the ambassador in Venice Diego Hurtado de Mendoza—who centralized the group in a certain way—or Mendoza’s secretary Juan de Verzosa. Antonio Pérez, the secretary of Philip II who eventually fled arrest, was the younger member of this constellation of interest in Tacitus, in a court (that of Philip II) that many came to understand in terms of the kind of politics, governed by deceit and dissimulation, which Tacitus both described and deplored. For the interest in Tacitus among Spanish scholars in the decades preceding the great wave of Tacitism that started in the 1570s, see Juan Varo Zafra, “Grupos tacitistas españoles del siglo XVI”, Signa 24 (2015); see also Saúl Martínez Bermejo, “Tácito leído. Prácticas lectoras y fundamentos intelectuales de la recepción de Tácito en la Edad Moderna” (PhD Diss., Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 2009), and Beatriz Antón Martínez, El tacitismo en el siglo XVII en España: el proceso de recepción (Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 1991).

447 Even though Lipsius decrees that Sallust excels in all three qualities, he does not focus on his works. However, Lipsius’ assertion aligns with Sallust’s preeminence in curricula across the continent, and the fact that his works were printed more often than those of any other ancient historian in the sixteenth century. Burke, “A survey”, passim.

into effects in the behavior of the men in charge of the state, which is, after all, the only way to teach men what to expect so as to act in consequence. It is Tacitus, on the contrary, who, more than anyone else, teaches so. But Tacitus had still to compete with Livy, whom humanists since Petrarch had traditionally greeted as *princeps historicorum*.449 It is against Livy that Lipsius models his defense of Tacitus, inspired in turn by a passage from Tacitus’ fourth book of *Annales*. Unlike Livy, Lipsius writes, Tacitus

will not go over the victories of Hannibal, baleful for the Romans, nor the splendid death of Lucretia, nor the omens of the soothsayers or the Etruscan (things that serve more to delight than to instruct the reader). Here [sc. in Tacitus] let anyone consider the courts of the princes, the inner life, counsels, commands, and actions of the princes, and he will find that he can use the evident similarities that link our ages in so many ways, to show how the same causes yield the same effects. You will find under tyranny delations, an evil not unknown to our time: nothing sincere, nothing simple, and a secure faith not even among friends.450

However moving Livy’s histories may be, they fail to make Lipsius a better man –that is, better prepared for the contingencies of life. As I will show later on, they fail to teach “prudence”.451 Lipsius introduces Tacitus as a response to Livy’s alleged focus on inspiring wonder in the reader. In contrast to Livy’s fireworks, Tacitus is “acer scriptor… & prudens”. Livy narrates grand and captivating events such as would provide readers with wonder and

449 For Tacitus taking from Livy the crown of the historians, see Whitfield, “Livy > Tacitus”; also Burke, “A survey”.
450 “Non ille Annibalis funestas Romanis victorias, non speciosam Lucretiae necem, non vatum prodigia aut Etrusca portenta recenset, & quae alia sunt oblectandi magis quam instruendi lectoris: hic mihi quisque principum aulas, principum interiorem vitam, consilia, iussa, facta consideret, & obvia in plerisque nostrorum temporum similitudine, ab iisdem causiss pares exitus animo praecipiat. Invenies sub tyrannide adulationes, delationes, non ignota huic saeculo mala; nihil sincerum, nihil simplex, & nec apud amicos tutam fidem”. Lipsius, *C. Cornelii Taciti*, n.p.
451 “First among the historians […] as long as we consider the greatness of the work, and the variety of events […] but (and I say this with the leave of the ancients), I always leave Livy more filled with emotion, but not better instructed for the contingencies of life” (“Princeps historicorum […] si magnitudinem operis, & varietatem rerum spectamus […] sed tamen (quod more maiorum liceat) a Livij lectione semper commotor surrexi, non semper melior aut ad vitae casus instructior”). Lipsius, *C. Cornelii Taciti*, n.p.
Tacitus, on the contrary, sheds light on intrigues, sordid and shady deals reached across the corridors of the palace, and even the inner thoughts of the prince. With insight and penetration, he turns meaningful that which otherwise would be confused, a talent that Lipsius described in one of his lectures at Jena during the 1570s, not coincidentally, as a proof of acuity of wit.

Lipsius’ comparison of Tacitus and Livy is itself a development of Tacitus’ *Annales* 4.32-33. Tacitus had confessed rather disingenuously that his histories might seem trifles when compared with the work of past historians. They are not a monument to great wars and deeds, but tell, conversely, “a series of savage mandates, of perpetual accusations, of traitorous

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452 In 1612, Trajano Boccalini would depict Livy as feeling guilty for having indulged too much in marvels and portents – an echo, with playful undertones, of the author’s own preference for Tacitus’ method. There are rumors, we read, that Apollo criticized Cassius Dio because he had filled with portents “the historical writing, which has to be a substance of truth, a juice of political teachings […]” Also the father of Roman histories, Livy, blushed noticeably, maybe because he knew that not even he could have a clean consciousness concerning the same defect (“la scrittura storica, che tutta deve essere sostanza di verità, tutta sugo di documenti politici, non ha bisogno di essere empiuta della borra di quella spessa narrazione di portenti […] Si dice che di questa reprimessione fatta a Dione, anco il padre delle historie romane Tito Livio si arrossì non poco, forse perché sapeva, che del medesimo difetto egli non si trovava haver la consenza netta”). Trajano Boccalini, *De’ ragguagli di Parnaso di Traiano Boccalini Romano. Centuria prima* (In Venetia: appresso Pietro Farri, MDCXII [1612]), 248-249.

453 In the edition that appeared posthumously in 1607, Lipsius would wonder: “Which aspect of prudence, either civil or military; which human affect, however concealed; which accident or event may be found which [Tacitus] did not open wide, or showed as it was behind a veil?” (“quae pars prudentiae est, militaris sive civilis; quis affectus hominum, et si occultus; qui casus aut eventus rerum, quos iste non palam aperit, aut sub velo ostendit?”). Lipsius, “Adlocutio iterata”, n.p. Yet, even though the opposition in matters of method and style justified strategically making of Livy a scapegoat in order to extol Tacitus, Lipsius must have been well aware that Livy’s histories contained, in the eyes of his contemporaries, many of the ingredients that he associated with Tacitus. Among the scholars who – as I will show later – took up Lipsius’ approach to Tacitus, there were those who, like the count Virgilio Malvezzi, “played Tacitus” by glossing and developing Livy’s revelation of Romulus’ and Tarquin’s inner thoughts, which were far from being always as glorious and infused with greatness as one may construe from the opposition between his work and Tacitus’. Of course, Niccolò Machiavelli’s *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio* had set a precedent for the establishment of a link between Livy’s histories and the explanation of the machinery of the state. 454 In fact, Lipsius calls Tacitus “acutus in explicandis causis”. Justus Lipsius, *Orations octo Jenae potissimum habitae; et in gratiam erutae, et in gratiam studiosae jurisius foras productae* (Darmestadii: excudebat Balthasar Hofmann, aere Johannis-Hacobi Porssii, MDCVII [1607]), 35. It must be noted that “acutus” was a term that often referred to the ability of a scholar to disentangle the meaning of a text, and therefore extremely common to characterize the work of a commentator. Mark Morford has written that after Lipsius visited emperor Maximilian II in 1572, “he had been teaching at the Lutheran University of Jena, where his lectures on Tacitus had focused on the person of the tyrant […], at this early stage of his career, Lipsius had already found in Tacitus the source of prudencia”. Mark Morford, “Tacitean Prudentia and the doctrines of Justus Lipsius”, in *Tacitus and the Tacitean Tradition*, ed. T. J. Luce and A. J. Woodman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 137. As I will demonstrate in what follows, in a world of dissimulation, for Tacitus to teach “prudence” means that he had also become a model of acuity”, for only through the latter does the historian unveil the former in the prince.
friendships, of ruined innocents, of various causes and identical results—everywhere monotony of subject, and satiety”. And yet, though of little momentum, Tacitus writes that “it may be not unprofitable to look beneath the surface of those incidents, trivial at the first inspection, which so often set in motion the great events of history”. This is so because governments differ according to the psychology of those who are in power: the people in democracies, and the kings in monarchies. Knowing how they think, how they wish and plot provides the kind of learning—“prudence”, Lipsius would have said—adequate for those who live in contexts that are more or less analogous. By unveiling the psychology of Tiberius and of subsequent emperors, Lipsius had good reason to extol Tacitus as a teacher for men living under monarchies such as those of the late sixteenth century.

The specificity of Lipsius’ take on the value of Tacitus’ method stands out when one considers the publication in 1627 of Diego Hurtado de Mendoza’s Guerra de Granada, a text written at roughly the same time as Lipsius’ dedicatory letter. Few things are more

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456 “Non tamen sine usu fuerit introspicere illa primo aspectu levia, ex quis magnarum saepe rerum motus oriuntur”. Tacitus, Annales, 56-57, §4.32.

457 “For every nation or city is governed by the people, or by the nobility, or by individuals: a constitution selected and blended from these types is easier to commend than to create; or, if created, its tenure of life is brief. Accordingly, as in the period of alternate plebeian dominance and patrician ascendancy it was imperative, in one case, to study the character of the masses and the methods of controlling them; while, in the other, those who had acquired the most exact knowledge of the temper of the senate and the aristocracy were accounted shrewd in their generation and wise; so today, when the situation has been transformed and the Roman world is little else than a monarchy, the collection and the chronicling of these details may yet serve an end: for few men distinguish right and wrong, the expedient and the disastrous, by native intelligence; the majority are schooled by the experience of others” (“Nam cunctas nationes et urbes populus aut primores aut singuli regunt: delecta ex iis et consociata rei publicae forma laudari facilius quam evenire, vel si evenit, haud diuturna esse potest. Igitur ut olim plebe valida, vel cum patres pollerent, noscenda vulgi natura et quibus modis temperanter haberetur, senatusque et optimatium ingenia qui maxime perdidicerant, callidi temporum et sapientes credeabantur, sic converso statu neque alia re Romana, quam si unus imperiet, haec conquiri tradique in rem fuerit, quia pauci prudentia honesta ab deterioribus, utilia ab noxiis discernunt, plures aliorum eventis docentur”). Tacitus, Annales, 56-57, §4.33.

458 Although Mendoza wrote the book right after the morisco rebellion that took place between 1568 and 1571, it was published only posthumously in 1627 (in an edition curated by Luis Tribaldos de Toledo) in order to avoid
illuminating than a comparison between Mendoza’s preface to his narration and the preliminaries written in the 1620s by Luis Tribaldos de Toledo and the count of Portalegre. Tribaldos praises Mendoza for “his wit” (“su agudeza”) in the analysis of causes, a formulation that mirrors Lipsius’ praise of Tacitus, in his orations at Jena, as “acutus” in unfolding causes of events.\footnote{Luis Tribaldos de Toledo, “Al lector”, n.p.} Moreover, the count of Portalegre praises Mendoza’s history for containing “the finest matters of state, and as many mysteries as Machiavelli wanted to infer in Livy’s writings”.\footnote{Juan de Silva, “Introducción, in Mendoza, Guerra de Granada, n.p.”} For Tribaldos and Portalegre, Mendoza showed “wit” as he penetrated the mind of the actors of history so as to unmake the prudence with which they operated. While the mention of Machiavelli’s “mysteries” points to a paradigm of history writing –which I address below– focused on secrecy and on the character of content-for-initiates that surrounds the issues of the government, the reference to “inference” confirms once again that by 1627 the role of the historian as given to conjecture, even from histories previously written, was actually commonplace.

However, if we turn now to the introduction that Mendoza himself wrote for the history before the fever of Tacitism that Lipsius did much to accelerate, we find a paraphrase of Tacitus’ aforementioned passage of Annales 4.32-33 that contains nothing in terms of the acuity of wit that penetrates the mysteries and the dissimulation of the agents; neither is there any reference to prudence. Rather differently, Mendoza gives pride of place to the scarce appeal of a history that deals with the turmoil of slaves and people of low extraction. These, he writes, are important insofar as it was they, rather than nobles or kings, who provoked the events narrated:

I have chosen a narrower path – hard, barren, and inglorious, but fruitful for those coming after us: low beginnings – a rebellion of highwaymen, a union of slaves, a turmoil of peasants – rivalries, hatred, ambitions, and aspirations; delay in supplies, want of money, trouble with those mentioned in the book. See Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, Guerra de Granada hecha por el rei de España don Philippe II... (En Lisboa: por Giraldo de la Viña, año 1627).

\footnote{Luis Tribaldos de Toledo, “Al lector”, n.p.}
obstacles not believed or just disregarded; laziness and weakness in souls accustomed to pay attention and care to greater things; with this in mind it will not be useless to consider from which unimportant beginnings, and particular causes, things came to great toil and troubles, and public harm which now have practically no remedy.  

Pretending to admit his to be a dull and sordid subject, Mendoza echoes Tacitus’ pride in a model that pays attention to causes usually disregarded by historians who look to lofty subjects. Mendoza takes the last sentence of Annales 4.32, about the disproportion between mean causes and large-scale events, and expands it as a model to deal with subjects that otherwise would find it difficult to find a place in a history: slaves and outlaws instead of kings and captains, or tricks in the midst of indolence called to replace heroic campaigns.

Mendoza’s view of Tacitus’ novelty was in line with that of many of his contemporaries. For one thing, he must have known Jean Bodin’s Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem (1566), with his interpretation of Tacitus’ mentioned passage in terms of the inclusion of even the smallest things, aiming at a history richer in information and deeper in scope. Bodin (1530-1596) praised Tacitus’ helpfulness to antiquarians at a time that witnessed an outburst of scholarly activity around disciplines like history of law, epigraphy, or numismatics, which provided the kinds of knowledge about the past traditionally disregarded by historians. In line with this, Bodin understood Tacitus’ reference to a history –his own– based on “trifles” as a

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461 “Yo escogí camino más estrecho, trabajoso, estéril, i sin gloria; pero provechoso, i de fructo para los que adelante vinieren; comienços baxos, rebelión de salteadores, junta de esclavos, tumulto de villanos, competencias, odios, ambiciones, i pretenciones; dilación de provisiones, falta de dinero, inconvenientes o no creídos, o tenidos en poco; remisión i floxedad en ánimos acostumbrados a entender, proveer, i dissimular mayores cosas; i assí no será cuidado perdido considerar de quàn livianos principios, i causas particulares se viene a colmo de grandes trabajos, dificultades i daños públicos, i quasi fuera de remedio”. Mendoza, Guerra de Granada, 1v.

462 I quote from Artis Historiae Penus. Octodecim Scriptorum tam veterum quam recentiorum monumentis & inter eos Io. Praecipue Bodini libris Methodi historicae sex instructa (Basileae: ex Officina Petri Pernae, MDLXXIX [1579]).

testimony to the detail about customs and daily realities of ancient Rome that populates his works:

Writing the facts of one century, between Tiberius and Nerva, he [Tacitus] pursued eagerly everything large, medium, and small. In the fourth book he confesses that he does not narrate wars, sieges of cities, armies put to flight, nor fights between the people and the aristocracy—and said that his work was without glory, but not useless.464

Bodin’s Methodus was at the center of a collection of artem historicae published by Pietro Perna in Basel—first in 1576, then in 1579—under the title of Artis historicae penus, or Treasury of Arts of History. The treatises edited with Bodin’s in the volume also predated Lipsius’ commentary on Tacitus, and presented divergent interpretations of what made the author of Annales worth reading.465

464 “Cum enim a Tiberio usque ad Nervam unius saeculi res gestas conscripserit, omnia maxima, mediocria, minima studiose persecutus est. Libro quarto profitetur se nec bella, nec urbium expugnationes, nec fusos exercitus, nec certamina plebis & optimatum narrare, suumque laborem inglorium fore non tamen inutiulem”. Artis historicae penus, vol. I, 62. At a certain point, Bodin characterizes Tacitus’ style as “witty and full of prudence” (“oratio … arguta et prudentiae plena”, but he soon proceeds to his value as a witness for laws and practices. Artis historicae penus, vol. I, 63. This seems to have influenced Gerónimo de San José, who wrote in 1651: “For those who are absent or yet to come […] everything that seems vulgar to us will look strange; and that which looks scarce and small, they will see as abundant and big. Otherwise why would it be then that we look so eagerly in authors or in inscriptions on stones, and ancient medals, the most insignificant rituals and customs from that time?” (“para los ausentes, i venideros […] todo aquello, que a nosotros es mui vulgar, será mui raro; i lo que nos parece poco, i pequeño, será para ellos mucho i mui grande. I si no, por qué andamos con tanto afán buscando en los autores i en las inscripciones de las piedras, i medallas antiguas los más menudos ritos, i costumbres de aquel tiempo?”) Gerónimo de San José, Genio de la historia (En Çaragoça: en la imprenta de Diego Dormer, año 1651), 69-70.

465 In addition to Jean Bodin and two ancient authors (Lucian and Dionysius of Halicarnassus), the Artis historicae penus contained texts by Francesco Patrizi, Giovanni Pontano, François Baudoin, Sebastián Fox Morcillo, Giovanni Antonio Viperano, Francesco Robortello, Christophe Millieu (Mylaeus), Uberto Folieta, David Chytraeus, Simon Grynaeus, Celio Secundo Curione, Christoph Pezel (Pezelius), Theodor Zwinger, János Zsámbokey (Johannes Sambucus), and Antonio Riccoboni. The royal chronicler Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas referred consecutively to seven of them in his “Discurso sobre los provechos de la historia”, a likely proof that he had consulted the book. Herrera y Tordesillas, Discursos, 8-10. Among the authors who consider Tacitus a help for antiquarians rather than a teacher of prudence, it is worth mentioning François Baudoin’s De institutione historiae universae, & eius cum iurisprudentia coniunctione. Baudoin’s emphasis aligns with Bodin’s praise of Tacitus’ interest in minima, or the smallest things. Tacitus, according to Baudoin, was extremely diligent in giving an account of public and private legal actions, some of them more or less insignificant, being helpful therefore for those that aimed at harmonizing the studies of history and law. Artis historicae penus, 678. The royal chronicler Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas was contemplating Baudoin’s notion of history when he wrote that the latter cooperates with civil jurisprudence with “the answers of the jurisconsults, the constitutions of the Roman princes, and the praetorian edicts” (“las respuestas de los jurisprudentes, constituciones de los principes romanos y editos pretorios”). Herrera y Tordesillas, Discursos, 44.
Only one among the texts featured in Perna’s anthology seems to prefigure Lipsius’ view of Tacitus. It is a letter from Celio Secundo Curione (1503-1569) to the Basel jurist and art collector Basilius Amerbach containing a canon of historians that Curione’s correspondent has requested in order to guide his readings. Where it comes to Tacitus, he is praised for his ability to penetrate and expose to the view of men the artifice of princes and the reasons for what they do. Moreover, it mentions “acuity” as a characteristic of Tacitus’ eyes, which see through the confusion of artifice and dissimulation:

I judge Cornelius Tacitus most worth reading. For he was extremely diligent in explaining counsels, and most penetrating in inquiring causes: there was no one who saw with greater acuity, and who exposed more faithfully the arts of the princes, and of those who assist them.466

Curione’s reading of Tacitus, like Lipsius’, inherited a disenchanted vision of politics: one sparkled with a dose of trickery and deceit, which scholars would identify immediately with the world depicted by Francesco Guicciardini –not in vain among the earliest admirers of Tacitus, and also a close friend of Niccolò Machiavelli. For Curione and Lipsius, Tacitus was not so much a source of legal or antiquarian learning –as was the case for Bodin or Baudoin–, as he was a teacher of “prudence”, a notion that limited, and soon would become confused with one of the most relevant concepts of the period, that of “reason of state”.

Rather than a work exclusively intended for scholars, Lipsius saw his edition of Tacitus as a way to make the works of the historian useful to approach ethical and political behavior. “Out of a work of philology, I have built a philosophy”, he wrote to Johannes Woverius on

466 “Cornelium Tacitum maxime legendum iudico. Nam & in consilijs explicandis diligentissimus fuit, & in causis perquirendis perspicacissimus: principum vero artes, eorumque qui principibus adsunt, nemo vidit acutius, nemo fidelius exposuit”. Artis historicae penus, 600.
November 3 1603. Tacitus outweighed any other source in the composition of Lipsius’ handbook of political learning, published in 1589 for the first time as Politicorum libri sex and containing a detailed account of “prudentia”. Considering that “prudentia” would soon become the object of the historian according to a series of developments that start in the 1620s—to be considered in sections two and three—it is time to contextualize the notion in question through the scholars who popularized it.

The virtue proper to the ruler, “prudentia” became a key notion of political science in the wake of the increasing popularity of Tacitus’ works. According to Mark Morford, Lipsius interpreted Tacitus’ “prudentia” in a way that became central to Tacitism as it developed as a doctrine of political thought in the first half of the seventeenth century. However, Lipsius’ view was built upon ideas partially sketched by earlier historians and scholars.

Interest in Tacitus began in Rome in the early sixteenth century, with his works acting as Pope Paul III’s bedside reading. Filippo Beroaldo the Younger’s editio princeps of 1515 had been a milestone for the diffusion of the work, a commission by Giovanni de’ Medici in the years prior to his papacy as Leo X. Burke notes that the focus on Tacitus in the first half of the century took place mainly around two families, Medici and Farnese, to which Leo X and Paul III respectively belonged.

467 “Ego e philologia philosophiam feci”. Quoted in Morford, “Tacitean Prudentia”, 129. Then Morford concludes that “his slighting of other editors of Tacitus, two of whom –Muretus and Chifflet– he plagiarized, can be explained in part by his confidence that he had been uniquely successful in making Tacitus available to readers beyond scholarly circles and relevant to his contemporaries”. Morford, “Tacitean Prudentia”, 130.


469 Francesco Soderini gave the manuscript Mediceo primo (Laurentianus 68,1) to Leo X. He had obtained it from the abbey at Corvey (Germany) in 1508. In 1515, Beroaldo published the six first books of Tacitus’ Annales. Ettore Paratore, “BEROALDO, Filippo, iunior”, in Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani, 9 (1967), accessed January 20, 2016, http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/beroaldo-filippo-iunior_(Dizionario_Biografico)/

470 Peter Burke, “Tacitism”, in T. A. Dorey, ed., Tacitus (New York: Basic Books, 1969), 149-150. The importance of the edition commissioned by Leo X had been mentioned as early as Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas in the early
There is no evidence to prove that Niccolò Machiavelli actually saw the manuscript of Tacitus’ works used by Beroaldo before he wrote *The Prince* about 1513, and yet the fact remains that, as reported by Giovanni Botero at the end of the century, Machiavelli and Tacitus were conceived by then as being equally responsible for a fashion of understanding statecraft and the way it relates to questions of religion and ethics that usually went by the name of “reason of state” – the same that made the title of Botero’s book.\(^{471}\)

A friend of Machiavelli – like Francesco Guicciardini (1483–1540), equally connected with Medicean circles – seems to have been the first to use the term.\(^{472}\) Unlike for Machiavelli, there is absolute certainty that Guicciardini was acquainted with Tacitus. He would write down in his *Ricordi* – a collection of varied notes and reflections – that “s/he who lives under tyrants, Tacitus teaches very well how to live and conduct himself with prudence, just as he teaches the tyrants the way to found a tyranny”.\(^{473}\) The reason of state that Guicciardini found Tacitus to be seventeen century. Herrera y Tordesillas, *Discurros*, 48. As a matter of fact, Lipsius’ work had been preceded by that of many scholars in Italy and Spain, who made partial attempts at a restoration of Tacitus’ text. On March 20, 1572, Jerónimo Zurita asked his friend Pietro Vettori for manuscripts that would allow the text of Tacitus, an author for whom he felt “mucha afición”, to be emended. Andrés de Uztarroz and Dormer, *Progressos*, 245. Roughly at the same time, Antonio Agustín—who would accuse his friend Zurita of idolizing Tacitus much as Boccalini would do with Lipsius decades later—curated the annotations corresponding to Tacitus in the edition of ancient historians eventually published by his friend Fulvio Orsini. See Fulvio Orsini, *Fragmenta historicorum collecta ab Antonio Augustino, emendata a Fulvio Ursino. Fulvi Ursini Notae* (Antwerpiae: ex officina Plantiniana, MDXCV [1595]). For Agustín’s accusation of Zurita, see Agustín, *Opera omnia*, vol. 7, 219. It is perhaps not coincidental that Agustín’s friend Orsini was working for Cardinal Alessandro Farnese.

\(^{471}\) “In the last years […] I was led […] to attend the courts of great kings and princes […] I was filled with wonder to hear reason of state continuously mentioned, and also to hear Niccolò Machiavelli or Cornelius Tacitus quoted for that subject; the former because he gives precepts touching on the government and rule of peoples; the latter because he expresses vividly the arts used by Tiberius Caesar both to obtain and to preserve himself in the power of Rome” (“questi anni adietro […] mi è convenuto […] praticare […] nelle corti di re, e di principi grandi […] mi ha recato somma meraviglia il sentire tutto il dì mentovare ragione di stato, et in cotal materia citare hora Niccolò Machiavelli, hora Cornelio Tacito; quello perché dà precetti appartenenti al governo, & al reggimento de’ popoli; questo, perché esprime vivamente l’arti usate da Tiberio Cesare, e per conseguire, e per conservarsi nell’imperio di Roma”). Botero, *Della ragion di stato*, n.p. Hardly five years later, in 1594, Scipione Ammirato would be even more explicit when linking Tacitus and Machiavelli in his *Discorsi sopra Cornelio Tacito*.

\(^{472}\) Guicciardini would have referred to “la ragione e uso degli stati” (“the reason and the customs of the states”). Maurizio Viroli, *From Politics to Reason of State. The Acquisition and Transformation of the Language of Politics* (1250-1600) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 194. See also Gajda, “Tacitus and political thought”, 261, who nevertheless translates “reason and profit of states”.

\(^{473}\) “Insegna molto bene Cornelio Tacito a chi vive sotto e tiranni il modo di vivere e governarsi prudentemente, così come insegna a’, tiranni e modi di fondare la tirannide”. Francesco Guicciardini, *Opere inedite di Francesco
insightful at revealing, and of which he saw the effects in the maneuvers taking place around him in a situation where most republics in Northern Italy were yielding to signorie ruled by one man—entailed a notion of politics where Christian virtue and what serves the purpose of the preservation of the state are no longer seen as equivalent.\textsuperscript{474} The latter, as a matter of fact, started to be seen as governed by laws that may imply the suspension of ethical principles: princes lie and sometimes fail to keep a promise, and they do so because it is good for the state.

Guicciardini learned from Tacitus that princes dissimulate with their subjects no less than with their enemies. The former, in turn, cannot help doing the same to fare in a society where liberty does not actually exist, and where the courtier, as one who lives closer to the prince, performs day after day as a form of service and survival.\textsuperscript{475}

Like Tacitus, though to a lesser degree, Guicciardini became a model for scholars who agreed that, with dissimulation and even deceit made into the norm in politics, a historian apt for the task had to develop genuine interest in the psychology of the powerful so as to grasp the intentions they conceal in words and deeds.\textsuperscript{476} When the society mocks anything taken at face
value, the historian who looks for the causes of events needs to exert mistrust and embark upon
conjecture. Guicciardini conceived gloomily of a world in which tyranny acts “prudently” to
reassert itself, knowing that the use of force would prove less advantageous than that of cunning.
Interestingly, as Alexandra Gajda has noticed, the notion that a tyrant could be “prudent”
represents a development in political vocabulary. In traditional “humanist” and
Aristotelian terms prudence was a cardinal virtue, a quality that a tyrant could not
possibly possess; Guicciardini’s application of the term to tyranny and to the conduct of
subjects under tyranny unmoored the word from its conventional ethical meaning.
Prudence could be re-translated as “statecraft”. 477

In fact, prudence would often serve as a synonym for reason of state. As a replacement, it
presented two advantages. On the one hand, rooted in a tradition stemming from antiquity, it was
camouflaged as a virtue, even though it was one only in a sense that challenged the meaning
generally ascribed to the term. In addition, prudence had a broader scope, insofar as it was not
restricted to government and made it possible to trace continuities between ethics and politics,
and to apply to behaviors taking place not only between the ruler and the subjects, but also
horizontally among the latter.

477 Gajda, “Tacitus and political thought”, 257.
Defined since 13th-century Scholasticism as a faculty that applies general principles to the realm of individuals—and therefore as a hinge between theory and praxis—, prudence became particularly fashionable as a term after treatises such as Lipsius’ *Politiorum libri sex* (1589) conferred to it a place of privilege in the theory of statecraft.\(^\text{478}\)

Prudence is what laid the foundations of the states and then helped preserve and augment them, as Lipsius wrote in the dedication to the States of Holland or *Ordines Bataviae* that opens his 1581 edition of Tacitus’ works. One finds here a formulation, standardized in Spanish as “conservación y aumento”, to be repeated over and again as the end pursued by the reason of state.\(^\text{479}\) Lipsius’ reading of Tacitus, not different from Guicciardini’s, derived a conception of prudence intimately associated with the need to “dissimulate”—that is, with making others believe that one has in mind something different from what one actually has.\(^\text{480}\)

At the start of Chapter IV.XIII, we find Lipsius wondering: “Would it be lawful to mix and add [to the prudence of the prince] something from the dregs of deception?”. He answers


\(^{480}\) Lipsius *Politiorum libri sex* are indebted to Tacitus more than to any other writer. In the book, “Tacitus is quoted on almost every page, 528 quotations out of a total 2,069, and, appropriately, the very first and very last quotations are taken from him”. Morford, “Tacitean Prudentia”, 142. In truth, Baldassare Castiglione’s enormously successful treatise on *The Courtier* (1528), itself a classic in the definition of what “dissimulation” means, had the character of Pietro Bembo (II.29) use the term “prudence” in a way that imples directly the scrutiny of inner thoughts behind appearances that are deceptive even in the case of friends: “There are so many hiding places and recesses in our souls that it is impossible for human prudence to know the simulations concealed within them” (“negli animi nostri sono tante latebre e tanti recessi, che impossibil è che prudenzia umana possa conoscere quelle simulazioni, che dentro nascone vi sono”). Baldassare Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano* (Milano: Garzanti, 1981), 163.
himself: “I think so”.\textsuperscript{481} In order to be operative in the world of politics, prudence needs to be “mixed” with fraud. Hence the name, popularized for decades to come, of “prudentia mixta”. Since things useful and honest no longer coincide, the prince ought to prepare his blend of both with the public good in sight.\textsuperscript{482} Of course, there will be rigid censors, either naïve or hypocritical, who will disagree;\textsuperscript{483} but after all, Lipsius asks, “among what kind of men do we live? To be sure they are cunning and evil, and of a kind that seems to everyone to rest upon deceit, stratagem, and lie”.\textsuperscript{484} Quoting a letter from Cicero to his friend Atticus, Lipsius reminds us that politics happen less in the world of Plato’s \textit{Republic} than in “Romulus’ dregs”, in reference to the kind of stratagems used by the first king of Rome as they had been described by Livy and glossed by Machiavelli in his \textit{Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio}.\textsuperscript{485} Quoting Cicero for the injunction not to use dissimulation, Lipsius opposed Aristotle’s warning that kingdoms are subverted by deception. In order to preserve them, it is necessary to respond with the same, something that Lipsius summarizes in the following adage: “Behave like a fox to other foxes”.\textsuperscript{486}

This is what brought Lipsius not only to allow but also to commend the use of dissimulation, in addition to mistrust, in a world where virtue alone cannot lead to the common good that makes the end of politics.\textsuperscript{487} He sought to promote a strong model of government, of a

\textsuperscript{481} “Fasne est ut leviter miscam, \& iungam aliquid e fraudium faec? Ego puto”. Justus Lipsius, \textit{Politicorum sive civilis doctrinae libri sex, qui ad principatum maxime spectant} (Lugduni Batavorum: apud Franciscum Raphelengium, MDLXXXIX [1589]), 201.

\textsuperscript{482} “Velimusque principem, alto quidem, splendidoque ingenio: sed tamen eruditum utilia honestis miscere”. Lipsius, \textit{Politicorum libri sex}, 203.

\textsuperscript{483} “Inter quos enim vivimus? Nempe argutos, malos: \& qui ex fraudis, fallaciis, mendaciis, constare toti videntur” Lipsius, \textit{Politicorum libri sex}, 210, 201.

\textsuperscript{484} “\textit{After quoting a letter from Cicero to his friend Atticus, Lipsius reminded us that politics happen less in the world of Plato’s \textit{Republic} than in “Romulus’ dregs”, in reference to the kind of stratagems used by the first king of Rome as they had been described by Livy and glossed by Machiavelli in his \textit{Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio}. Quoting Cicero for the injunction not to use dissimulation, Lipsius opposed Aristotle’s warning that kingdoms are subverted by deception. In order to preserve them, it is necessary to respond with the same, something that Lipsius summarizes in the following adage: “Behave like a fox to other foxes”. This is what brought Lipsius not only to allow but also to commend the use of dissimulation, in addition to mistrust, in a world where virtue alone cannot lead to the common good that makes the end of politics. He sought to promote a strong model of government, of a
kind able to end the evils of civil strife and threats of sedition. Lipsius’ Netherlands, like France, was in the second half of the sixteenth century as gloomy a landscape as Italy had been in the times of Guicciardini. To those who objected morally to the use of dissimulation, Lipsius concluded with an aphorism modeled on the famous “qui nescit dissimulare, nescit regnare”, attributed to Louis XI of France, the king famously depicted as a reincarnation of the cunning of Tacitus’ Tiberius by Philippe de Comines.488

Lipsius had been cautious toward the position of Machiavelli, generally condemned by the end of the century as the embodiment of impiety in politics. By writing that some had been excessively fierce towards Machiavelli’s emphasis on deceit, Lipsius was somehow aware that they shared a way of understanding the methods of politics, even though they might differ as to the ends.489 For Lipsius, like for many late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century scholars, what mattered was to emphasize that, even in the conditions described above, the common good, rather than the interest of the ruler, ought to remain the goal for action.

Lipsius was not the only one to suggest that the alternative of virtue or deceit was simplistic, not to say inoperative. Authors like Giovanni Botero in Della ragione di stato (1589)

488 However, Lipsius attributes the quotation to an emperor, “Fridericus, sive Sigismundus”. He goes on to write that “some naive mind will be displeased, and will claim: simulation and dissimulation ought to be banned from the life of everyone. I confess that this is so in private life; but as for public life I reject it entirely. Those who do not veil their thoughts will never rule” (“displicebit hoc ingenuae alicui fronti, & clamabit: ex omni vita Simulatio, Dissimulatioque tollenda est. De privata, fateor: de publica, valde nego. Numquam regent, qui non tegent”). Lipsius Politicorum libri sex, 210. The opinion against dissimulation dismissed by Lipsius belongs to Cicero’s De officiis. The evidence for the importance of secrecy and dissimulation in political literature across the late sixteenth and during the seventeenth century is overwhelming. See below the section on Vera y Zúñiga for dissimulation and diplomacy; as for the secretary, see Saaavedra Fajardo, Empresas políticas, 658-662; and, for the prince, 724-732. We also read in 1620: “Dissimulation—the soul of the secret—is the helm of government” (“la dissimulación, alma del secreto, es el timón del gobierno”). Francisco Bermúdez de Pedraza, El secretario del rey (En Madrid: por Luis Sánchez impressor del R. N. S., 1620), 62r.

489 “In Machiavellum nimis quidam saeviunt”. Lipsius, Politicorum libri sex, 205. According to Morford, “Tacitus had displayed the deception of princes and courtiers with restraint and irony. The followers of Machiavelli used his references to the arcana imperii to develop a theory of ratio status, in which the impersonal state replaced the prince at the center of power. Lipsius was temperamentally unable to accept such ruthless Machtpolitik. As teacher and humanist, he focused upon the prince and his counselors. Where Tacitus revealed the arcana imperii by irony and ambiguity, Lipsius masked his own discomfort with specious argument”. Morford, “Tacitean Prudentia”, 148-149.
or Juan de Mariana in De rege et regis institutione (1598) explored the gap stretching between extreme naiveté and impiety, thus adding to a body of scholarship in which Jesuits played an important role and which tended to set the boundaries between a good or true reason of state, as opposed to a bad or false one. Both versions of reason of state, or prudence, were indebted to Tacitus’ writings, but accepted to varying degrees, and allegedly with different goals in mind, the need for dissimulation in government.

The legacy of Tacitus in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century historiography entails that the explanation of causes, such as Polybius famously required in order for history to be meaningful, was going to be consistently understood as decoding the intentions that rulers or

490 The issue of the reaction in Spain around the question of reason of state (in Jesuit and non Jesuit circles) is far from being exhausted. There are several monographic works devoted to the subject: José A. Fernández Santamaría, Razón de estado y política en el pensamiento español del Barroco (1595-1640) (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Constitucionales, 1986). For Jesuit debates on the use of dissimulation see Alexandra Merle, “Un aspect de l’antimachiavélisme des jésuites: le prince chrétien de Pedro de Ribadeneyra entre simulation et dissimulation”, in Les jésuites en Espagne et en Amérique. Jeux et enjeux du pouvoir (XVIe-XVIIIes), ed. Annie Molinié, Alexandra Merle and Araceli Guillaume-Alonso (Paris: Presses de l’Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2007). For the debate on reason of state, see for instance Peter Burke, “Tacitism, scepticism, and reason of state”, in The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450–1700, ed. J. H. Burns and Mark Goldie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 479-483. Gajda has pointed to what is common between between the so-called good and bad reason of state: “In the preface to his Della Ragion di Stato, Botero denounced both Machiavelli and Tacitus as teaching a false reason of state, which allowed men to legitimise behaviour that clashed with Christian ethics. But Botero’s subsequent discussion of statecraft—the techniques of political manipulation and the fiscal and military foundations of a strong monarchy—bore strong similarities to that of Lipsius, and the text, too, was larded with quotation from Tacitus”. Gajda, “Tacitus and political thought”, 262. On the one hand, Peter Burke has defined seventeenth-century anti-Tacitism as “a tendency to associate Tacitus with Machiavelli and to condemn them both as immoral”, for the illustration of which he adds that “in the early seventeenth century, the rival statesmen Richelieu and Olivares were both suspected of an admiration for Tacitus which was supposed to have encouraged them in harsh measures”. Burke, “Tacitism”, 489. However, individual authors such as Gracián would attack Machiavelli and praise Tacitus at the same time.

491 The link between Tacitus and reason of state is explicit in Scipione Ammirato’s Discorsi sopra Cornelio Tacito (1594). Ammirato’s contemporaries, as he lets us know at the opening of the twelfth book, have grown used to attribute everything to reason of state, often without knowing much what that means. Scipione Ammirato, Discorsi del signor Scipione Ammirato sopra Cornelio Tacito (In Fiorenza: per Filippo Giunti, MDXCIll [1594]), 228. Placing it in the context of different reasons or laws, Ammirato concludes that reason of state is the contravention of ordinary reason for the sake of the public good. “Par che si possa concludere, ragione di stato altro non essere che contravvenzione di ragione ordinaria per rispetto di pubblico beneficio”. Ammirato, Discorsi, 231. Likewise, Höpfl has asserted that “reason of state generalized and radicalized this perception into the distinction between what circumstances (‘necessity’) demanded, and the ordinary rules of morality, religion or piety, and law”. Höpfl, Jesuit political thought, 164. Concerning the identification of the public good with that of the state: “Reason of state referred to the means used by rulers to secure and preserve existing governments—their own ‘state’, which was equated with the abstract notion of the commonwealth or polity”. Gajda, “Tacitus and political thought”, 261. For the link between reason of state and secrecy, see also Michael Stolleis, Arcana Imperii und Ratio Status: Bemerkungen zur politischen Theorie des frühen 17. Jahrhunderts (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1980).
courtiers had dissimulated in order to succeed. This, in fact, would place the genre in connection with trends that go beyond the scope of history, and have to do with forms of discourse that would become extremely popular in the seventeenth century. Dissimulation would pervade disparate fields of public and private existence, and the propagation of Lipsius’ characterization of the prudence required from the ruler to other fields might be considered a first step towards this.

For instance, dissimulation is at the core of what is required from the secretary Bermúdez de Pedraza’s 1620 handbook for the profession, mentioned above. The same year, Juan Antonio de Vera y Zúñiga would apply Lipsius’ doctrine of “prudentia mixta” to the task of the diplomat in his handbook *El enbaxador*, which would soon become extremely popular across the continent.492

Vera y Zúñiga was deeply influenced by Lipsius.493 His injunctions to the apprentice of the ambassador are more than closely modeled on those that Lipsius had conveyed to the prince. He warns the diplomat not to behave as if he had a chest made of transparent glass (“el pecho de cristal transparente”). Dissimulation informs every form of sociability.494 Tacitus and Guicciardini provide Vera y Zúñiga with examples, respectively ancient and modern, concerning the dangers of acting otherwise.495 As Gracián would say later, even as flawless a ruler as Ferdinand the Catholic used to leave a gap between language and what he had in mind or

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492 Vera y Zúñiga also signed his name as Juan Antonio de Vera y Figueroa. Philip IV’s ambassador to Venice, he was a protégé of Olivares. In order not to lose sight of the connections between circles of power and influence and reading taste, it would be useful to bear in mind that it was probably Olivares who encouraged king Philip IV himself to attempt a translation of Guicciardini. See Fernando Bouza, *Corre manuscrito: una historia cultural del Siglo de Oro* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, Historia, 2001), 303-311.
493 For the importance of Lipsius in Vera’s work, see G. A. Davies, “The influence of Justus Lipsius on Juan de Vera y Figueroa’s *El enbaxador* (1620)”, *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 42 (1965); see also the chapter devoted to Vera in Mattingly’s classic work on early modern diplomacy, Garrett Mattingly, “The perfect ambassador”, in *Renaissance Diplomacy* (New York: Cosimo, 2008), 211-222.
494 Juan Antonio de Vera y Zúñiga, *El enbaxador*… (En Sevilla: por Francisco de Lyra, año 1620), 88v.
495 Vera y Zúñiga, *El enbaxador*, 90r-91v.
intended to do (“el ánimo”, “el intento”). Awareness and mistrust are the point of departure for any behavior: thus equipped, men become able to notice (“reparar”) whatever seems odd, and then decode and dissect the mind of the other.\(^{496}\)

However, in order to learn how to decipher the intentions dissimulated by others, it is necessary to gain experience of the way affairs are generally conducted, such as Cabrera de Córdoba or Labrit suggested. History comes to the aid of anyone wanting to investigate intentions by providing examples of dissimulation and prudence from the past. This is a perception of exemplarity that barely resembles the old idea of history as “magistra vitae”, proverbially associated with Cicero’s name. As he promoted the use of history as a way of learning about prudence put into practice, Vega y Zúñiga developed a method that Baltasar Álamos de Barrientos had expounded in more detail some years earlier in *Tácito español* (1614), mentioned above.\(^{497}\) Considering the similarity between past and present events, Vera y Zúñiga infers that the world has governed itself following principles that are also similar and that, if one were to compare case to case with a distance of millennia, they would appear “different in the

\(^{496}\) Vera y Zúñiga, *El embaxador*, 93v. Gracián’s theory of wit will establish a parallel between the function of “reparo” in prudence and the effect of wit in discourse. See below.

\(^{497}\) Baltasar Álamos de Barrientos, *Tácito español, ilustrado con aforismos* (En Madrid: por Luis Sánchez, a su costa, y de Juan Hanfrey, año MDCXIII [1614]). Álamos (1555-1640) had prepared the book since the early 1590s, but published it only in 1614. Álamos had been associated with Philip II’s secretary Antonio Pérez in the conjuration that ended up with the latter’s flight into Aragón and eventually France. Álamos, in turn, spent several years in prison. According to the witness Bustamante, who deposed against Pérez in the trial, the correspondence between Álamos and Pérez discussed the events of the monarchy under the disguise of Tacitus’ characters, with Philip II referred to as Tiberius. Álamos’ familiarity with the text of Tacitus, and the sort of analysis that he was able to transfer to the society within which he lived thanks to the similitude of the two historical periods (*similitudo temporum*), earned him a great reputation that culminated with his ascension to high charges in the government of Philip IV. For the nature of Álamos’ work and the transformations that it underwent in relation to his stay in prison and the delay in publication, see Charles Davis, “Baltasar Álamos de Barrientos and the Nature of Spanish Tacitism”, in *Culture and Society in Habsburg Spain: Studies Presented to R.W. Truman by his Pupils and Colleagues on the Occasion of his Retirement*, ed. Nigel Griffin *et al.* (London: Tamesis, 2001). Davis also points to Álamos’ debt to the earlier commentary by Annibale Scoto (1589).
times and the names, but not in cunning (‘astucia’”). It is the patterns of dissimulation used to conceal intentions that lay the foundations for the continuity of history:

In sum, out of the variety of affects found in different subjects and times, examined with mature mind and agile wit, the ambassador has to create a certain rule, together with an art of understanding words and penetrating intentions.

In a similar vein, in the manifesto that prefaced Tácito español, Álamos had placed psychology at the intersection between history and prudence. If effects remain constant through time, then the following is true: if A led to B, so C, being similar to A, will lead to X, similar to B. Aristotle’s Rhetoric had asserted that the usefulness of history relied on the fact that “as a rule the future resembles the past”, and that “similar results naturally arise from similar causes”. In the version of history with which Álamos – and Vega y Zúñiga – seem to be engaging, causes and effects are to be understood in terms of affects and actions resulting from them. Affects are

498 “Hallaréis la diferencia en los tiempos, i en los nombres; pero no en la astucia”. Vera y Zúñiga, El enbaxador, 94r.
499 “En fin, de variedad de afetos, que conozca en varios sugetos, i tiempos el enbaxador, examinados con maduro seso, i dispierto ingenio, á de hazer una regla cierta, i un arte de entender palavras, i penetrar intenciones”. Vera y Zúñiga, El enbaxador, 99r-v.
500 “Ὅµοια γὰρ ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ τὰ μέλλοντα τοῖς γεγονόσιν”. Aristotle, Rhetoric, 276-277, §3.20, 1394a; and also “τῶν ὕμων τὰ ὅµοια γίγνεσθαι πέφυκεν”. Aristotle, Rhetoric, 42-43, §1.4, 1360a. For this, see Carli, “Aristotle on the Philosophical Elements of Historia”, 336.
501 According to Álamos de Barrientos, although effects remain stable, the similarities in the system of government make Tacitus particularly suitable to “the time of monarchies in which we are” (“al siglo que corre de monarquía”). Álamos, Tácito español, 18. Like Álamos, two years later the count Virgilio Malvezzi would justify the fact that Tacitus’ histories about emperors are more easily relatable to the present than Livy’s accounts of the republic of Rome. Malvezzi, Discorsi, n.p. In the passage from Annales 4.33 discussed above, Tacitus laid the grounds for understanding of the way in which a system of government shapes the character of the people and the way they react. In 1618, the translator of Tácito español Girolamo Canini considered Álamos’ method of inference from causes to effects exemplar of the theory of “regressus”, devised at the University of Padua by Jacopo Zabarella (1533–1589) back in the mid-sixteenth century. In this way, Álamos’ “science of politics” found among Tacitists of the continent not only popularity, but also legitimation within the framework of the latest developments in logic. These would make of him “a new Aristotle of history”. Girolamo Canini, “Del modo di cavar profitto dalla lettura di Corn. Tacito. Di D. Girolamo Canini, al lettore”, in Opere di G. Cornelio Tacito ... illustrate con notabilissimi aforismi del signor D. Baldassar’ Alamo Varienti, trasportati dalla lingua castigliana nella toscana (In Venetia: appresso i Giunti, MDCXIX [1618]), n.p.
the basis for a science of politics, the latter serving the historian as a tool in the work of
conjecture, and learning, in turn, from the examples of the past he provides.

In the wake of Lipsius’ edition of Tacitus, and of a work like Politicorum libri sex, politics
became largely a science about affects that need to be uncovered under the effects. “There is no
effect or outcome (Álamos would write) originating in the affects of the soul that [Tacitus] fails
to discover”. 502 The affects appear “so hidden […], and so disguised in order to show another
figure than the one in the heart” that historians need to have a deep knowledge of man’s heart in
order to deal with their object appropriately. 503

The same conception of politics that placed dissimulation at the center of statecraft would
make of it the object of the wit of the historian.

Both Lipsius and Tacitus were characters at the court of Apollo vividly depicted in
Trajano Boccalini’s De’ ragguagli di Parnaso (1612). We find Lipsius welcomed to the court of
Apollo with a pageant as a hero of letters. Later on, he is accused of idolizing Tacitus. In fact, the
scholar may be held responsible to a great extent for the main ingredients of Boccalini’s
Tacitism, not only insofar as the latter provides as a model of prudence, but also as the proponent
of a kind of history writing. 504

502 “Ningún efecto ni resulta procede de los afectos del ánimo que él [Tácito] no descubra […]”; for he wrote “con
tanto conocimiento de la inclinación, y natural humano, que es lo que falta a muchos historiadores”. Álamos de
Barrientos, “A don Francisco Gómez de Sandoval y Rojas, duque de Lerma”, n.p. Charles Davis summarized this as
follows: “Psychological penetration is the key to prudence, says Álamos, and Tacitus epitomizes it”. Davis,
“Baltasar Álamos de Barrientos”, 70.
503 “Tan encubiertos […] y afeitados para que parezcan y muestren otra figura de la que tienen en el corazón”.
504 For Lipsius being welcomed to Parnassus, see “Ragguaglio XXIII”, in Boccalini, De’ De’ ragguagli di Parnaso
... centuria prima, 74-85. In connection with Lipsius’ idolatry of Tacitus, “ragguaglio” LXXXVI bears the title:
“Justus Lipsius, to make up for his mistake of having accused Tacitus, would contemplate him so attentively as to be
accused before Apollo of idolatry towards him. Then he receives praise and admiration, having suffered a pretense
of torture from His Majesty” (“Giusto Lipsio, per emendare il fallo di haver accusato Tacito, così intensamente
l’osserva, che appresso Apollo vien imputato di idolatrarlo. Onde dopo un finto supplicio da sua maestà alla fine è
lodato, & ammirato”). Boccalini, De’ ragguagli di Parnaso ... Centuria prima, 398.
Boccalini may be considered a major exponent of “Tacitism”. In the wake of the interest in a model of historiography that would provide causes for the events, Tacitus interested many due to his analysis of the interiority of the mind, which unveiled the kinds of intention that the rulers had dissimulated in order to get away with their plans.

*De’ ragguagli* is presented by Boccalini as a refreshment amidst the hardships involved in writing a commentary on Tacitus –to appear posthumously in 1677, when Boccalini had been dead for more than half a century.505 The book was sort of Lucian of the seventeenth century. It consisted of a series of allegorical episodes at the court of the god Apollo, where celebrities paraded, among whom Tacitus was not the least important. At one point, Apollo issues a decree forbidding anyone to write history without experience of the courts:

To any man of talent we forbid to undertake the important duty of writing histories unless he has traveled through many provinces, and exercised the important charges of secretary, or counselor of a great prince, or unless he is a senator of a famous republic, and, above all, unless he has lived in the court for at least two thirds of his life. All this is so necessary a requirement that in our Delphic Library there are some histories written by courtiers entirely ignorant of the purity of the language, or the most important precepts of the art of history, but *so salty* and fruitful because of the abundance of political precepts of which they are full that they have made clear to everyone that it is a special virtue of astute courtiers to make known to posterity not things that they have heard in the tavern, but *the innermost and most hidden feelings of the princes, which they have been able to penetrate with their acutely speculative wits.506

505 Boccalini’s work was extremely popular in both Italy and Spain. For the latter, see Juan Beneyto, “Boccalini en España”, *Revista de Estudios Políticos* 45 (1949); see also Donatella Gagliardi, “Fortuna y censura de Boccalini en España: una aproximación a la inédita *Piedra del parangón político*”, in *Literatura, sociedad y política en el Siglo de Oro*, ed. Eugenia Fosalba and Carlos Vaillo (Bellaterra: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Servei de Publicacions, 2010).

506 “A qual si voglia virtuoso prohibiamo l’intraprendere l’importante impresa di scrivere historie, se egli non havrà peragrate molte provinie, se non havrà esercitati i carichi importantissimi di secretario, o di consigliere di prencipe grande, o se non sarà senatore di qualche famosa repubblica, e sopra tutte le cose per i due terzi degli anni della sua vita, non haverà praticate le corti. Requisito tanto necessario, che nella nostra Bibliotheca Delfica alcune historie si leggono scritte da cortigiani della purità della lingua, e di tutti i più importanti precetti dell’arte historica affatto ignoranti, ma per lo cumulo de i precetti politici, de’ quali abbondano, *tanto salate* e fruttuose, che chiaramente hanno fatto conoscere ad ogn’uno esser particolar virtù de i cortigiani forbiti felicemente pubblicare a i posteri, non le cose che hanno udite raccontar nelle botteghe, ma *quegl’intimi sensi più ascosi del cuor de i prencipi, ch’essi con gl’ingegni loro acutamente speculativi hanno saputo penetrare*” [italics added]. Boccalini, *De’ ragguagli di Parnaso ... Centuria prima*, 246.
Demanding from the historian experience of the world, and especially of the court, Apollo points to principles exposed by Labrit more than half a century earlier. Whereas for the latter this resulted in a sort of *aporia*, with the claim that a history written according to the rules, unless the king may have a part in it, is simply not feasible, Boccalini focuses on the acuity of wit of the historian as self-sufficient tool for the penetration of minds.\(^{507}\)

The rejection of the rumors of the tavern as a source for history had been commonplace in the wake of the transformations introduced in historiography after the models of Polybius and Tacitus. As mentioned above, Páez de Castro, for instance, had complained to Jerónimo Zurita that neither soldiers nor the taverns would provide him with the kind of trustworthiness to which he aspired.\(^{508}\) However, as we consider the antidote to sources like these, the parallel stops: it is no longer the archive nor the memoirs of the prince that would give notice of the causes concealed to everyone else, but the experience and the wit of the historian trained in the manners of the court and the language of politics there in use that would make him prepared to understand and, so to speak, “decode” what the prince and the courtiers were hiding.

Apollo’s decree makes clear that, far from a switch in the approach to methodology from documentation to inference, a model based on the wit of the historian entails also a difference in expectations as to the experience of the reader of histories. Scholars like Páez or Cabrera, however acquainted with Tacitus’s histories they might have been, still privileged a genre where causality was conceived, almost exclusively, as the source of meaningfulness. Causes would make history, to use the terms of Aristotle in *Poetics* 1451b, for poetics “more philosophical and elevated”. Boccalini’s approach, in contrast, adds a dimension through which readers are instructed in the affairs of politics –the same that allowed the historian to peep into the mind of

\(^{507}\) For Labrit’s claim that there cannot be history “as it should be”, see Labrit, *Diálogos*, 15v-16v.

\(^{508}\) See above for the quotation from Domingo Malvadi, *Bibliofilia humanista*, 449.
the prince. At the same time, and more importantly for our argument, they take pleasure while they do this.

That the process is pleasant appears from the characterization of histories like these as being “so salty and fruitful” (“tanto salate e fruttuose”), in connection with the interweaving of precepts about politics. Even though condiments perform commonly as a metaphor for the pleasure of a text, salt (“salis”) was, in the language of Cicero, already one of the manifestations of what seventeenth-century scholars call “acuity of wit”.\textsuperscript{509} As he praises the historian Paolo Emilio Santorio, Boccalini writes in the second volume of \textit{De’ Raggugli di Parnaso} (1613) that “political salts” make histories full of “taste”, not only more pleasant but also able to make readers learned and wise.\textsuperscript{510} Santorio is “a political historian” (“uno storico politico”) because he always inserts “a couple of words” that provide “the true reason” for the events narrated.\textsuperscript{511} Unveiling motivations becomes a source of pleasure, but one of learning too. In the section that follows, I address the way in which Baltasar Gracian theorized the correspondence between prudence and acuity of wit, so as to make the one the mirror of the other.

\section*{2. Tacitus in Gracian’s thought: the wit of the historian as the detection of prudence}

The characters of Trajano Boccalini’s \textit{De’ raggugli di Parnaso} live in a world where it is taken for granted that there are ingredients of the reason of state that apply not only to politics, but also to the society as a whole. Such would be the case of the use of dissimulation, which

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{509} In 1639, Matteo Peregrini reminded his readers that Quintilian had called “salty” or “salsum” a sentence that battles against the tediousness of a speech with some obscure piece of judgment or “latente iudicium”. The salt of something surprises the reader with a thought that hides beneath the surface, and fits with Boccalini’s notion of something concealed now revealed, or rather hinted at, by an act of the understanding. Peregrini, \textit{Delle acutezze}, 15.

\textsuperscript{510} “That political salt that gives taste to the reading of histories, and makes infinitely learned and wise he who devotes himself to such a useful study” (“quel sal politico, che soprormodo saporita rendendo la lettione historica, infinitamente dotto, e saggio fa colui, che in simil’ utilissimo studio si affatica”). Trajano Boccalini, \textit{De’ raggugli di Parnaso... Centuria Seconda} (In Milano: appresso Gio. Battista Bidelli, 1614), 70.

\textsuperscript{511} Boccalini, \textit{De’ raggugli di Parnaso... centuria seconda}, 71.
\end{footnotesize}
prompts men to assume that there is always a gap between language and feeling. The method inferred from Tacitus to decode the duplicity of man as he deals with others was transferred to fields outside politics from as early as the first commentaries on the works of the historian. The one by Annibale Scoto (1589), to give just one example, would famously focus less on the prince than on “the prudent courtier” or “prudens aulicus”.\textsuperscript{512} Every milieu seemed to welcome the principles drawn from Tacitus’ works, turned into a sort of dictionary for sociability in general.

In what follows, I will analyze two works by Baltasar Gracián: \textit{Oráculo manual} (1647) and \textit{Agudeza y arte de ingenio} (1648). By comparing a work on prudence with the mentions of Tacitus’s method of history writing as they appear in a work on the acuity of wit, I will show that Gracián’s thought is paradigmatic of a conception of historiography, generalized in the first half of the seventeenth century, which sought to project onto the text of the historian the blueprint of the way human affairs are usually conducted. The issue seems to be the way in which history copes with reality once the analysis of causes that may render the events meaningful comes to be understood in terms of psychological penetration. Acuity becomes the virtue that enables the historian to lift the veil of intentions.

The connection between wit and the conjecture of causes was far from new. Quoting Thucydides as the example of a historian who uses “his wit” as he inquires into the causes of events, Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas admitted that history is expected to use conjecture freely, supported by the historian’s prudence and knowledge of the science of politics.\textsuperscript{513} Slightly later, in 1627, the count of Portalegre described Diego Hurtado de Mendoza as a man of “wit” due to the way he inquired into the causes for actions that appeared obscure at first sight. In what follows,

\textsuperscript{512} Davis, “Baltasar Álamos de Barrientos”, 72.
\textsuperscript{513} See section one above.
Gracián’s works will serve as a guide to see how historiography might structure the relationship between the prudence of actors and the wit of the historian with entire awareness of the transformation at work between the one and the other. This will answer the question placed at the opening of the present chapter – that is, whether 17th-century theoreticians allowed wit to play a role in history writing, and, if so, how it is different or similar in relation to the case of poetics.

Few books were as representative of the convertibility between politics and life in society as Gracián’s *Oráculo manual*. Like Scoto’s commentary, Gracián’s handbook was oriented to those looking for chances to survive at the court. If prudence is necessary in the first place, this is because the courtier is a person (“ser persona”). In line with the etymology of the term – meaning “mask” in Latin– the requirement amounts to having inner “depths” (“fondos”), creating within the subject a discrepancy between the exterior or “façade” (“fachada”) and the capacity (“caudal”) lodged inside.\(^{514}\)

A myth recounted in *Agudeza y arte de ingenio* explains the idea that underlies the art of prudence conveyed by *Oráculo manual*. It was precisely Boccalini who, according to Gracián, narrated how

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\(^{514}\) Baltasar Gracián y Morales, *Oráculo manual*, ed. Emilio Blanco (Madrid: Cátedra, 1995), 101; and consider also: “A man is a person inasmuch as he has depths” (“hombre con fondos tanto tiene de persona”). Gracián y Morales, *Oráculo manual*, 129. In addition to Juan Huarte de San Juan’s *Examen de ingenios para las ciencias*, first published in 1575, other attempts at establishing a science through which men might be scrutinized and categorized according to their temperaments appear from the late sixteenth century. This, in turn, would appear helpful to those seeking a method to penetrate the interiority of fellow competitors at court. For figures like Pierre Charron or Eustache du Refuge considered in parallel to Gracián’s art of unmasking, see Henry C. Clark, “Privatizing Courtly Unmasking”, in *La Rochefoucauld and the Language of Unmasking in Seventeenth Century France* (Geneve: Droz, 1994). Roughly contemporaneous with Gracián, Saavedra Fajardo would advise one to learn the temperament and the nature of the other in order to grasp his intentions. Saavedra Fajardo, *Empresas políticas*, 429-431.
Vulcan presented a man, crafted with the greatest artifice. Looking at him, [the god] Momus objected that, with deceit flowing from his breast, he ought to have a window in order for the others to see the interior, and check whether the words matched the heart.515

The present is an age of secrecy: “It requires greater work to deal with a man now than with an entire people in the past”.516 It is only prudent not to take language at face value. Prudence requires that we make “a mystery” of ourselves in order to evoke interest. With stratagems of dissimulation and simulation, we become desirable for others. Prefiguring some of the topics of Gracián’s later work El Criticón, Oráculo manual has the subject become a field of experimentation for strategies of dissimulation not different from the tricks of the merchants depicted in the former. It comes as no surprise that Saavedra Fajardo’s Empresas políticas (1643), published only a few years earlier, pointed to the ability to read the eyes and gestures of men as being necessary to princes as well as merchants: “Without it, the prince will not know how to rule, nor the merchant will reach his goals”. For this, nothing is more important than being able to know the temperament of each man, or “conocer los naturales”.517

According to Gracián, the aim of individuals is to have others overestimate what they are capable of. Each negotiates his image in the mirror that the others afford him.518 It has become commonplace to see here a version of what Pierre Bourdieu calls “symbolic capital”, and which Gracián, not in vain, denotes with a term etymologically related: “Caudal”. Meaning capacity and, metaphorically, wealth, “caudal” is vague enough to convey the idea of that which one can

515 “Presentó Vulcano un hombre que había fabricado con suma arte; mirole Momo, y tachole de que, por cuanto nacía el engaño en su pecho, le faltaba una ventanilla en él, por la cual se pudiera ver lo que tenía allá dentro, y si decían las palabras con el corazón”. Gracián y Morales, Agudeza, vol. 1, 326.
517 Saavedra Fajardo, Empresas políticas, 429.
518 “Dissimulation at court was a supremely self-conscious art of producing an image of oneself for others through language, gesture, and action, among other things, even if such a representation was intended to disclose little or nothing about the courtier’s true intentions”. Jon R. Snyder, Dissimulation and the culture of secrecy in early modern Europe (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 75.
or cannot do.\textsuperscript{519} To a certain extent, one might describe \textit{Oráculo manual} as a handbook on how to have our “caudal” appear greater than it actually is. However, the relation to the reality of what we actually are is less important than maintaining in the other uncertainty about our self. As soon as people think they have understood something, they are ready to criticize it, whereas what seems secret and mysterious appears to them godlike.\textsuperscript{520} Everything that is out of the way they worship as mysterious.\textsuperscript{521} Disillusionment (“desengaño”) is the horizon of the knowledge we may obtain of others, for regardless of what we are capable of, it will be always less than that which expectation is able to build: in Gracián’s maxim: “A half is more than the whole … a half being shown with the other half kept in pound is more than declaring the whole”\textsuperscript{522}.

With a focus on dissimulation, men are conceptualized (as mentioned above) in terms of a division between “in” and “out”: “There are subjects who are only façade, like unfinished houses” – men with “the entrance of a palace, and the inner rooms of a shack”.\textsuperscript{523} The image would then reappear in \textit{El Criticón}, where a palace would typically reveal a heap of ruins in the rear.\textsuperscript{524} Prudence includes measuring the depth of our “caudal” for our own use, and disguising it for others.\textsuperscript{525} More important for our purpose, it teaches the ability to detect “caudal” within others. In fact, he who is prudent “detects [“sonda”] immediately the bottom of the greatest

\textsuperscript{519} For the notion of caudal in Gracián and in the world of the picaresque, see Francisco Sánchez, “Symbolic Wealth and Theatricality in Gracián”, in \textit{Rhetoric and Politics: Baltasar Gracián and the New World Order}, ed. Nicholas Spadaccini and Jenaro Taléns (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997). Sánchez defines caudal as “both the amount of cultural and material wealth and also the dialogic sign of social struggle, knowledge, and deception”. Sánchez, “Symbolic Wealth”, 214. “In Gracián social reality is a sign that needs to be decoded in terms of the subject’s success in the imposition of its own meaning and in its increase in symbolic capital, or caudal. Thus, social performance is also a discursive exchange”. Sánchez, “Symbolic Wealth”, 216.

\textsuperscript{520} “La arcanidad tiene visos de divinidad”. Gracián y Morales, \textit{Oráculo manual}, 190.

\textsuperscript{521} “Todo lo recóndito veneran por misterio”. Gracián y Morales, \textit{Oráculo manual}, 239.

\textsuperscript{522} “Más es la mitad que el todo… una mitad en alarde y otra en empeño más es que un todo declarado”. Gracián y Morales, \textit{Oráculo manual}, 195.

\textsuperscript{523} “Hay sujetos de sola fachada, como casas por acabar”; “la entrada de palacio, y de choza la habitación”. Gracián y Morales, \textit{Oráculo manual}, 129.


\textsuperscript{525} Gracián y Morales, \textit{Oráculo manual}, 151-152.
depth; he is able to do the anatomy of any capacity ("caudal") to perfection". The metaphor of depth is consistent across Gracián’s works: “There are some low sandbanks today in the conversation of men: it is convenient to use the sound often”. In addition to architecture and depth, Gracián cultivates for the man of prudence a range of metaphors based upon the cipher: he is “a rare talent of observation, a great decipherer of the most hidden interiority. He notices with acuity, conceives with subtlety, infers with judgment: he discovers, notices, attains, and comprehends everything”. By the end of the third volume of El Criticón, the decipherer (“el descifrador”) is the one able to fare without danger through the dissimulation of men.

Life is a conflict where victory implies comprehending others without being comprehended: “Against a lynx of reasoning, hide like a cuttlefish”. In the economy of sight and hiding staged by Oráculo manual, the lynx, as well as the water diviner or “zahorí”, performs as an emblem of readiness and penetration of that which is hidden. Not in vain, they

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526 “Sonda luego el fondo de la mayor profundidad; sabe hacer anatomía de un caudal con perfección”. Gracián y Morales, Oráculo manual, 129. See Saavedra Fajardo’s injunction to have the sound always at hand: “Se ha de proceder con advertencia y fortaleza, siempre la sonda en la mano”. Saavedra Fajardo, Empresas políticas, 431.

527 “Hay grandes bajos hoy en el trato humano: conviene ir siempre calando sonda”. Gracián y Morales, Oráculo manual, §78, 146. See also: “Wherever it is deep enough, there lie the deep secrets—for there are large spaces and coves, where things of importance usually sink” (“donde ai fondo están los secretos profundos, que ai grandes espacios i ensenadas donde se hunden las cosas de monta”). Gracián y Morales, Oráculo manual, 200.


529 It is the decipherer who explains, in the fourth crisis or chapter of the third book, that “everything in the world is a cipher […] Most things are not as we read them: “Bread” means no longer “bread”, but “earth” […] Even worse for men! Where you think that you will find substance, everything is circumstantial, and what looks solid is hollow, and then what is hollow is also empty” (“todo cuanto hay en el mundo pasa en cifra […] Las más de las cosas no son las que se leen: ya no hay entender pan por pan, sino por tierra […] ¡qué serán los hombres! Donde pensáreís que hay sustancia, todo es circunstancia, y lo que parece más sólido es más hueco, y toda cosa hueca, vacía”). Gracián y Morales, El Criticón, 613-614.

530 “A linces de discurso, jibias de interioridad”. Gracián y Morales, Oráculo manual, 155. For another occurrence of cuttlefish in connection with hiding and obscurity, see the preface to Gracián’s El discreto (1646), where Vincencio Juan de Lastanosa mentioned that Aristotle was often called “xibia” because of the obscurity of his style. Vincencio Juan de Lastanosa, “A los letores”, in Baltasar Gracián y Morales, El discreto (Huesca: Juan Nogués, 1646), n.p. Gracián’s proverb translates in terms of sight and concealment Lipsius’ advice to reciprocate cunning, mentioned above: “Ἀλωπεκίζειν πρὸς ἔτεραν ἀλώπεκα”. 

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appeared together already in 1628 in the title of one of Francisco de Quevedo’s *memoriales* for Olivares, *Lince de Italia y zahorí español*.\textsuperscript{531}

In reference to Norbert Elias’ study on courtly societies, Jon R. Snyder has pointed out that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the contest “for social, cultural and political capital led to a new art of observation of human behavior at court. And this, in turn, led to new developments in the discourse on the art of dissimulation […] If the court system founded new practices of knowledge, in particular in the management and conduct of the courtier, dissimulation was certainly included among them.”\textsuperscript{532}

To a reader of the time, the mechanisms described by Gracián for survival at court were so obviously modeled upon Tacitus’ thoughts that Abraham Nicolas Amelot de la Houssaye (1634-1706) filled his translation and edition of *L’homme de cour* (Amelot’s title for Gracián’s *Oráculo manual*) with footnotes “unveiling” inspiration in Tacitus for eighty-three aphorisms of Gracián’s handbook for courtiers.\textsuperscript{533} Amelot was just making obvious something that Boccalini’s Apollo had advanced some decades earlier: Tacitism and dissimulation had come to be identified with a way of perceiving and being in the world, rather than as a method exclusively related to the art of government.

Tacitism became the code by which to understand relations among people no matter where they belonged. Echoing the title of a famous book published decades earlier by Alonso de Barros, Gracián described *El Criticón*, published in three volumes between 1651 and 1657, as

\textsuperscript{531} As for Gracián with the courtier, experience of affairs in Italy was meant to account for Quevedo’s introduction of himself as insightful in the penetration of the intentions that enemies like the Duke of Savoy were hiding, and which others had misunderstood, unable to decipher the signs. For an analysis of Quevedo’s text, see Antonio Azaustre Galiana, “Estructura y argumentación del *Lince de Italia y zahorí español* de Quevedo”, in *Actas del Congreso Internacional “Quevedo, Lince de Italia y Zahorí Español”*, ed. Ignacio Arellano and Enrica Cancelliere ([Pamplona]: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Navarra, 2004).

\textsuperscript{532} Snyder, *Dissimulation*, 70. Norbert Elias published his text in 1969 as *Die höfische Gesellschaft. Untersuchungen zur Soziologie des Königtums und der höfischen Aristokratie*. It was based on work presented in 1933.

\textsuperscript{533} For the numbers, I rely on Burke, “Tacitism”, 158.
“philosophy for courtiers” (“filosofía cortesana”). The book tracks the various steps in the life of two pilgrims through the world of men, equated with a court where the difference between truth and appearance is the focus of the exercise of perception, understanding, and choice of action. Even the worlds of the picaresque appear modeled after patterns of value and behavior generally theorized for the court, making true the assertion “todo es corte ya”, often attributed to Antonio Pérez, once the secretary of Philip II, later a fugitive, and always a champion of Tacitus. As a matter of fact, a book among the most influential for Gracián’s configuration is Mateo Alemán’s Guzmán de Alfarache, with two parts published in 1599 and 1604. Alemán was connected with Tacitism to the point that his complete works bear an engraving of the author with a book of Tacitus in his hand. Moreover, as shown by Felipe E. Ruan, a joint edition containing a book of manners for courtiers like Gracián Dantisco’s Galateo español together with the censored edition of Lazarillo de Tormes, and published several times, attests to a trend, well disseminated in 17th-century society, which saw continuity between the court and the world of pícaros: entities that, in both cases, fashioned themselves according to principles of clothing, dissimulation, and deceit such as those gathered in Gracián’s Oráculo manual and staged by the characters met by Critilo and Andrenio in El Criticón. Such is the world that emerges from the

535 For Antonio Pérez and Tacitus, see Varo Zafra, “Grupos tacitistas españoles”, 542-544 and passim. In connection with the growth of courts in Europe, and Madrid as a paradigm, see Ruán, Picaro and cortesano, passim. “Although the court was hardly a new phenomenon in Italy or elsewhere, under absolutism its importance grew steadily, and in many places it became the chief institution mediating between the center of state power, namely the prince, and the social order”. Snyder, Dissimulation, 68.
537 Ruán, Picaro and cortesano, 31-51. In the world of picaresque, subtlety or acuity of wit are attributes generally linked to deceit. In Salas Barbadillo’s La hija de Celestina, we read that the main character Elena “era tan sutil de
conversation of Gracián’s characters as they enter a bookshop upon arrival at the court. As the bookseller recommends to them a book bearing the title *El Galateo cortesano* –a volume in the manner of Dantisco’s book– a courtier who is present laughs and declares texts like that to have become outdated and therefore useless. They belong to a time where, interpreting from the first maxim of *Oráculo manual* discussed above, the art of dissimulation and “ser persona”, conceived as a difference between appearances and interiority, was far less advanced than it is in the present. The book, according to the courtier, belongs to a time when one fought with “ballestas”, whilst the present is the time of “gafas” –the name of a weapon, but also, unsurprisingly, that of the lenses that allow the seeing and correcting of appearances into what things actually are.538 Criticisms like this point to the existence, much like in the field of reason of state, of a tradition of criticism against the use of dissimulation at the court, opposing to it a time where virtue and transparency had not yet been replaced by the economy of concealment and unveiling that is the life of the present.539

It should come as no surprise that Gracián presents his art of wit as the counterpart, and even the reverse, of the use of dissimulation in a world of such a kind. What seems remarkable is that he turns the art of unveiling “caudal” into a source of pleasure for the reader, and a criterion by which to evaluate the excellence of a text. In doing so, Gracián opens a space where the writing of history may participate in a degree of “invention” that commentators on Aristotle’s *Poetics*, as discussed above, had long denied the genre since the late sixteenth century.

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538 For a commentary on the passage, found in the eleventh chapter of the first volume of *El Criticón*, see Ruán, *Pícaro and cortesano*, 117.
539 See Snyder, *Dissimulation*, 81-83, for an instance of criticism against the prevalence of dissimulation at the court in the case of Lucio Paolo Rosello’s attack against Castiglione’s ideas in *Il cortegiano*.
After all, there was a tradition linking acuity of wit and the investigation of what lies concealed. Baltasar Gracián may have been aware of Cesare Ripa’s description of “acutezza de l’ingegno”. Ripa evoked a sphinx that, as the embodiment of enigma, can point to us the acuity of wit – for there is nothing in the world so covered and hidden which the acuity of human wit is unable to uncover and make known [italics added].\(^{540}\)

Gracián would develop the connection between history writing and acuity of wit by tackling the root in which the theorization of dissimulation just described had found a language to speak, namely Tacitus’s works.

The latter features prominently in “Discurso” XXVI of Agudeza y arte de ingenio (1648), devoted to what Gracián calls “critical wit” or “wit of crisis” (“agudeza crítica”, “agudeza de crisis”), more precisely in the subdivision related to “malice” (“malicia”). If, as explained in Chapter Two, wit implies arguing a correspondence generally unnoticed between terms in an act that Gracián calls “conceit”, “crisis” is the sort of conceit that eventually allows for historiography to partake of the pleasures of wit.\(^{541}\) Through “crisis” one expresses correspondence between actions and the motives leading to them, understood in terms of cause and effect:

\(^{540}\)“La sfinge […] ci può significare l’acutezza de l’ingegno, perciocché non è al mondo cosa si coperta, e tanto nascosta, che l’acutezza dell’umano ingegno scoprire, e divulgare non possa”. Cesare Ripa, Iconologia... nella quale si descrivono diverse imagini (In Siena: appresso gli eredi di Matteo Florimi, 1613), 10. Ripa’s work appeared for the first time in 1593. The voice “acutezza de l’ingegno” was included since the edition of 1613. The reference appears also in Aurora Egido, La búsqueda de la inmortalidad en las obras de Baltasar Gracián: discurso leído el día 8 de junio de 2014 en su recepción pública... (Madrid: Real Academia Española, 2014), 99.

\(^{541}\)Covarrubias traces the meaning of “crisis” back to “κριτικός, from the verb κρίνειν, a iudicando, and hence those who judge and examine with rigor the poems and writings of others were called “critics” (“κριτικός, del verbo, κρίνειν, a iudicando, y de aquí se dieron críticos los que juzgan, y examinan con rigor las poesías, y escrituras, y obras de otro”). Covarrubias Orozco, Tesoro de la lengua castellana, 249r.
For this kind of critical malice, ingenuity resorts to the correspondence between terms: it always looks for some proportional correlation, so that the conceit may have a basis [italics added].

As it is often the case in Gracián’s theory of wit, acuity depends on a twofold constraint governing the operation of wit. The correspondence it discovers needs to have “a basis” and be solid (“con fundamento”), but at the same time it has to contain something unexpected and therefore surprising. Accordingly, in order for “crisis” to inspire feelings of wonder in the reader—and, as a result, for the author to appear witty—the motive behind the action needs to be previously unknown to the reader—something that happens, for the most part, when it is at odds with the one that is visible and perceptible to everyone. According to a rule applicable to conceits of every kind, “crisis” brings greater pleasure in proportion to the degree of unexpectedness in the motivation:

Insofar as the reason is better concealed, and more difficult to attain, it makes the conceit more esteemed; it wakes up the attention by noticing some inconsistency, thus calling for curiosity; after which, the exquisiteness of the solution solves the mystery with excellence.

By definition, a conceit of “crisis” assumes that the agent has used some kind of artifice. The reason is plain: should his or her actions be entirely straightforward, the cause for them would be public and well known to everyone, with no room left for conjecture, nor, consequently, for the exercise of wit. Looking self-evident, no one would remark any value in the work of connecting motive and action.

542 “Válese el ingenio para esta malicia critica de la correspondencia entre los términos della; busca siempre alguna correlación proporcional, para que sea con fundamento el concepto” [italics added]. Gracián y Morales, Agudeza, vol.1, 294.
543 “Cuanto más escondida la razón, y que cuesta más, hace más estimado el concepto; despiértase con el reparo la atención, solicítase la curiosidad; luego, lo exquisito de la solución desempeña sazonadamente el misterio”. Gracián y Morales, Agudeza, vol. 1, 82.
Arguing from this premise, it follows that “crisis” causes the unveiling of acts of prudence to appear ingenious thanks to what Gracián calls “reparo” –the evidence that appearances point otherwise than what has been discovered, which appears then shocking, and new. Gracián writes that

crisis has always a greater deal of artifice whenever it exists together with reparo –for then, in addition to showing prudence and judgment, it is also ingenious. 544

The hinge between prudence and wit corresponds to the gap between the two meanings of reparo: it refers to the act through which the wit of the author notices (that is, “repara”) that something in the action hides motives at odds with appearances, but also to the expression in speech of the inconsistency between truth and appearance that allows the reader to perceive that the author’s wit has found something that was not obvious, but rather is the result of his penetration and subtlety in argumentation.

Noticing that something has been effected with a different purpose in mind than the one that everyone accepted as valid unleashes a contest of wits in which the investigator competes first with his object of inquiry and, second, with those who are inquiring along with him. About the former, Gracián writes:

Since acting with artifice and duplicity shows excellence of wit, discovering that artifice, and noticing it, is twice subtle [italics added]. 545

Prudence implies concealing and ciphering purposes. The author’s wit comes upon this and exerts itself to decode the secret:

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544 “Siempre que se junta con el reparo es más artificiosa la crisi, porque a más de lo juicioso, concluye lo ingenioso”. Gracián y Morales, Agudeza, vol. 1, 331.
545 “Así como el obrar con artificio y con refleja nace de ventaja de ingenio, así el descubrir ese artificio, y el notarlo, es sutileza doblada” [italics added]. Gracián y Morales, Agudeza, vol. 1, 288.
He who is prudent acts always with soul, and executes the action with an intention ciphered in speechless actions; then comes he who pays attention to things, and reveals everything through the excellence of his wit.  

This is how Tacitus and Tiberius, respectively historian and agent, have something in common, for it took the wit of the former to unveil the artifice and cunning of the latter. Tacitus, Gracián writes,

exelled in tasteful crises, examining the intentions, and discovering the best dissimulated of artifices […] He has the wisest censures; and it is an uncommon artifice to scrutinize the artifice of another man. There was reciprocity between Tiberius’ malice and Tacitus’ censure.  

Tacitus put his knowledge of politics – of the prudence of the ruler who uses artifice and dissimulation – at the service of his writing.  He used his wit to avoid a mere narration of effects, as he unveiled the motivations for everything his characters did. This is what, according to Gracián, would make him at the same time a great statesman and a great historian:

Cornelius Tacitus, that great oracle for the politicians, the idol of the statesmen, was never satisfied with the vulgar and simple narration of history, which he wrapped with glosses, crises, and judgments. He did not stop at the crust of events, but transcended to the innermost recesses, to the most hidden bosoms of intention.

The wit of the historian takes place through the detection of the prudence of the agent.

546 “Siempre el advertido obra con alma, ejecuta con intención, aunque cifrada en las acciones mudas; llega el atento y descúbrela a costa de su ingenio”. Gracián y Morales, Agudeza, vol. 1, 82.

547 “Se estremó en las apetitosas crisis, examinando las intenciones, y descubriendo el más disimulado artificio […] Desta suerte tiene discretísimas censuras; y es artificio no común el escudriñar el artificio ajeno. Reciprocáronse bien el malicioso Tiberio con el censurador Tácito”. Gracián y Morales, Agudeza, vol. 2, 617-618.

548 The act of “crisis” or judgment presupposes experience of the object being judged, and that is why Boccalini asked of the historian, as discussed above, that he spent time in the courts. The requirement of knowledge in addition to the ability to judge is clear in the context of Aristotelianism. See Carli, “Poetry is more philosophical”, 307.

549 “No se contentaba aquel gran oráculo de los políticos, el ídolo de los estadistas, Cornelio Tácito, con la vulgar sencilla narración de la historia, sino que la forró de glosas, crisis y ponderaciones; no paraba en la corteza de los sucesos, sino que trascendía a los más reservados retretes, a los más ocultos senos de la intención”. Gracián y Morales, Agudeza, vol. 1, 287-288.
Unveiling artifice and cunning serves prudence whenever it helps one to avoid harm or to counter the offensive intended by the other. Considered in discourse, as it “comments upon” or “glosses” the facts accomplished by the one employing craft, it serves to make the author appear ingenious through his skill in penetrating the intentions of the other and, as a result, inspiring pleasure.⁵⁵⁰

Transferring into a handbook of wit the detection of prudence praised by readers of Tacitus since at least the days of Guicciardini also meant a need to rethink the way in which history as a genre is able to bring pleasure to readers. As a matter of fact, Gracián’s *Agudeza* offers an answer to the question as to how the historian is supposed to use invention, and therefore show acuity of wit, despite the fact that, unlike the poet, s/he is not allowed to introduce alterations in the events. Even if Gracián’s views on Tacitus’ way of writing history were not entirely new, he may be credited with a clear understanding of how history becomes the space where acuity of wit as a quality perceived in argumentation obtains a space in history writing thanks to the notion of prudence inherited from the reading of Tacitus inherited from authors like Lipsius.⁵⁵¹

However, as we compare the views that Lipsius and Gracián entertained concerning Tacitus’ histories, we are better able to grasp the scope of Gracián’s contribution. Lipsius argued Tacitus’ superiority over Livy according to the former’s ability to instruct us about “prudentia” through the inspection of the inner lives of the rulers –to make of the reader, as he liked to put it,  

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⁵⁵⁰ “Llega a glosar esta política Tácito y despliega grandes primores”. Gracián y Morales, *Agudeza*, vol. 2, 619. If Tacitus becomes paradigmatic for “crisis”, it is because he is simultaneously copious and subtle, something that he shows by avoiding “vulgarity” whenever he applies himself to being malicious about others, a task to which men are naturally prone. Gracián y Morales, *Agudeza*, vol. 2, 618-619. However, as I will discuss later, there were scholars who saw Tacitus’ tendency to ascribe evil or interested motives to actions in a less positive light.

⁵⁵¹ Even though Gracián avoids the reference to Lipsius, it is certain that he had access to his works. For a discussion of Gracián’s relation to Lipsius’ texts, see Elena Cantarino, “Justo Lipsio en la biblioteca de Lastanosa. Apuntes para las fuentes de Gracián”, in *Memoria de la palabra: actas del VI Congreso de la Asociación Internacional Siglo de Oro: Burgos-La Rioja 15-19 de julio 2002*, ed. María Luisa Lobato and Francisco Domínguez Matito (Frankfurt am Main/Madrid: Vervuert/Iberoamericana, 2004).
“a better man”. Unable to compete in this respect, Livy remained the historian able to make audiences wonder through accounts of prodigies and uncommon events. Gracián took exception to the alternative as he showed the penetration of motives, transformed into a species of the use of wit, not only powerful as a source of wonder, but also more pertinent to history than Livy’s grand and prodigious events. After all, the historian had no responsibility in the latter being so, and therefore, as Cabrera had suggested, the pleasure derived from them was only accidental to the genre. The ability to “gloss” any kind of “policy” with excellence of wit shows the historian, according to Gracián’s treatise, a path by which to be ingenious in the way allowed by the genre. For a wonder more proper to poetry –that of a chain of events that the poet shapes with freedom, making them follow each other in new and unexpected ways–, Gracián’s Tacitus substitutes a wonder proper for historians as investigators of the prudence of public and private agents.

It is worth observing that even those who viewed with derision the proliferation of secrets allegedly disclosed through efforts of conjecture showed awareness that there was a kind of pleasure involved in presuming intentions in the minds of others. Excepting Tacitus from a group he branded “indiscrete historians”, Bartolomé Leonardo de Argensola ironically scorned imitators of the author of Annales like Guicciardini as being “brave, and with a gallant brain”.

552 It is symptomatic that Gracián does not even mention Livy in the section of “Discurso” LXI devoted to style, which was precisely the virtue for which the latter had been traditionally praised.

553 Needless to say, there is a kind of wonder that exists in the field of style or elocutio, and as such one that suits poetry as much as history. This is the case, for instance, of the kind of wonder and of acuity of wit perceptible in metaphors –even though it must be kept in mind that there was agreement about poetry being tolerant to wonder of this kind to a greater degree. There was also a kind of wonder that partially depends on the historian rather than on the material at hand –that is, the events that the course of the world has put before him. I am referring to describing or narrating things in a way that they appear before the eyes, fulfilling the virtue that rhetoricians call “ἐξάργεια” or evidentia. Plutarch had praised Xenophon on this account, and Livy was considered to excel, inspiring marvel thanks to it.

554 “Historiadores indiscretos”, “bizarros y de cerbelo gallardo”. Bartolomé Leonardo de Argensola, Obras sueltas, vol. II, 336. This is part of what the editor of Bartolomé de Argensola’s work in 1889 entitled “Discurso que dirigió Bartolomé a los diputados de Aragón cuando les pidió le hicieran merced de nombrarle cronista del reino”. Some critics date the speech back to the unsuccessful attempt of 1590, although Omar Sanz, not at all implausibly, suggests that it is from 1615. See Omar Sanz, “Bartolomé Leonardo de Argensola, cronista de Indias: ‘Conquista de
The charge seems to denote that, even in the absence of evidence in support of the tricks with which historians like these try to fool whoever reads them, there is no question that they aspire to a sort of admiration. As a matter of fact, they play the role of magicians, introducing themselves into the minds of others through cleverness and wit. Argensola calls them presumptuous: they disrespectfully scrutinize “every soul, even the first impulses”, wanting “their suspicions and divinatory conjectures to be authorized and held for the original determinations behind events and revolutions of kingdoms and kings”.

As discussed above, the dismissal of conjecture in historiography as mere trick was common among those who championed a model of history writing based on documentation, and became a criticism targeted against specimens shaped after what many saw as a misinterpretation of Tacitus’ works.

las Islas Malucas (I)”, in Hombres de a pie y de a caballo (conquistadores, cronistas, misioneros en la América Colonial de los siglos XVI y XVII), ed. Álvaro Baraibar et al. (New York, NY: IDEA, 2013), 170.

555 Argensola’s diatribe deserves to be quoted in full: “I have wondered how one may reduce to the principles of art the ability to learn about the leagues and confederations of the princes, and their meetings, without for that being their ambassador, or their counselor – therefore without enjoying permission to see the papers that contain the secret. And, unless this happens through revelation, I cannot figure out how else it might happen. Is it then convenient for the historian to trust his head so much as to try to guess the counsels of the kings, and to divine who on earth took part in their ruin, and which counselors received briberies in order to be persuaded to do wrong, or the opposite – and, in this way, to unveil for us the souls of men conjecturing just from a hint? There is no use in it, for time opens the secrets for us, and there is none that remains hidden for too long. Let the chronicler wait for them to be disclosed, and examine them with impartial carefulness, not credulous, but with a mature mind; and any other kind of curiosity (at least the one that might imply following our own judgment) is dangerous blindness, and full of unbearable inconveniences: a school of suspicion, and a doctrine that teaches not to keep faith: far from us, in the name of God, such a harmful anatomy” (“he imaginado si puede caer debajo de precepto el poder saber las ligas y confederaciones de los principes y los capítulos dellas, no siendo su embajador ni consejero, ni permitiéndole ver los papeles del secreto, y si no es por vía de revelación, no lo hallo. ¿Por ventura háse de fiar tanto de su cabeza que adevine los consejos de los reyes, y quién participó en su ruina, qué consejeros fueron sobornados para que les persuadiesen lo que no convino, o al contrario, y con estos y con algún indicio descubrirnos las almas de los hombres? No habrá para qué, pues está tan a cargo del tiempo el abrir secretos, que no hay ninguno que lo esté muchos años. A guárdelos el cronista, y examínelos con diligentia desapasionada, poco crédulo, sino muy maduro; y otra curiosidad (a lo menos la deseguir nuestros propios juicios) es ceguedad peligrosa, llena de insufribles inconvenientes, escuela de sospechas y doctrina que enseña a no guardar la fe; lejos de nosotros, por amor de Dios, el querer hacer tan perjudicial anatomía”). Bartolomé Leonardo de Argensola, Obras sueltas, vol. 2, 271; see also Bartolomé Leonardo de Argensola, Obras sueltas, vol. 2, 261. For Argensola’s position, see Agnès Delage, “Tacitisme et hypertacitisme: les écritures du secret politique dans l’Espagne du XVIIe siècle”, in Le partage du secret. Cultures du dévoilement et de l’occultation en Europe du Moyen Âge à l’époque moderne, ed. Bernard Darbord and Agnès Delage (Paris: Armand Colin, 2013), 327-328.
The objects of Argensola’s criticism were works that, according to him and other critics, were not only disconnected from the truth of things, but also failed to comply with verisimilitude—the notion that Cabrera de Córdoba had connected with secrets of the state. The leading voice against Tacitus’ method was Famiano Strada, a Jesuit professor in Rome’s Collegio Romano. More famous to posterity as a historian of the wars of Flanders, Strada published in 1617 a book containing his prolusiones—lectures open to the public at the start of the academic year—, on rhetoric, poetics, and history, a volume that became extremely successful across the continent.556

Strada targets what he sees as Tacitus’ habit of interpreting without proof, and mostly for the worse, the intentions behind any action. This is something the historian shared, according to Strada, with the so-called “politici”, who saw duplicity and deceit in the behavior of everyone.557

556 I quote from the edition of Lyon 1617, almost contemporary with the editio princeps published that year in Rome: Famiano Strada, Prolusiones academicae (Lugduni: apud Horatium Cardon, 1617). In the context of contemporary polemics about style, Roberta Ferro calls the volume “testo programmatico della rettorica gesuitica”. Roberta Ferro, Federico Borromeo ed Ericio Puteano: cultura e letteratura a Milano agli inizi del Seicento (Milano: Biblioteca Ambrosiana; Roma: Bulzoni, 2007), 289. He deals with Tacitus on two occasions: firstly, he devotes to him a speech concerning the legitimacy of incorporating “what they call cunning and political precepts” (“callida & politica, ut ipsi vocant, praecepta”) into the narration of events; then Strada makes Tacitus the focus of the first of two dialogues that discuss the method of writing history. See “An congruenter honestatis, & historicae legibus faciant ij, qui in rerum narrationibus ad callida & politica, ut ipsi vocant, praecepta divertunt, quo loco de Corn. Taciti scribendi ratione multa disputantur”, in Strada, Prolusiones academicae, 25-64; and “An omnia dicere debeat, aliqua omittere possit Historicus: & an iudicia & coniecturae aliena sint ab eo, quae gemino exemplo ad Livianam, Corneliamque scribendi rationem confirmato illustrentur”, in Strada, Prolusiones academicae, 181-213. For Strada and historiography, see Florian Neumann, Geschichtsschreibung als Kunst: Famiano Strada S.I. (1572-1649) und die Ars Historica in Italien (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013).

557 “I find in their history frequent remarks and interpretations, mostly for the worse” (“reperio, crebras horum animadversiones in Historia, interpretationesque in deteriorem plerunque partem”). Strada, Prolusiones academicae, 31-32. The Genoese patrician Anton Giulio Brignole Sale—who filled for a while the duty of ambassador in Spain—aligned himself with Strada when he wrote in his Tacito abburattato (1643) that it is on account of man’s inclination to be malicious that he enjoys arguing bad intentions. See Gaspare de Caro, “Brignole Sale, Anton Giulio”, in Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani, 14 (1972), accessed January 31, 2016, http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/brignole-sale-anton-giulio_(Dizionario_Biografico) The royal chronicler Herrera y Tordesillas voiced a similar opinion when he wrote that sometimes Tacitus looked like a prosecutor rather than a historian: “Tacitus […] full of envy, accuses many with particular eagerness and even pride, that which makes him look more like a prosecutor than a historian” (“El vicio de Tácito […] que imbidiosamente acusa á muchos con particular estudio y profesión, con que viene á parecer mas acusador que historico”). Herrera y Tordesillas, Discursos, 19. Herrera’s discourses contain divergences on the subject of Tacitus that, although they do not affect the kind of characteristics associated to the historian, vary widely in relation to these being valued positively, as in the discourse where Herrera prefers Tacitus before any of the ancient historians, or rather negatively, as in the present case.
Whilst Strada’s criticism does not exclude intentions from the account of the historian, it certainly questions the right to conjecture freely about people’s interiority without proofs to sustain the accusation.\footnote{558} He goes so far as to propose a discussion about the conditions in which the inquiry of intentions is legitimate for the historian. For this, he would stage a dialogue among three speakers. The first, Francesco Benci, was Strada’s professor at the \textit{Collegio Romano}, and appears here in the company of Marc-Antoine Muret, of whom Benci, in turn, was a disciple. Silvio Antoniano, the son of a wool merchant and called to become a cardinal, comes third.\footnote{559} According to Muret, who performs as spokesperson for Strada’s opinion, there is no obstacle to presuming concealed motives for actions whenever there is opinion (“fama”) that ill intent was involved.\footnote{560}

As has been discussed above in connection with Cabrera de Córdoba’s explanation of how to handle the space of verisimilitude that haunts the task of the historian, without agreement among testimonies it is legitimate to “judge”. With none actively suspecting, however, only excess of curiosity or malice would cause the historian to doubt the professed intentions of the agent. In line with this, Strada had provided in his discourse on Tacitus a set of examples in which the historian – at least in his opinion – had found ill will where no one else so far had felt the need to think badly.

\footnote{558} According to Arnoldo Momigliano, “one of the reasons why Polybius became so authoritative was that he offered the best alternative to the obsession with Tacitus which was typical of the intellectual climate about 1585, especially in Italy and Spain. In more than one sense, Tacitus had become irresistible. He offered exactly that mixture of Machiavellianism, moralism, epigrammatic acuteness and pathos which the age liked”. Momigliano, “Polybius’ Reappearance”, 91.

\footnote{559} It is worth mentioning that Muret had been Lipsius’ professor as well, as the latter studied in Rome. Muret, both by himself and through the legacy of Lipsius, is crucial to understand the rise of Tacitus’ popularity in Rome during the 1570s. Gajda, “Tacitus and political thought”, 254. However, for Lipsius’ slighting Muret as editor of Tacitus, see Morford, “Tacitean prudentia”, 130.

\footnote{560} Given Muret’s reputation as a renowned scholar, and his fondness of Tacitus, Strada’s choice of him as spokesperson implies, at least in appearance, a rejection of downright attack, in favor of moderation.
Strada traced a base line for conjecture that involved a reference to the archive: also in connection with the use of dissimulation and deceit, the historian had the right to judge only when some of those who were present or near to the events showed any suspicion. Strada’s criticism points at a distinction that centrally divides the understanding of what the historian is expected to do with the space for verisimilitude that he has to tackle in addition to the certainty of events: in addition to the use of judgment to sift true from false accounts among the sources of documentation, the possibility arises, favored by many followers of Tacitus and attacked by Strada, of using wit (“ingenium”) to conjecture from the events what were the causes motivating them—that is, the intentions within the mind of the agents. For Strada, the absence of witness or proof means that the historian has no claim to argue something that is not visible to anyone:

Could it be that it was allowed to Tacitus alone to penetrate the mind of Augustus, so that he may claim in eloquent and conclusive manner that the emperor had acted with vainglory and arrogantly?  

The readiness to suspicion that Gracián praises in Tacitus as a proof of acuity of wit becomes for Strada a school of suspicion that teaches readers not to keep faith, most expectable from a historian whom many saw as impious. Tacitus would be, for Strada, a proponent of “bad” or “false” reason of state, as he presents a world moved only by the pursuit of self-interest through deceit and dissimulation, where trust (“fides”) is absent from either vertical or horizontal social relations—that is, between the king and his subjects, as well as among the latter. In doing so, the historian cooperates actively in the destruction of life in the community.

561 “Ecqui licuit uni Tacito introspicere mentem Augusti, ab eoque gloriose ac superbe id actum esse tam diserte ac explorare pronunciare?” Strada, Prolusiones academicæ, 34.
562 “Men, made averse to and suspicious of each other, and fearing the perfidy of each other, will go away from the administration of the republic, from the cities and from gatherings of other men, from the sight of each other, and turn to the woods and eat acorn, as cattle do. And there is not a shaft, in my opinion, more harmful and which disarms more thoroughly the faith of men than a history written with the style and cunning (versutia) of which we are talking” (“ipsi inter se mortales aversi, & suspiciosi, sibique ab aliorum perfidia metuentes, ab rerum
For a reader of Oráculo manual, however, the transformation of mistrust from a behavior to be found in the attitude toward men into a method subservient to the writing of history emerges as a natural and sound consequence. As a matter of fact, it results from a paradigm of sociability that had been operational since at least Castiglione’s treatise on The Courtier, written more than a century earlier, and which was then perceived as permeating society from bottom to top. It seemed only right that the historian would update his method and write accordingly.

However, I would like to suggest that the difference between Gracián’s praise of Tacitus’ “curiosity” and the criticism it obtains from Strada and Argensola stems from something more than a different opinion vis-à-vis the way things generally happen in politics and in the relations among men. In addition to this, they seem to be considering Tacitus’ works from the standpoint of radically different genres of writing.

For one thing, Gracián never denies that Tacitus writes with “malice”. As a matter of fact, malice is so characteristic of the author of Annales that, as Gracián greets the reader of Agudeza with a commendation of his book to different kinds of writers, he announces to historians that he would offer them “the malicious saying of Tacitus”. As mentioned above, the kind of wit in

administratione publicarum, ab urbibus, atque conventibus, a communi colloquo conspectuque ad sylvas, & glandes more pecudum redigentur. Atque nullum, mea sententia, est telum, quod tantum infringat ac labefactet humanam fudem quantum historia hoc, de quo loquimur stylo versutiaque conscripta”). Strada, Prolusiones academicae, 31-32.

Herrera y Tordesillas had established, with reference to Augustine of Hippo, that promoting faithfulness (“fides”) among individuals, and between these and the government was central among the functions of history. Herrera y Tordesillas, Discursos, 1. In Botero, “fides” was opposed to cunning (“calliditas”) as attributes related to respectively building and destroying the community. In line with this, Strada identifies Tacitus’ advocacy of mistrust in the interpretation of intentions as impious: “Unceasingly, they dig these techniques out of the recesses of the histories, and study and scrutinize those writers from every period who ever gave precepts of these arts of domination. For since the history of past events instructs about prudence by narration, therefore the political fraud of these writers wears the habits of prudence, so that everywhere it may teach the ugliest ways leading to usefulness under the appearance of honesty” (“haec ex penetralibus Historiarum sedulo rimantur, eoque ex omni antiquitatis memoria Scriptores colunt ac terunt, qui ad hasce dominatrices artes callidoribus praeceptis informant. Quare cum Historia rerum gestarum narratione ad prudentiam instituat: prudentiam vero sic politica istorum fraud imitetur, ut sub honestatis aliena specie, foedissimae utilitatis vias ubique doceat”). Strada, Prolusiones academicae, 27.

Agostino Mascardi called Tacitus “malicious in interpretations” as well (“maligno nell’interpretazioni”). Mascardi, Dell’arte historica, 209. Paganino Gaudenzio would contest Strada’s position in De candore politico in Tacitum diatribae XIX (1646).

which Tacitus excels is precisely that denoted as “critical and malicious”.\footnote{Gracián y Morales, \textit{Agudeza}, vol. 1, 300.} A point that it is necessary to stress is that Gracián does not consider Tacitus within a discussion about historiography, as did Strada and Argensola, but rather in connection with the poet of epigrams, Marcus Valerius Martial.\footnote{Gracián y Morales, \textit{Agudeza}, vol. 1, 288.} Gracián makes explicit the ingredient that ties the two writers together:

From among all the species of wit, those two great censors, Tacitus in prose and Martial in verse, devoted their taste to the present one, and they were eminent in it: a malicious, critical subtlety, and loaded with intention: in sum, any good taste likes it, because it hurts.\footnote{“Aquéllos dos máximos censores, Tácito en la prosa y Marcial en el verso, entre todas las especies de agudeza, a esta dedicaron su gusto, y en ella libraron su eminencia. Sutileza maliciosa, crítica, intencionada: al fin, todo superior gusto la estima porque lastima”. And, in another place: “The artifice of this species of wit lies in discovering the malicious artifice of the actor, and knowing how to comment upon it” (“todo el artificio desta agudeza consiste en descubrirle la malicia artificiosa al que obra, y sabérsela ponderar”). Gracián y Morales, \textit{Agudeza}, vol. 1, 287, 289; malicious wit “censures the artifice of others in their behavior” (“censura el artificio ajeno en el proceder”). Gracián y Morales, \textit{Agudeza}, vol. 1, 300.}

In Gracián’s \textit{Agudeza}, comparing Tacitus with Martial entails placing the criticism of Tiberius’ policies side by side with a jibe about a woman who sought the company of ugly friends in order to appear beautiful in comparison. In both of them, according to Gracián, the author showed acuity of wit by disclosing intentions not considered by others.\footnote{Gracián y Morales, \textit{Agudeza}, vol. 1, 289.}

Far from Strada’s point of view, which ultimately looked for neutrality in the historian, Gracián accepts a confluence between history and epigram or satire. In a certain way, Gracián’s Tacitus is trapped in a sort of circularity exemplified by a statement found in the prologue to Virgilio Malvezzi’s \textit{Discorsi sopra Cornelio Tacito}: “Since [Tacitus] speaks about bad princes, it is no wonder if he blames all the time”.\footnote{“Parlando [Tacito] di principi cattivi, non può far di meno di sempre biasimare”. Malvezzi, \textit{Discorsi}, n.p.} Wicked subjects require malicious historians, but evil
here seems to come *a priori*, as opposed to a conclusion that ought to be arrived at on a case by case basis.

However, there is more going on with Gracián’s notion of “critical wit” than just blame. As early as “Discurso” IV, while he explained that acuity of wit results from the gloss of correspondences between qualities or circumstances of a subject that one notices by “pondering” it, Gracián had stated that the ingenious one finds the proportionality he seeks in two ways: “Either in clever panegyric, or in ingenious crisis –that is, *either praising or blaming*” [italics added].

When someone “glosses a policy” through “crisis”, it is always the case that the cause so far concealed and now revealed, at least if it is to have some kind of impact upon the reader, will be necessarily good or bad, but not indifferent. Though the reason for this is never clearly stated in *Agudeza*, there is a hint in “Discurso” XXXIX that may illuminate the issue. We find there, in a discussion concerning how to answer questions with “agudeza”, the assertion that even interrogations concerning natural matters receive answers in a moral key whenever they aim at looking ingenuous. It is as though the axis of good and bad –as opposed to the necessity and indifference characteristic of nature in terms of ethics– operated somehow in connection with the feeling of wonder experienced by the audience.

In sum, “crisis”, as Gracián writes,

is an artifice that glosses (by means of interpretation or guess, or by twisting things or making them up) the intention, the cause, the motive of the agent – *sometimes with malice (and this is the most usual), sometimes with praise* [italics added].

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570 “Proponense algunas vezes estas preguntas, assi en general, abstrayendo de lo natural, y moral, mas la solución siempre tira a la moralidad” [italics added]. Gracián y Morales, *Agudeza*, vol. 2, 446.
571 “Consiste su artificio en glosar, interpretando, adivinando, torciendo, y tal vez inventándose la intención, la causa, el motivo del que obra, ya a la malicia –que es lo ordinario- y ya al encomio” [italics added]. Gracián y Morales, *Agudeza*, vol. 1, 287.
Gracián himself had tried the panegyric with *El político Fernando el Católico* (1640), following a fashion that had become widely popular since the 1620s. It is precisely in connection with the possibility of glossing events both for good and for bad that he mentions Pliny’s panegyric of Trajan, a work for which he held affection:

In the same way that malice colors with vice the artifice behind an action, flattery may conversely transform that which seemed reprehensible into an object of praise. So did Pliny, in his refined and profound panegyric (that is a perfect example of all this theory of the conceit) gloss Trajan’s excessive donation to the people.\(^5\)

In 1622, Francisco de Barreda had translated Pliny’s panegyric into Spanish, a work that Gracián elaborates as the perfect example of the notion of “critical wit”. In the prologue, Barreda praises Pliny’s work as a peak in the genre, with the leave of Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia*. A mirror of princes, Xenophon’s text had enjoyed a great reputation in the preceding century, but now seemed superseded by a model that we have seen centered on the expression of crisis, oriented toward either satire and blame, such as in Tacitus’ censure, or praise, as in Pliny’s text.\(^6\) The one, much like the other, embodied what Boccalini had called “political salts”. Glossing a narrative by bringing good or bad intentions to light, illuminating the way in which these had succeeded or not, was much in tune with the expectations of 17th-century readers. Francisco de Barreda defined Trajan as “ilustre en todos los monumentos de la prudencia” – a prudence

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\(^5\) “Así como se transforma el artificio de honesto en vicioso a la malicia, así, al contrario, de reprehensible en loable a la lisonja. De esta suerte Plinio, en su culta y grave *Panegíri* – que es una perfecta plática de toda esta teórica conceptuosa – glosó el excesivo donativo de Trajano al pueblo”. Gracián y Morales, *Agudeza*, vol. 1, 298.

\(^6\) From the viewpoint of pedagogy, the preference for panegyric would receive a justification that Barreda was not the first to propose. Praising someone as if he had already done something is more flattering and therefore persuasive than advising to do it: [Pliny] “seems to be praising rather than giving advice: for warning as a teacher results in displeasure, and rebellion; on the contrary, advising that which needs to be done under the pretense that it has been accomplished makes the advice esteemed, and is welcomed by self-love” (“no parece que aconseja, sino que alaba: porque advertir con nombre de maestro, lleva delante el desagrado, y haze rebelde la docilidad; pero aconsejar lo que se ha de hazer, con voz de que se ha hecho; sella el consejo al lado de la estimación, y házelo aposento el amor propio”). Francisco de Barreda, *El mejor príncipe Trajano Augusto. Su filosofía política, moral, y económica; deducida y traduzida del panegyrico de Plinio, ilustrado con márgenes y discursos …* (En Madrid: por la viuda de Cosme Delgado, año MDCXXII [1622]), n.p.
revealed, as one might expect, through Pliny’s conceits of “crisis”, wonderful in the surprise and unexpectedness they provided to the readers.\textsuperscript{574}

In blame or panegyric, Gracián makes clear that the procedure remains exactly the same: everything is about “orienting” the wit in one direction or the other. “Every great wit is ambidextrous”, he writes: “It argues on either side” of a cause.\textsuperscript{575} Gracián adds:

This species of wit does not only judge with malice but also with praise and flattery, which is the opposite end of the subtlety it displays. One must maintain the same method here as there, with the only difference that the subject then glossed with malice, now one should gloss with eulogy.\textsuperscript{576}

Any wit, if versatile enough, is capable of censure and eulogy of the same subject. In fact, twisting objects of praise into blame or vice versa counts as a proof of acuity.\textsuperscript{577}

With history valued in terms of the ability to gloss actions by means of “crisis” through either censure or panegyric, it is easy to see how the fashion of Tacitism engendered a product that comes progressively close to epideictic rhetoric—the genre that speaks of a subject to praise it or blame it— in detriment to the faithfulness to truth presumably sought by the historian.\textsuperscript{578}

The loss is noticeable as long as factuality is considered. Yet, with the genre released from the constraints of veracity, history—or what remains of it—becomes truly a field of experimentation for wit understood as unmaking the prudence of others: pleasure and ethics

\textsuperscript{574} Barreda, \textit{El mejor príncipe}, n.p.
\textsuperscript{575} “Todo gran ingenio es ambidextro”, “discurre a dos vertientes”. Gracián y Morales, \textit{Agudeza}, vol. 1, 181.
\textsuperscript{576} “No solo pondera a la malicia esta agudeza, sino al encomio y lisonja también: que es el otro extremo contrario de su sutileza. Obsérvese el mismo método en este segundo que en el primero, con sola esta diferencia: que lo que allá glosaba el discurso a la malicia, aquí a la alabanza”. Gracián y Morales, \textit{Agudeza}, vol. 1, 294. The same symmetry appears in “Discurso” XXVIII, where crisis results in judgment of wrong no less than of right moves (“ya de los yerros, ya de los aciertos”). Gracián y Morales, \textit{Agudeza}, vol. 1, 315.
\textsuperscript{577} “Transformar un artificio afectado en su contrario no es la menor sutileza”. Gracián y Morales, \textit{Agudeza}, vol. 1, 296.
\textsuperscript{578} Francisco de Barreda was careful to identify Pliny’s panegyric with the epideictic or demonstrative genre of rhetoric. Barreda, \textit{El mejor príncipe}, n.p. It is worth mentioning that Gracián advised moderation in the use of glosses by the historian. For instance, he noted that there were voices raised against Pierre Matthieu because he wrote as an orator rather than as a historian. Gracián y Morales, \textit{Agudeza}, vol. 2, 639.
move to center stage as the connection with the actuality of events fades away. Deciphering so that others learn how to do it is what matters for the historian to earn praise:

There needs to be some artifice and skill in the agent, either true or interpreted – and critical wit happens whenever one notices that art, and that subtle second intention with which he acts.\(^{579}\)

Gracián’s position is furthest removed from the sphere of history writing when he asserts that it is not necessary for the cause interpreted by the author to be the one that actually motivated the action; and that, when the motive is well known, it is preferable to make one up, although entirely false:

Sometimes it is more pleasurable to make up the artifice that informs the action than to express the one that we find in it, and this either because of the novelty in the intention, or because of the subtlety with which it has been made up.\(^{580}\)

Truth is meaningless for the purposes of acuity, which looks instead for verisimilitude with a spark of unexpectedness. The verisimilar here considered differs from the one sought by Cabrera de Córdoba in that it does not introduce itself as a path to ascertain what was actually true. In fact, the wave of Tacitism in the midst of which Gracián would develop the idea of “critical wit” had witnessed the rise of investigations that cast suspicion on verisimilitude,

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\(^{579}\) “Es menester que haya artificio y destreza en el que obra, ya verdadero, ya interpretado, y el notar aquella arte y segunda intención sutil con que obra es la crítica agudeza”. Gracián y Morales, *Agudeza*, vol. 1, 287.

\(^{580}\) “Da a veces más gusto el fingir el artificio en la acción que exprimir el que se halla, ya por la novedad de la intención que se descubre, ya por la sutileza con que se finge”. Gracián y Morales, *Agudeza*, vol. 1, 290. It is worth mentioning that the comment corresponds to one of Martial’s epigrams, not a quotation from Tacitus. The idea reappears a little later on: “Even where there is no room for it, the affected malice may Wittily be made up” (“aun donde no cabe, se finge ingeniosamente la afectada malicia”). Gracián y Morales, *Agudeza*, vol. 1, 292. Regarding a case of panegyric, and more precisely of religion, we also read: “One notices the artifice in the action, either expressing the motive of he who acts, or making up the whole” (“nótase el artificio en el obrar, ya expresando el que hay en el motivo del que ejecuta, ya fingiéndole”). Gracián y Morales, *Agudeza*, vol. 1, 294. Even though verisimilitude may be both more pleasant and useful than truth, it is important to moderate the impulse to argue in a way that might be too convoluted: “I will praise secure rules, not political paradoxes in which reason stretches out dangerously – valuing that which is secure rather than novelty” (“Apreciaré reglas ciertas, no paradojas políticas, peligrosos ensanches de la razón, estimando más la seguridad que la novedad”). Baltasar Gracián y Morales, “El político Fernando el Católico”, in *Obras completas*, ed. Santos Alonso (Madrid: Catedra, 2011), 107.
suggesting that, whereas the verisimilar might be of help in the search for truth, it might also serve to craftily clothe appearances that at bottom are false.

The question became prominent in the treatise *Dell’arte historica*, published in 1636 by the former Jesuit Agostino Mascardi (1590-1640). Rather than opposing the verisimilitude of conjectures and the truth of documents that, after all, were often untraceable, Mascardi was careful to distinguish “two sorts of verisimilar […] one that looks at false things, and the other, aiming at that which is true”. When it coincides with the way things happened, or at least has this in mind, the verisimilar may be considered “the instrument to find out the truth”. As for what the historian knows to bear no relation to actuality in spite of being verisimilar, it is to be cast away from the genre, and left to the poet. Eraldo Bellini has demonstrated that Mascardi’s position clashed directly with Malvezzi’s, as expressed in the prologue “To the reader” of his *Introduttione al racconto de’ principali successi accaduti sotto il comando del potentissimo re Filippo Quarto*, published in 1651. There, agreeing with Gracián’s ideas about the unimportance of being faithful to the truth for every part of history that is not events, Malvezzi made a point about the harangues that the historian can make up and then put in the mouth of the agents. For the speeches “are not those that were pronounced. They are, perhaps, those that should have been spoken –if not the true ones, those that are verisimilar […] One should not neglect what should be in the name of knowing only about that which actually was”.

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581 “Due sorti di verisimile […] una che riguarda il falso, l’altra ch’ha per oggetto il vero”. Mascardi, *Dell’arte historica*, 151.
582 “L’istorico […] il verisimile falso aborrisce […] Adopra talora il verisimil vero, ma come strumento da rinvenire la verità”. Mascardi, *Dell arte historica*, 151.
583 “Non solo quelle che si fecero, forse sono quelle che si dovevano fare, se non le vere, le verisimili […] Non ha l’uomo da negligere quello che aveva ad essere per voler solo sapere quello ch’è stato”. Virgilio Malvezzi, “Lettore”, in *Introduttione al racconto De’ principali successi accaduti sotto il comando del potentissimo re Filippo Quarto libro primo* (In Roma: per gl’heredi del Corbelletti, MDCLI [1651]), n.p. For the analysis of Mascardi’s position in connection with that of Malvezzi, see Bellini, *Agostino Mascardi tra ‘Ars poetica’ e ‘Ars historica’*, 150-151. Malvezzi’s lack of concern with factuality is keenly reminiscent of his way of introducing speeches in *Il Romulo* (1629), where we read: “We can believe that he spoke in this way” (“potiamo credere, che in
Malvezzi lays claim to the right of the historian to prefer the exposition of prudence to that of the truth, and he does so in a way that Gracián had advocated while adding a component of acuity of wit connected to the teaching of prudence whenever it happens in the unmasking of dissimulation. What seems particularly interesting in Malvezzi’s formulation is that the dismissal of actuality in favor of verisimilitude occurs in a text that starts precisely with the author claiming that, as a historian officially appointed and working under the protection of Olivares before his fall, he had been granted access to the archive:

While I was in Spain, I could see in slightly more than a year’s time a great number of original documents of the monarchy from the time of Philip III and Philip IV. They contained Councils and Assemblies of State and War, orders, letters to Ambassadors and to Ministers with their answers, warnings and news, and other things of that kind.584

Through a discussion inherited from sixteenth-century debates on the lawfulness of making up speeches for the characters of history, Malvezzi demonstrates that criticisms such as those by Argensola or Strada, which attacked either Tacitus or his imitators for making up causes instead of looking for documentation, had somehow missed the point.585 Malvezzi may well rely upon evidence and documents from the archive, but the resort to conjecture and verisimilitude of the kind that Mascardi calls “false” nonetheless remains necessary. This is so because, as in the case of Gracián’s search for “crises” that display acuity of wit, genres like the one that Malvezzi

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585 See Bellini, *Agostino Mascardi tra ‘ars poetica’ e ‘ars historica’*, 145-152. In a chapter about Mascardi’s art of history, Bellini traces back to Giovanni Antonio Viperano’s *De scribenda historia liber* (1569) the debate concerning the lawfulness of creating speeches or “orationes” based only upon verisimilitude. For Viperano, see Girolamo Cotroneo, *I trattatisti dell’‘ars historica’* (Napoli: Giannini Editore, 1971), 418-442. In Spain, for instance, the debate was an object of discussion in the correspondence between Antonio Agustín and his friend Jerónimo Zurita. See Agustín, *Opera omnia*, vol. 7, 219.
would popularize with works such as *Il Romulo* (1629) had made teaching prudence and relating to universality a priority.

In a certain sense, Gracián’s commendation of Tacitus as a decipherer of hidden truths is far from the praise that the historian had earned from scholars like Jean Bodin, François Baudoin or even Diego Hurtado de Mendoza: these, as discussed above, conceived of the unveiling of intentions as only a part of a concern with the smallest things (“minima”) of history, in opposition to exclusive attention to the great deeds of great men. For them, after all, Tacitus, much like Polybius, was a source of information of the kind that other traditionally more praised historians had tended to disregard. Tacitus helped them understand institutions, practices and daily habits otherwise lost in the accounts of those who only depict heroic deeds of war. They saw Tacitus in line with a conception of history deeply rooted in the careful reconstruction of worlds now past, and consequently in harmony with efforts to dig out truths from the archive.

Gracián, in contrast, summarized with lucidity a different understanding of Tacitus, by then even more popular, according to which the historian should be a teacher of prudence. Tacitus taught readers how to decipher the mind of tyrants like Tiberius. Gracián completes the view by making his readers aware that in the way that Tacitus opens for us the emperor’s cunning and artifice, he fills us with wonder at the unexpectedness of the motives behind the actions. Consistently, authors of panegyrics fill readers with surprise as they unveil policies that no one had thought of as being the causes for actions that so far had looked indifferent, or even bad. Wit, conceived of as “ambidextrous” and able to twist actions for better and for worse by ascribing different intentions to them, becomes for Gracián and for his contemporaries a way to understand new genres of writing that aim at pairing history and wonder. They make the object of what follows.
3. History and epideixis: the form of wit

Gracián’s method encouraged an understanding of historians as “critics” of actions: they penetrate the intentions of the agents to show them to be different from what one expected, either for better or for worse.

I suggest that Gracián’s perception, where history as a genre is conceived in terms of “epideixis”, is connected with a certain turn taken by works originating in the sphere of Tacitism since the 1620s. While treatises and discourses on prudence, and commentaries on Tacitus, continued to fill the stands of the bookshops, they would lose the primacy as the latest and most popular product of the obsession with the reason of state and prudence.\(^{586}\) But what, then, was the alternative?

Barreda’s translation of Pliny’s *Panegyric* in 1622 does not stand alone in a trend that favors the fragmentation of histories into the lives of individuals (“vidas particulares”), adopting in most cases the form of censure or panegyric.\(^{587}\) For one thing, this had become popular even in official circles. In a letter written from Naples on December 28 1612, Lupercio Leonardo de Argensola, then “coronista mayor” of Aragón, advised the extraction of eulogies from histories of Spain that were already written: this would give more visibility to characters worthy of praise, isolated from everything that foreigners are not interested in.\(^{588}\) It took only a few years for this to become common practice. Since the 1620s, the interest in censures and panegyrics or

\(^{586}\) Virgilio Malvezzi is an example of this. Before he inaugurates a new genre by the end of the decade, he publishes in 1622 a set of discourses on Tacitus’ works under the title *Discorsi sopra Cornelio Tacito*.
\(^{587}\) For a study of the genre of “vidas particulares”, see Agnès Delage, “Las vidas particulares bajo el reinado de Felipe IV: ¿un problema de definición genérica?”, *Criticón* 97-98 (2006).
\(^{588}\) “Sacar encomios de la misma historia […] para que se dilaten entre otras naciones”. Lupercio Leonardo de Argensola, *Obras sueltas*, vol. 1, 371.
individuals had grown in importance and, as Richard Kagan has demonstrated, was at the core of the politics of historiography surrounding Philip IV.  

However, it would be useful to focus on a group of texts that present a series of characteristics calling for a study such as might put them in connection with the link between prudence and wit that so interested Gracián. These, not surprisingly, tend to deal with subjects from ancient history—even if this is not always the case—and often with episodes or characters taken from Tacitus’ works. They exemplify the development of history as a genre, from narration to discourse or argumentation. In doing so, they lean towards rhetoric and, more particularly, to the epideictic or demonstrative genre.

The publication in 1621 of Vincenzo Squarciafico’s translation of *Vida de Elio Seyano* was a landmark in the genre. Originally published in French in 1617, the author Pierre Matthieu drew from the tangle of Tacitus’ *Annales* and singled out the story of Tiberius’ favorite Sejanus. Matthieu placed catchwords and sentences in the margins that referred to the text of Tacitus—and, occasionally, to other authors—out of which he had built a discourse. In a way that would become paradigmatic for 17th-century readers, Tacitus had depicted Sejanus’ rise to power followed by his fall out of the favor of the emperor and his subsequent death—a subject in consonance with the climate of the years that followed Lerma’s and then Uceda’s fall from grace. The success was immediate, and within four years Juan Pablo Mártir Rizo published a second translation of Matthieu’s book under the title *Vida del dichoso desdichado* (1625).

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590 Pierre Matthieu, *Vida de Elio Seyano Compuesta en Francés por Pedro Matheo Coronista del Christianíssimo Luys XIII Rey de Francia. Traducida en Castellano por Vicencio Squarçafigo* (En Barcelona: por Sebastián de Cormellas, MDCXXI [1621]).  
592 In the dedicatory letter to the king, Matthieu had written that the book shows “favors [to be] a precipice for those who abuse them” (“les faveurs sont des précipices pour ceux qui en abusent”). Pierre Matthieu, “Au Roy”, in *Aelius*
Exemplifying the trend to make of censure and panegyric two complementary ends of the
ability to reason (“discurrir”) about history, Mártir Rizo’s Sejanus, a paradigm of evil, would
find a counterpart in two eulogies of virtue embodied in the lives of Seneca and Maecenas,
published by the same author in 1625 and 1626 respectively. These would serve as examples of
the good privado, much like Sejanus represented the bad one.594

The transformations undergone by the genre from Tacitus’ *Annales* to a short biography
in a key of either censure or panegyric might seem less than immediate. Focus on a case study
had been a requirement advanced from the orientation toward “prudence” shown by historians
and scholars since the late sixteenth century. In Trajano Boccalini’s *De’ raggualgi di Parnaso*
(1612), the god Apollo issues an edict whereby historians are prohibited from the composition of
“general histories” of the world. Experience had sufficiently proved that these lend no instruction
to the readers, who in turn benefit greatly from “particular histories, in which they are told not
the things, but their reasons and motives”.595 Boccalini’s distinction favored close observation as
a path for actions to become meaningful and therefore able to impact readers. The difference in
scope translates into one in the kind of writing: from a narration of effects to a discourse on
relations of causality teaching prudence to the audience. In line with this, the focus on the
psychological characteristic of Tacitism led to history being *par excellence* that of some

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593 Mártir Rizo mentions the wish to resume Squarciafico’s work by completing the work started by him. Juan Pablo Mártir Rizo, “Advertencia”, in *Vida del dichoso desdichado* (En Madrid: por Pedro Tazo, 1625), n.p.
594 See *Historia de la vida de Lucio Anneo Séneca, español*… (En Madrid: por Juan Delgado, año MDCXXV [1625]); *Historia de la vida de Mecenas*… (En Madrid: por Diego Flamenco, 1626).
595 “Prohibiamo il poter per l'avvenire compendiosamente in piccolo volume scrivere l'historie universali del mondo… l'esperienza havendo fatto conoscere ad ogni uno, la lettione di cose tanto succintamente scritte, in tutto, e per tutto esser inutile, non essendo possibile da essa cavar quel’abbondantissimo frutto, che si gusta dall’historie particolari, nelle quali non le cose, ma le ragioni, & i consigli di esse si raccontano”. Boccalini, *De' raggualgi di Parnaso*, 247.
individual, turned into an example to be shunned or imitated, ingeniously written as either
censure or panegyric.  

Whereas the model popularized by Matthieu and then by his translator Mártir Rizo would
remain popular until the end of the 1620s, the publication in Bologna in 1629 of Virgilio
Malvezzi’s *Il Romulo* would bring about a change without precedent, first in Italy, and then, soon
after, in Spain. The impact of the book was such that Mártir Rizo himself wrote in the
dedication to Lope de Vega that opens his own *El Rómulo* (1633) that some people at court were
of the opinion that “not even in the entire world would it be possible to find a work that might
compare to his”. Printed in *duodecimo* format with an engraving based on a painting made *ad
hoc* by Malvezzi’s friend Guido Reni, *Il Romulo* underwent several editions, translations, and
rewritings. Mártir Rizo’s book of 1633 was, in fact, a version of Malvezzi’s, but in the style,
by then partially obsolete and old fashioned, of Matthieu’s books.

How was Malvezzi’s book different from the style that had become the brand of Matthieu
and his imitators? For one thing, even though Matthieu would be made the target of the enemies

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596 In a letter that Lipsius addressed on September 5, 1597 to the legal scholar Antonio de Covarrubias y Leyva, he
referred to his book of political advice and examples *Monita et exempla politica*, writing that “the work with
political examples is of a kind germane to history, and will serve as a prelude or a preparatory exercise to write
history” (“hoc de exemplis, historiae accedit scilicet, et erit haec scriptio ad illam velut prolusio et progijsmasma
[sic]”). Ramírez, *Epistolario de Justo Lipsio*, 249. Examples of politics are related to history but remain different
from it. Even more importantly, Lipsius speaks of examples as creating a sort of apparatus upon which the historian
would then proceed to attempt the major genre: they are preliminaries. Contrary to this perception, the blend of
prudence and laconism that Lipsius commended in Tacitus’ writings ended up turning individual histories of
exemplarity into products that look final in themselves, and which, on the contrary, take histories, generally written
by others, as raw material to work upon.

597 “L’effet d’entraînement entre la traduction et la production de biographies originales devient alors évident et
permets de comprendre comment P. Matthieu ouvre, entre 1620 et 1630, la voie à une écriture tacitiste en Espagne”.

598 “Ni aun en el mundo se podía hallar obra que compitiesse con la suya”. Juan Pablo Mártir Rizo, *El Rómulo*... (En
Madrid: por Francisco Martínez, año 1633). For the impact of Malvezzi at court in Madrid, see Jorge García López,

599 For Malvezzi and Reni, see José Luis Colomer, “Peinture, histoire antique et scienza nuova entre Rome et
Bologne: Virgilio Malvezzi et Guido Reni”, in Poussin et Rome. Actes du colloque à l'Academie de France à Rome
et à la Bibliotheca Hertziana, Paris, Réunion des Musées Nationaux, ed. Olivier Bonfait ([Paris]: Réunion des
musées nationaux, [1996]).

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of the so-called laconic style like Agostino Mascardi, Malvezzi’s laconism was in the eyes of both admirers and detractors a more radical expression of the phenomenon.\(^{600}\)

A second, even more important characteristic that Malvezzi’s work seemed to be carrying to a new level was the focus on argumentation and reasoning over narration. As a matter of fact, neither the author nor the readers of the book – to judge from those who wrote preliminaries and evaluations of it – were at all clear about it being exactly a narration. Earlier on, in connection with Matthieu’s works, I have used the word “discourse”. This – itself a hints at Gracián’s conception of Tacitus as someone who “glosses” the actions narrated by history into a form of argumentation – seems to apply particularly well to Malvezzi’s book. The first editor, Clemente Ferroni, premised a notice explaining that the author had wished “to reason” (“discorrere”) about Livy’s first decade\(^{601}\). Il Romulo was only the first in a set of projected lives of the kings of Rome which continued with Il Tarquinio Superbo, published in 1632.\(^{602}\) In each of these, Malvezzi took the narration for granted. He merely adopted the narration from Livy’s first book

\(^{600}\) See Chapter Three for the relationship between laconism and wit in general, and for Malvezzi’s contribution in particular. The bookseller Joaõ Leite Pereira, in the dedication of Malvezzi’s Complete Works published in Lisbon in 1648, identified in Malvezzi’s laconism the reason for his superiority: “Concedo a veneração devida aos escritos dos antigos, admirando con tudo algúns modernos, que não só se podem igualar a elles mas aventejarse, principalmente no estilho laconico, & politico em que se fez tanto lugar o marques Virgilio Malvezzi, especialmente nos tres volumes que este autor compôs de David perseguido, Romulo, & Traquino [sic]”. Joaõ Leite Pereira, “Dedicatoria”, in Las obras del marqués Virgilio Malvezzi. David perseguido, Rómulo, y Tarquino. Traduzido de italiano, por don Francisco de Quevedo Villegas (En Lisboa: por Paulo Craesbeeck, año de 1648), n.p. In line with this, Antonio González de Resende justified in 1634 the publication of a new version of Malvezzi’s Il Tarquinio superbo because, in the one available, the translator “deviated from laconism”, therefore obtaining a product that did not resemble the original. Virgilio Malvezzi. El Tarquinio Soberbio… (En Madrid: Fran.co de Ocampo, [n. d.]).

\(^{601}\) “Hebbe disiderio l’autore di discorrere la prima deca di Livio”. Clemente Ferroni, “Al lettore”; in Virgilio Malvezzi, Il romulo (In Bologna: presso Clemente Ferroni, 1632), n.p. In Il Tarquinio Superbo, the printer presents Malvezzi with the same desire while claiming to have a draft of the remaining lives of the kings of Rome: “Quando mandò alle stampe la vida di Romulo die deitentione (e ne ha disiderio) di stampare anche le vite, che ha hormai finite di discorrere pur de gli altri primi re di Roma” [emphasis added]. Malvezzi, Il Tarquinio Superbo, n.p. Reasoning over Livy’s first decade was precisely what Machiavelli had done, though in a style that bears little or no resemblance to Malvezzi’s. However, the echo is likely to have been obvious to many.

\(^{602}\) With the exception of a life of Numa Pompilius that never saw the light, it would be fair to say that Malvezzi’s project remained limited to the first and the last of the kings of Rome. For his third book, written in a similar style, Davide perseguitato (1634), Malvezzi chose a topic from sacred history.
and, without introducing major changes, he “glossed” everything pertaining to ethics and politics—or, as Ferroni wrote, he “reasoned” about them.

Malvezzi’s translator Francisco de Quevedo would be even more explicit when he applied himself to the genre and wrote *Vida de Marco Bruto*, published for the first time in 1644 but written earlier. For that, Quevedo would translate Plutarch’s *Life of Marcus Brutus* and then divide it into fragments with his commentary appended to each. In fact, we gather from the title of the book that the author followed the text of Plutarch which he then “pondered with discourses”. In the work, the two parts are respectively labeled “text” and “discourse”, thus making explicit the relationship between gloss and glossed text and dispelling any doubt as to where Quevedo’s novelty and contribution were supposed to lie.603

Earlier on, in his translation of *Il Romulo* (1632), Quevedo had claimed that *Il Romulo* had gone further than any other work in the depiction of prudence. In his prologue entitled “A pocos”, he described what he thought to be interesting and new about the book. One may find reunited there terms that had been key in the tradition of Tacitism, together with others that would become standard in the years to come, reaching well into the 1640s:

There were many who wrote Romulus’ life, but no one wrote Romulus. Those in the past were historians of his life, but our author was a historian of his soul. His actions had been read, but not his intentions: the events and not their causes. The marquis wrote the prince; the others, the man. The book is called *Romulus*, not history or life of Romulus, because he does not only say that which we know about him, but that which he knew. He refers what everyone saw together with that which he tried to prevent others from seeing. The marquis has been so diligent deciphering Romulus that, if others had penetrated his intentions while he was alive as well as Malvezzi has done now, he would not have ruled, nor would his brother have died—to such extent does the unknown interiority matter. Grandeur owes more to dissimulation than to valor.604

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603 The book appeared as Francisco de Quevedo, *De la vida de Marco Bruto. Escriviola por el texto de Plutarco, ponderada con discursos*, Don Francisco de Quevedo Villegas ([Madrid]: [Diego Din. de la Carrera], 1644).
604 “Escribieron la vida de Rómulo muchos, mas a Rómulo ninguno. Los pasados fueron historiadores de su vida, nuestro autor de su alma. Avianse leido sus acciones, no sus intentos: los sucesos, no la causa dellos. El marqués escribe el príncipe, los demás el hombre. Llámase Rómulo, no historia o vida de Rómulo, porque no dice sólo lo que
Many of the terms featuring in Quevedo’s programmatic description derive from those that Lipsius, his elder correspondent, had used to characterize Tacitus’ method. According to those, Malvezzi had reached the interiority of Romulus’ mind, peeping deep into his intentions in order to undo the efforts of the latter at concealing both secrets and goals. Quevedo alludes plainly to dissimulation (“that which he tried to prevent others from seeing”) and resorts to the notion of “cipher”, which would be dear to Gracián. However, the identification between the character and the book is new: the latter is not “about” Romulus, but is Romulus himself, and, moreover, it is truly and genuinely Romulus insofar as it presents us with the previously unknown, interior man. Quevedo points here to a feature that became characteristic of the genre: small pocket books, commended as encompassing the soul of one of the actors of history, together with the directions to consider either their goodness or their evil – for each character, a book.

As for the connection between the man and the role he played in politics, Quevedo refers to Malvezzi as depicting “the prince” rather than “the man”. As discussed above, Lipsius referred to Romulus –in a quotation from Cicero– as representative of real politics (“Romulus’ dregs”). Malvezzi echoes the same feeling from the start:

de él se supo, sino lo que supo él. Refiérese lo que vieron todos, y lo que él procuró que no se viesse. Con tal diligencia le ha descifrado el marqués, que sí, como él le ha sabido escribir en su muerte, le hubieran sabido penetrar en su vida, ni él reinara, ni su hermano muriera: tanto vale el interior ignorado. Más grandezas se le deben a la disimulación que al valor”. Francisco de Quevedo, El Rómulo, ed. Carmen Isasi Martínez (Bilbao: Universidad de Deusto, 1993), 109. For a discussion of the implications of Quevedo’s position, see Delage, “Tacitisme et hypertacitisme”, 322. Mercedes Blanco suggests that Quevedo skillfully presented himself as arbiter, and made use of his authority to sanction the shift of taste that comes with Malvezzi’s book. Mercedes Blanco, “Quevedo lector de Malvezzi”, in Actas del Congreso Internacional “Quevedo, Lince de Italia y Zahorí Español” (Palermo, GRISO y Universidad de Palermo, 14-17 de mayo de 2003), ed. Ignacio Arrellano and Enrica Cancelliere ([Pamplona], Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Navarra, 2004).
The facts of the princes do not appear as they truly are. There is epic in narrating them as they appear, but satire in telling them as they are.\footnote{“I fatti de’ principi hanno ogn’ altra faccia, che la vera. Il narrargli come piacciono, ha dell’epico, come sono, del satirico”. Malvezzi, Il Romulo, 1. Malvezzi’s intention to place his instruction in politics within a context of men as they are rather than as they should be is made explicit through a comparison with Xenophon’s Cyropaedia, the treatise that exemplified the virtue of a sovereign in the person of Cyrus the Great and which had enjoyed great success in the sixteenth century. Malvezzi writes that “not every man has Cyrus’ valor” (“non tutti gli huomini hanno il valore di Ciro”). Malvezzi, Il Romulo, 6. In order to commend his censure of Tarquin as more instructive than the panegyrical of a perfect prince: “Everyone is able to shun Tarquin’s vices, but not all of us are able to imitate Cyrus’ virtues” (“possono ben tutti astenersi da’ vitij di Tarquinio, ma non tutti possono imitare le virtù di Ciro”). Malvezzi, Il Romulo, 7; also: “The goodness of the government of a prince lies not in an indivisible point; it has its latitude, and human nature is so depraved that it needs to praise as virtuous him who has no vice, and as the best him who is not evil” (“la bontà del principato non consiste in un punto indivisibile; egli ha la sua latitudine, ed è tanto deprivata la natura humana, che si ha da stimare virtuoso quello, che è senza vitio, ottimo, quello che non è cattivo”). Malvezzi, Il Romulo, 6.}

Malvezzi’s text is not epic, but rather a satire: beneath the appearances, it reveals to us the truth of the policies that Romulus kept secret from his subjects. The opposition between epic and satire introduced by Malvezzi might prefigure, even if not exactly, the one between censure and panegyric later advanced by Gracián—with the difference that the possibility of “glossing policies” for the better is not mentioned here.\footnote{It refers even more directly to the link between history and “crisis”. In fact, in light of the praise that Gracián devoted to Malvezzi and the way he would imitate him since his first work, El héroe (1637), the genre popularized by Il Romulo seems to embody the process through which Gracián’s notion of “malicious crisis” would theorize a new kind of history.\footnote{On September 22, 1637, the historian Andrés de Uztarroz commented on the publication of El héroe by referring to the book as a volume written in the style of Malvezzi. Miguel Batllori, Baltasar Gracián en su vida y en sus obras (Zaragoza: Instituto Fernando el Católico, 1969), 47.} When he asserts that Malvezzi “blends the sententious style of the philosophers with the critical of the historians”, “critical” is used in the technical sense of...}
“crisis” explained by Gracián’s theory of wit, here made typical of history as a genre. It seems fair to conclude that, in Gracián’s view, here in line with Malvezzi’s opening of Il Romulo, it is the exercise of “crisis”, held to be characteristic of history, which turns out to save the latter from the temptations of epic.

Malvezzi’s gloss of Romulus’ actions lets us peep into the kinds of thoughts that led to what everyone was able to see –what Quevedo calls “lo que vieron todos”. Quevedo’s assertion that “el marqués escribe el príncipe, los demás el hombre” establishes a connection between interiority and politics via the use of dissimulation. The opposition between individuality and universality is rewritten in terms of a contrast between the man and the politician: the latter, embodying the use of dissimulation, teaches relations of cause and effect, whereas the former is finite, considered in the singularity of actions impossible to be referred to a system of causes. It is through what Gracián would call “crisis” that the politician replaces the man in the optic of historians like Malvezzi, thus rendering Quevedo’s assertion meaningful.

The use of a story that, so to speak, “everyone” knows –such as that of Romulus’ life and deeds– was also part of what Gracián considered to be the conditions in which the wit of “crisis”

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608 “Junta el estilo sentencioso de los filósofos con el crítico de los historiadores”. Gracián y Morales, Agudeza, vol. 2, 639.
609 Readers and editors of Il Romulo and Il Tarquinio Superbo express time and again the idea of uncovering and then showing the ruler as he actually is. Without need to list all the witnesses that practically repeat one another, this is what the editors Salvioni and Grisei wrote in their edition of Il Tarquinio Superbo of 1632: “Senz’alcun neo di simulazione la scopre qual ella fu”. Malvezzi, Il Tarquinio Superbo (In Macerata: appresso gli heredi di Pietro Salvioni, & Agostino Grisei, 1632). “Ella” refers back to “simulazione”, which the historian entirely unmakes so as to provide his readers with an account where riddles have been solved up to the last and smallest piece.
610 Quevedo’s statement is likely to be a modified version of Malvezzi’s “I will write about the man, rather than about this man; for the latter dies, but the former stays” (“scriverò più dell’huomo, che di cotest’ huomo, perché cotesto muore, e quello vive”). Malvezzi, Il Romulo, 3. Gracián would use similar terms as he dedicated to the Duke of Nocera El político Fernando el Católico (1640). He describes the book as “no tanto cuerpo de su historia, como alma de su política; no narración de sus hazañas, discurso sí de sus aciertos; crisi de muchos reyes, que no panéngiris de uno solo”. Gracián y Morales, “El político Fernando el Católico”, 107. Translating the book into Latin, Johannes Kruus would take the typification of a prince versus a tyrant exemplified, respectively, in Romulus and Tarquin, to the title of each of the books, which he called Princeps and Tyrannus.
performs best. In fact, as he writes, when the events are taken for granted, the gloss of causes that the historian interprets for them renews and infuses life into cases that otherwise belong to the past. This is why, according to Gracián, Malvezzi excelled more in his lives of ancient kings than in his works about the present, where the narration itself needs approval, and the author cannot focus exclusively on the commentary. In the former, Gracián writes, Malvezzi “takes the history for something that everyone knows, to which he then applies his commentary”.  

Malvezzi’s lives of Romulus and Tarquin seem to be at the root of Gracián’s reading of Tacitus as much as Tacitus’ works themselves were. Gracián gave theoretical form and codified in terms of a type of wit a product of the reading of Tacitus that entailed taking a distance from traditional history writing insofar as the desire to learn about the events is absent, and might be considered even as a nuisance for the genre. The wonder originating in the novelty of events fades out to make room for the surprise at the causes newly interpreted by the wit of the author.  

Gracián’s position, however, was not a new one. While it was certainly greatly relevant due to the degree of theoretical awareness that he conferred to the genre of “vidas particulares”, the latter rested upon notions that were commonplace since at least the 1630s, and even earlier.  

To illustrate this, we may resort to a tale involving two characters familiar to us, such as the marquis Malvezzi and Philip IV’s ambassador in Venice, Juan Antonio de Vera y Zúñiga, whom we mentioned earlier in connection with his treatise El enbaxador. Malvezzi, so the story goes, would be one of the personalities whom Vera y Zúñiga tried to engage to be at the service of his patron, the Count-Duke of Olivares.  

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611 Then Gracián adds: “With this, [Malvezzi] has been more celebrated for the old subjects that he renews than in the modern ones that he makes known” (“Supone […] sabida la historia a lo llano, echa él después su comento, así ha sido más célebre en lo antiguo que renueva que en lo moderno de que da noticia”). Gracián y Morales, Agudeza, vol. 2, 639.  
612 Vera played a most singular role following his arrival in Venice in 1632. From the start, he would take in his hands the absorption of any possible talent or energy for the cause of the Spanish crown against Pope Urban VIII, and especially in support of Olivares’ person and policies. At the peak of his inclination to extravaganza, we find his
With the consent of Olivares, Vera contacted Malvezzi in 1634 to have him write a panegyric of the Count-Duke. The ambassador started sending the materials to Malvezzi and applauded the latter’s decision to write the panegyric after the model of *Il Romulo*:

> You have made the right choice, in my opinion, adjusting the life of the Count Duke to the manner of *Il Romulo*. For, indeed, subjects that are merely political and need not to express any deeds of Mars or Neptune do not require any other genre of history.

We find, more than half a century later, a remnant of Lipsius’ opposition between politics and grandeur, as he had exemplified respectively with Tacitus and Livy. For a history focused on politics, Vera writes, there is nothing like the manner of “discourse” – which Gracián would call “gloss” – used by Malvezzi.

But Vera y Zúñiga did not step away after having engaged someone with the reputation of Malvezzi. Still in Venice, on July 28 1640 he answered a letter from a friend of the latter, Giovan Battista Manzini, who had offered his services to cooperate as historiographer and panegyrist of the king. Vera explained to Manzini the way in which he had provided materials...

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*Essequie poetiche di Lope de Vega* – an homage paid in 1636 to the deceased “fénix de los ingenios” by (or at least, so it was claimed) the poets of Italy, which has recently been claimed as orchestration of his: “Hasta fechas recientes, las *Essequie* han sido consideradas por los historiadores de la literatura como uno de los más importantes testimonios de la fortuna de Lope de Vega en Italia. Hoy sabemos que la operación fue orquestada desde Venecia por el embajador español”. José Luis Colomer, “El conde de la Roca y el marqués Virgilio Malvezzi. Dos diplomáticos panegiristas del conde duque de Olivares”, in “Por discreto y por amigo”. Mélanges offertes à Jean Canavaggio, ed. Christophe Couderc and Benoît Pellistrandi (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2005), 527.

For more on Vera y Zúñiga as a scholar at the service of Olivares, see Kagan, *Clio*, 223-227.

613 “V. S. I. ha hecho a mi parezer la mejor elección tratando de ajustar la vida del Sr. Conde Duque en la manera que El Rómulo, porque verdaderamente los sugetos meramente políticos que no tienen sucesos de Marte o Neptuno que expresar no requieren otro género de historia” [italics added]. Quoted in Colomer, “El conde de la Roca”, 518.

614 It is hardly a coincidence that Vera y Zúñiga, in his role as a mediator between Spain and Italy, has turned out to be the focus of scholars like Colomer – who has studied the relationships between Italy and Spain in the fields of literature and the visual arts – and Clizia Carminati – who has produced extremely suggestive findings in the approach to laconism and acuity of wit in seventeenth-century stylistic theory. See Carminati, “Alcune considerazioni”, passim.

615 Carminati, “Alcune considerazioni”, 110. The letter is in Archivio di Stato di Bologna, Fondo Fantuzzi-Ceretoli 273/15. By then, Malvezzi had already spent some years at the court of Philip IV and had been ambassador to him in England. In addition to the text prepared by instigation of Zúñiga, eventually published in 1635 with the title...
for Malvezzi’s works –things that only a statesman like him could have known. Of course, he would do the same for Manzini: he would give him access to “knowledge of the hidden things about the events that happened in Italy in recent times, the causes of any changes”.

Vera went on to explain that hidden causes should play a role in the history that Manzini was expected to write, and indicated the genre to which the work should belong.

Whereas, according to him, the panegyric is best suited to shine through conceits (“luzir concetos”), abuse of the form has rendered it less and less prestigious: Manzini’s style, therefore, has to aim at something bigger. And since there is no occasion for a history –a general one–, with the request for “so much knowledge and circumstances, and abundance of time”, a mean term might be to write the history of ten years.

Vera y Zúñiga seems to be looking for a panegyric that is not one –namely, a history, the timespan of which is reduced enough to allow for the gloss of causes to feature center stage. It might be that another historian like Malvezzi or Capriata had told the same events earlier, but this, as Vera reassuringly affirms, is less important than the way in which they are commented upon. It is in the considerations that historians make about the facts, pointing to causes that appeared dubious before and less than obvious to everyone, that they differ from the people.
The panegyric that Vera refuses to call that seems to be a genre of history writing that, following the model of Malvezzi, would gloss the events with causes so as to help them appear in a better light than the way in which the general opinion had valued them so far. Manzini would unveil causes that, as Gracián would suggest two years later, would use “critical wit” in the modality that transforms vice into virtue:

>You will have much to say about the piety and justice of His Majesty, about the zeal and skill of the Count Duke, about the valor of the Spanish forces. You will have much to do to make clear that some negative events have been inglorious because Spain preferred to undergo danger and risk than to entrust itself to the unfaithfulness of badly kept compacts [italics added].

From the passage it is clear that the gloss is going to be in the direction of praise: Manzini has before him the task of making what Gracián calls “crisis” by bending the opinion of why and for what purpose things were done. Basically, it is about cleansing Spain’s reputation and that of Olivares by substituting a new cause, concealed to everyone so far, to the one that had become vox populi.621

Vera’s recruit campaign among Italian writers shows that modern subjects were (almost) as adequate as ancient ones for the kind of “discourse” or “gloss” that delved deep into the soul of individuals, adopting the form of “vidas particulares”.

However, antiquity still provided subject matter for the majority of the titles. In 1642, within months after the printing press of Juan Sánchez in Madrid issued Gracián’s Arte de

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620 Tendrá V. S. bien de que dezir de la piedad, y la justicia de S. M., en el celo y destreza del conde duque, en el valor de las armas de España, en declarar que algunos malos sucesos dellas an sido más gloriosos por haberlos causado querer España peligrar en los riesgos antes que en la infidelidad de los pactos mal cumplidos” [italics added]. García Cueto, Seicento boloñés, 367.

621 This also continues what Esteban de Garibay’s Traça had proposed to Philip II. Recognizing “that ‘truth’ in history was a relative matter, and that different nations would necessarily have different interpretations of the causes of war, rebellion, and other important events, he recommended “that, with assistance from the Inquisitor General, histories written by secretaries of the kingdoms and provinces of the apostates be brought here and read, in order to better respond to their calumnies and evil objections”. Kagan, Clio, 140. For yet another case of propagandistic history as a way to clean the image of the state, see Kagan, Clio, 214-223.
ingenio, tratado de la agudeza –the first and preliminary version of the book–, the same printer published a volume entitled Séneca y Nerón. The book went under the name of Fernando Álvaro Diez de Aux y Granada, a pseudonym for Juan Francisco Fernández de Heredia, a nobleman from Aragón.  

A notice by the bookseller Pedro Coello, who had defrayed the expenses of the edition, explained that the book in question was a much cherished project that he had been pursuing to promote in Spain the popularity of a genre that was triumphant in Italy –in what seems more than likely to be an allusion to Malvezzi’s works:

I have worked for two years to obtain permission from the author of Séneca y Nerón, in order to print such a learned work. In doing so I have looked more for the honor of our language in this kind of style than for my utility. I have seen celebrated other books of this genre which were born in Italian –and, unless the misfortune of being a Spaniard among his own people becomes a curse for it, I will have to give it back to the presses more than once.

Coello’s prediction was not entirely misguided, for the book saw a second edition in Lisbon in 1648. Coello’s interest in the publication of the book is proof of the enthusiasm that the genre started by Malvezzi, and theoretically accounted for in Gracián’s treatise, raised in Spain at the start of a decade that would see titles of the kind proliferate without number.

The language used by Heredia in the prologue of the book resounds with the terms that appear in the different “aprobaciones” that precede it. All resort to a jargon that was regularly in

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622 Fernando Álvaro Diez de Aux y Granada, Séneca y Nerón (En Madrid: por Iuan Sánchez, a costa de Pedro Coello, mercader de libros, año 1642).

623 “Dos años ha que solicito el conseguir permissión del autor de Séneca y Nerón para imprimir tan estudiosa tarea, ambicioso más del honor de nuestro lenguaje en este género de estilo, que del útil que se me sigue; veo aplaudidos otros libros deste genio que nacieron en toscano, y si a este no se le sigue la infelicidad de ser español entre los suyos, avré de repetir más de una vez las prensas”. Pedro Coello, “Al que le compré”, in Diez de Aux, Séneca y Nerón, n.p. Coello’s notice is absent from some exemplars of the book. It is present in the one preserved in Biblioteca Nacional de España. It is worth mentioning that Coello was also behind the publication of Quevedo’s 1632 translation of Malvezzi’s Il Romulo.

624 Fernando Álvaro Diez de Aux y Granada, Séneca y Nerón (En Lisboa: por Manoel Gomes de Carvallo, MDCXXXXIII [1648]). In 1680, the book was published again under the true name of the author.
use since Quevedo’s preliminaries to Malvezzi’s *Il Romulo* and that would reappear in Gracián’s *Agudeza*.

What Heredia accomplishes, or at least tries to in his book, according to the prologue, is “to reason / to argue Seneca” [*sic*] (“discurrir a Séneca”). This, he writes, is more daring than merely narrating his story.625 The book investigates Seneca’s “interior” rather than “his steps”, even though the latter—his actions taken, what is exterior and visible—provide the material for the inference of the former. The result of what Seneca did matters less than the aim he was pursuing, and it is the penetration of this that requires a wit.626 Later in the prologue, Heredia draws back and says that instead of a discourse about Seneca, he is going to make “a copy” of him.627 For the composition of the book, the author claims to have gathered more abundantly from Seneca’s “hidden desires than from his clear maxims—the former always happy, the latter, instead, sometimes human”.628 The bookseller Pedro Coello uses similar terms, for he describes the virtue of Heredia in terms of a voyage to the depths of Seneca’s mind: “He is admirable /

626 “Después de aver amado las obras deste insigne varón, y aborrecido las de Nerón, he inquirido sus pensamientos […] Pienso en estudiar otra vez a Séneca […] su interior, digo, no sus passos […] más que su vida, lo que quiso en ella, su elevación, no se ha [*sic*] delinear de sus obras”. Díez de Aux, *Séneca y Nerón*, n.p. Gracián had resorted to something similar in the preamble to *El politico Fernando el Católico*, where he describes whatever has remained of the king—what he did and said—as a hieroglyph of a truth that he kept inside: his policies are to be glossed in order to clarify the truth of the interiority of the king. The accounts containing the actions of the king are “many pieces that his own royal and Catholic hand made eternal; misshapen signs, but full of spirit; a twofold oracle due to both the arcane of the writing, and, even more, the depth of his thought” (“hallarme digo, con muchas noticias eternizadas por su propia real católica mano; deformes caracteres, pero informados de mucho espíritu; oráculo dos veces por lo arcano de la inscripción, y más por lo profundo del pensamiento”). Gracián y Morales, “El político Fernando el Católico”, 107. As in the case of Heredia and Seneca, what King Ferdinand did and the world could see of him is but the material for Gracián to “reason” (“discurrir”) what he aimed at in his soul.
627 “No he de discurrir a Séneca, cópiolo porque lo veneramos, estudiolo porque lo admiramos, dibúxolo porque lo comprendamos, estoico perfecto, filósofo santo”. Díez de Aux, *Séneca y Nerón*, n.p. The use by Mateo Sánchez of the term “copy” in exactly the same context in 1652 attests for the shared language of the genre, and, perhaps, for a degree of theoretical consistency. In reference to Epaminundas [*sic*], we read: “I will copy this illustrious subject” (“copiaré este insigne sujeto”), Mateo Sánchez, *Vida de Epaminundas príncipe thebano, escrita por el texto de Aemilio Probo y ponderada con discursos morales y políticos* (En Valencia: por Claudio Macé, año 1652), n.p.
wonderful in Seneca’s depth”.629 Fray Gregorio Niseno’s “aprobación”, in turn, would insist on the author’s “reasoning” through gloss and argument when he calls him “argumentoso”.630 This, as a matter of fact, represents the core of the transformation that turned history writing, as Gracián understood it, into a place for acuity of wit to perform and excel –namely the passage from narration, where wit cannot exist if the events are to be left untouched, to argumentation about the causes of the events.

Sharing the same year of publication and the same printing press, Fernández de Heredia’s book and Gracián’s Arte de ingenio appear as the two sides, respectively praxis and theory, of the notion of “critical wit” in the two orientations it may take, as censure and panegyric, which appear here embodied in Nero and Seneca.

Three years later, Luis de Mur’s Tiberio ilustrado (1645) emerged from the presses of Aragón to add to the body of “critical wit”. The volume owes much to Malvezzi’s lives of Romulus and Tarquin, but also to Gracián’s El político Fernando el Católico (1640).631

As with Fernández de Heredia’s book, the preliminaries of Tiberio ilustrado incorporate the language that Gracián had absorbed from Malvezzi and his successors. Juan Baptista de Íñigo’s “aprobación” praises “subtlety in noticing” (“la sutileza en el notar”). If, as mentioned in the introduction, “sutileza” is synonymous with “agudeza” and denotes the faculty to penetrate the connections among things, and, in ethical and political matters, the connections between motive and action, in the present chapter I have shown that “notar”, as well as “reparar”, refers to the perception of something odd or suspicious that prompts the wit to unveil something deeper,

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630 “Nunca se vio más solicita y argumentosa abeja”. Pedro Niseno, “M. P. S.”, in Fernando Álvaro Diez de Aux y Granada, Séneca y Nerón (En Lisboa: por Manoel Gomes de Carvalho, MDCXXXXIII [1648]), n.p.
631 Luis de Mur, Tiberio, ilustrado con morales, y políticos discursos (En Zaragoça: por Diego Dormer, año 1645). Dormer had also published Gracián’s El político five years earlier.
and somehow truer: with “acuity”, it “reasons” (“discurre”) and “glosses” and restores proportionality by means of a commentary. In doing so, according to Íñigo, the author “shows Tiberius’ cautiousness” (“muestra lo cauteloso de Tiberio”)—that is, he unveils the procedures of dissimulation that the emperor used to reach his aims.

In a letter to Mur after Íñigo’s “aprobación”, Francisco Vicente de Montosa, “señor de Mora”, describes the work as the exercise of “deciphering Tiberius”. The maxims that result therefrom, he writes, are “a cipher of the best policy”. This points to a way, most typical in texts of the genre, of conceiving the reversibility of wit and prudence: wit unmakes or deciphers astute and shrewd actions, but insofar as it encloses it in a discourse, it so to speak ciphers it again, now with a commentary. This, in turn, results from the duplicity inherent to the meaning of “cipher”, as registered in Covarrubias’ 1611 Tesoro: it means enigmatic inscription, but also the sum of something. The wit of the author works with the former to bring about the latter.

“Critical wit” restores the individual that it takes as the object of “reasoning” or “discurso” by means of a commentary that renders him exemplar of a set of principles with universal value. In this case, it delves within the interiority of Tiberius to obtain rules of prudence or political skills. However, as it does so, it brings about a pleasure associated with the process of unveiling or deciphering. Moreover, as it unfolds the prudence of Tiberius, it does so through maxims that Montosa describes as being “mysterious” themselves, meaning that they require from the reader, in turn, a process of deciphering.

This, of course, gives rise to a process of decoding that, as mentioned above, is both ingenious and pleasurable: it requires from the reader a degree of acuity of wit able to keep pace

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632 “Descifrando a Tiberio, son una cifra de la mejor política”. Francisco Vicente de Montosa, “Al licenciado Don Luis de Mur”, in Luis de Mur, Tiberio, ilustrado con morales, y políticos discursos (En Zaragoça: por Diego Dormer, año 1645), n.p.

633 Covarrubias y Orozco, Tesoro de la lengua castellana, 280v-281r.
with the one demonstrated by the author. Montosa would close his praise of Mur’s volume with a sonnet, where he describes Tiberius’ dissimulation as putting a cloak or covering (“rebozo”) over the evil the committed, described as cautious (“cautelosa maldad”). The use of “rebozo” for the purpose of dissimulation turns vice into appearances of honesty (“honestar de vicio el vituperio”). As Gracián had described, there is a kind of reciprocity between the author and the agent, as the former takes away the cloak that the former had worn. Both wearing it and taking it off require acuity of wit, although the latter, Gracián had stated, surpasses the former. According to the sonnet, Mur’s book “deciphered the mystery, / uncovering the truth that simulation had obscured”.

Mur’s prologue to the reader, however, is more caustic than the preliminaries just studied. These maintained, generally speaking, the optimism of Gracián concerning the proportionality between the way prudence ciphers and the decipherment accomplished by the historian. Mur starts his description of Tiberio ilustrado in terms that echo Quevedo’s evaluation of Malvezzi’s Il Romulo, or Fernández de Heredia’s terms about Séneca y Nerón: the book is a sort of epitome, not of Tiberius “history”, but of “his life”. This amounts to saying that it is not about actions, or anything external, but rather the inner life of the emperor. Mur proceeds with a claim:

I have attempted to decipher that which [Tiberius’] cunning kept under cover. It will be an achievement to understand him who seemed inscrutable during his lifetime.

The term with which Mur denotes the impenetrability of Tiberius’ prudence is “inapeable”. It is, not surprisingly, the one used by Gracián five years earlier to describe

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634 For the relationship between wit and the cooperation of audiences or readers, see Chapter Four.
636 “He pretendido descifrar lo que recató su astucia. Mucho será entender muerto al que vivo pareció inapeable”. Mur, Tiberio ilustrado, n.p.
Ferdinand the Catholic.  What appeared in Gracián as a trait of “good reason of state” becomes in Tiberius a source of evil. The commonality of language confirms once again the idea that prudence and reason of state, insofar as they require dissimulation, may serve purposes worth either praise or blame—and so historians should treat them, and ascertain through identical tools the good or evil that lies behind each case.

However, as Mur describes the process of deciphering Tiberius—and even though this is probably a kind of exaggeration intended to set the tone of the book in terms of ethical and political stance—, he resorts to terms that look blunt and simple, and threatens to undermine Gracián’s upholding of “critical wit” as a tool with some validity for the task of unmaking and unmasking prudence:

With only one [sc. truth] one can decipher all the deeds and words of Tiberius, for in order to sound his depth it is enough to say that everything that he said and did was a lie. Knowing that he always wanted that which he dissimulated, and that he dissimulated everything that he wanted may serve as a commentary of his life, and the key to decode his ciphered deceits. His text does not need a more attentive gloss, nor does his doctrine require any other observations.

Once again, the metaphor of depth (of the soul) made into the object that writing tries to unveil reappears in terms like those found in the description of Séneca y Nerón by the bookseller Coello. Furthermore, depths are described here in terms of being sounded (“sondar”). The notion of “sonda” was key in Gracián’s El héroe (1637), where the ability to sound each other’s “caudal” or capacity while not being sounded by others represented the first step to succeed. As

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637 “Un príncipe sagaz, Argos real que todo lo previene; émulo de Jano, que mira a dos haces; de fondo inapeable, con más ensenadas que un océano”. Gracián y Morales, “El político Fernando el Católico”, 124.

638 “Con una [sc. verdad] se descifran todas las obras y palabras de Tiberio, pues basta dezir que fue mentira quanto dixo, y quanto obró, para sondar su profundidad. Sea el comento de su vida, y la contracifra de sus engaños, el saber que siempre quiso lo que disimuló, y que disimuló lo que quiso. No necessita de más atenta glosa su texto, no de más observaciones su doctrina”. Mur, Tiberio ilustrado, n.p. It as though, somehow, the gesture of deciphering was more important than the outcome of the process.
discussed above, the notion would become a true leitmotiv in *Oráculo manual*, published only two years after Mur’s book in 1647.

The preceding may serve as a discussion of works generally referred to as “historias particulares” or “vidas”, consistently described as performing a decipherment of the prudence of the agents, which they then subsequently re-cipher through a blend of narration and laconic maxims. Decipherment occurs in terms defined as “discourse”, “commentary” or “gloss”. The material that serves as a basis is doubtless a narration, and yet the product that is obtained from the gloss is only partly one.

The respective roles of narration and commentary in texts of this kind received paradigmatic treatment in Malvezzi’s preface to *Successi principali della monarchia di Spagna nell’anno MDCXXXIX* (1640), a book mentioned by Vera as useful to be shared with Manzini in order for the latter to write his history. This is how Malvezzi’s statement sounded, quoted at length from a translation into English which appeared in 1647:

I confess I use my uttermost skill to not write a history with a plaine narration and that I employ the uttermost of mine understanding to set it out […] The Tuscan aires, the Ruggierie and Romancies, & other touches, songs and daunces are playd in the streets, and market places, and also in the royall palace. The merchant, the citizen, the gentleman, and the king also goe clothed in silke; but those which are playd in the royall pallace, are playd leisurely with learned counterpoints, touched with foraigne daintinesses, stopps, quavers, accents, and spirits. This place on most noted dayes clotheth the kings person, in a habit woven with gold and gemmes, embroidered and garnished; and so great is the art and workmanship, that the least thing that is heard in the one is the basso, and that is seene in the other is silke. If royall things are so different from city ones, who shall blame my histories onely for the manner of it?  

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639 Virgilio Malvezzi, *The Chiefe Events of the Monarchie of Spaine, in the yeare 1639*. Written by the marquesse Virgilio Malvezzi, one of his Majesties Councell of Warre. Translated out of th’Italian Copy by Robert Gentilis Gent. (London: printed by T. W. for Humphrey Moseley, 1647), n.p. The original reads: “Confesso […] che pongo ogni arte per non iscrivere una historia con simplice narrazione e che adopro ogni mio spirito per adornarla […] Suonansi l’arie di Toscana, i Ruggieri, le Romanesche, & altre toccate, canzoni e balli, nelle strade, nelle piazze, & anche nel palazzo reale. Vestesi di seta il mercante, il cittadino, il gentilhuomo, & anche il rè. Ma quelli nella reggia sala si suonano passeggiate con dotti contrapunti, toccati con peregrine delicatezze, grate, gruppi, trilli, accenti, e spiriti:
Malvezzi justifies his style as a historian through a metaphor that projects social status – or the distinction between the nobility and the people – onto music and clothing. The square and the marketplace may well favor different tastes when compared with the court, but they are built upon something that is common to both. Plain melodies such as those that charm the crowd in the streets find a path to the palace, where they become artful thanks to the use of “contrapuntos”. These “gloss” the notes, borrowing inspiration from and agreeing with them – while making them less noticeable in the process. Likewise – so claims Malvezzi – the jewels sewed onto the silk hide the fabric that gives them the chance to exist and display a pattern.

Glossing or reasoning (“discurrir”) upon the events of the narration is history’s equivalent of “contrapuntos” and jewels. “Contrapuntos” are described in terms of “delgadeza” – or delicacy, and thinness –, a term that usually acts as equivalent to “sutileza” and “agudeza”, embodying like these the metaphor of a wit that is sharp and thin enough as to be able to penetrate the innermost secret. In addition, the metaphor of wit as consonance is also well-known to readers of Gracián’s *Agudeza*, in which the act of finding proportions in the intellectual sense is equated to harmony and consonance in music.  

We are nearly a century removed from the days when Juan Páez de Castro pronounced history superior to “consejas” that old ladies tell the children”, in a reference to accounts deprived

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640 “What beauty means to the eyes, and harmony to the ears, such is the conceit for the understanding” (“lo que es para los ojos la hermosura, y para los oidos la consonancia, eso es para el entendimiento el concepto”). Gracián y Morales, *Agudeza*, vol. 1, 21-23. Alonso de Castillo Solórzano was obviously referring to the fashion praised by Malvezzi and Gracián when he speaks dismissingly of the habit of “using conceits when writing history” (“conceptuar en la historia”). Alonso de Castillo Solórzano, “Prólogo”, in *Epitome de la vida y hechos del ínclito Rey Don Pedro de Aragón, tercero deste nombre, cognominado el grande* (En Zaragoça: por Diego Dormer, año 1639), n.p.
of explanation of causality, which are of no instruction despite the fact that they may appeal to the crowd. History, unlike these, would incorporate the causes into the narration of events.\textsuperscript{641} Malvezzi’s reframing of the superiority of history over mere narration of events takes place by resorting once more to a difference in taste and status. However, it presents the readers of histories with characteristics that differ widely in relation to the model proposed by Páez: on the one hand, the content of the causes has been narrowed down to an analysis of ethical and political “prudence”; moreover, the way in which causality is present in the narration has adopted a form that supplements the account by “glossing” actions and choices in a way that fosters the perception of those as “mysteries”, which the author, with acuity of wit, has been able to illuminate.

It was in connection with the idea of “contrapunto” that Malvezzi had proposed in \textit{Discorsi sopra Cornelio Tacito} (1622) –a distinction that proved to what extent the reciprocity between wit and prudence embodied by Malvezzi’s poetics of history and theorized in Gracián’s \textit{Agudeza} was in tune with late sixteenth-century theorizations of wonder, such as those reviewed in Chapters One and Two. According to Malvezzi,

Things provide pleasure of two sorts, either from the senses, or from the intellect [...] in music [...] the sense of hearing, whose object is sound, partakes of the former; whereas the intellect partakes of the latter. For, \textit{since he knows the artifice} of the composer as he creates the counterpoints, and avoids roughness, he takes extreme pleasure. The first kind of pleasure is common to everyone who has ears, while the other belongs to him who knows. This is the case in painting as well, for the pleasure of he who enjoys the beauty of colors and the image differs from the one of he who appreciates the good disposition, and the imitation of the muscles. For this pleasing insofar as \textit{he could not have obtained pleasure if he had not had the knowledge in question, and therefore he receives pleasure from the knowledge of the other inasmuch as he notices his own} [...] Tacitus proves to be most pleasant to those who study the historians with their intellect, not caring if he writes better Latin, or if Caesar does [italics added].\textsuperscript{642}

\textsuperscript{641} Páez de Castro, “Memorial ... para escribir Historia”, 27.
\textsuperscript{642} “Due spetie di gusto si possono ricevereda una cosa; l’uno da’ sensi, l’altro dall’intelletto [...] nella musica [...] del primo participa il senso dell’udito, del quale è obietto il suono, del secondo partecipa l’intelletto; che conoscendo l’artificio del compositore nel cavare i contrapunti, o nel salvare le crudezze, gode eccessivamente; quel primo gusto
The comparison with music and painting points to a difference between a pleasure coming from the senses and one coming from the intellect. Admitting that Tacitus’s histories are not particularly pleasing for the senses, this is not only because of the language he uses, which is mentioned in the quotation above, but also, according to Malvezzi himself, because of the world he evokes to the imagination. Malvezzi connects this to Tacitus’ self-acknowledgment in *Annales* 4.32-33 (as discussed in section one above) that he deals with harsh times and unappealing characters, such as befits a dark age dominated by vicious tyrants. The pleasure that Malvezzi calls “of the intellect” has to do with “knowing” or “recognizing” the artifice used by the historian: this amounts to saying that for a reader who has knowledge of prudence, it is pleasurable to recognize in the glosses with which the historian comments on the actions remarks of a kind that he himself would have made: it is then that, in Malvezzi’s words, “he receives pleasure from the knowledge of the other inasmuch as he notices his own”.

The experience of wit that a prudent reader obtains from the glosses of the historian corresponds therefore with what Giovanni Talentoni called in 1596 wonder of the second kind: that is, the one that happens not when we are partially ignorant and unaware of the cause of something and look forward to learning about it, but rather when we already know both the cause and the effect and still we experience marvel at the way in which God, the artificer, or whoever is responsible for something created, has put both together. On a different note, the assumption that the reader enjoys because s/he is made aware of *his/her* knowledge rather than because he

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notices that of the author implies a radicalization of Talentoni’s idea, and nonetheless one that had been widely discussed since early in the sixteenth century, as I will consider at length in Chapter Four.

“Contrapunto”, understood as commentary over the narration of events, may take the form—as it does in Quevedo’s *Marco Bruto*—of explicit, well delimited commentary, or else more subtly, as in Malvezzi’s *Il Romulo* and *Il Tarquinio Superbo*, integrating alternatively narration and comment. In Fernández de Heredia’s *Séneca y Nerón*, the action progresses in italics while Roman type marks off the comments on the events. Regardless of the procedure used to integrate or distinguish between the two parts, it seems certain that the 1630s and 1640s witnessed an increase in popularity of a genre that provided a foundation for Gracián’s theorization of acuity of wit under the mode of “crisis”. This presented the commentary of events conceptualized in terms of “contrapunto”, or reworking of a material that is common and that, as such, is usually termed “simple” or “mere” narration.

The metaphor of “contrapunto” was a favorite with Gracián. He resorted to it in “Discurso” LXI of *Agudeza y arte de ingenio* to explain how variation occurs while taking as the point of departure one and the same narration. Typically for a way of understanding history that places all the weight on the gloss of prudence, the events in Gracián’s view seem to be taken for granted. In opposition to fifteenth- and sixteenth-century discussions on historiography, which held the historian’s judgment (“iudicium”) to be of utmost importance as he sifts through sources and casts away falsity from the events, Gracián asserts that, except for the different glosses and the different styles displayed by each historian, the narration of a set of events would always be

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644 Quevedo refers to the twofold structure in the title of the book with the term “ponderar”. His book is a life of Marcus Brutus, “ponderada con discursos”. The same reappears in Juan Mateo Sánchez’s *Vida de Epaminundas* (1652), which keeps, as Quevedo had done, the typographic distinction between “texto” and “discurso”, and in works published after the period here under consideration, like Antonio Costa’s *Vida de Numa Pompilio* (1667).
the same. This does not necessarily mean that Gracián is unaware that facts are far from remaining unaltered as soon as more than one historian narrates the same story. It rather seems to be a comment intended to emphasize Gracián’s interest in the possibility of rewriting history in ways increasingly artful and refined, through the exercise of acuity of wit in commentary. For him, this occurs most often by building upon histories that are already well-known, no matter if this means relying on the version of a single historian, as is the case with the series of “lives” or “historias particulares” based upon Tacitus’ works that I have reviewed above. This is why Gracián writes that, without glosses and commentaries,

There would be only a historian for each matter. Since, once that the first would have narrated the events, the others would have nothing left to do other than boring us with their repetition. The bare narration is like plainsong. The agreeable and artful counterpoint is woven on top of it. Human taste is anomalous, because in the same food it likes to try a thousand different sauces.645

The exercise of variation within a defined set of events may be conducted according to different modalities in the operation of wit. What matters, however, is the fact that all of them have the ability to delight the reader endlessly. As Gracián tellingly points out, human beings have a strange yet defining characteristic: namely, they live on feeding themselves upon varying arrangements of the exact same things, projecting the infinite from what is not only limited, but sometimes even scarce. It is upon this general assertion that Gracián’s method, with its

645 “No había de haber más que un historiador de cada materia: porque en refiriendo uno los sucesos, no les quedaría que hacer a los demás, sino cansar con repetir. La desnuda narración es como el canto llano, sobre él se echa después el agradable artificioso contrapunto. Es anómalo el humano gusto, que apetece en un mismo manjar mil diferencias de sainetes”. Gracián y Morales, Agudeza, vol. II, 617. Gracián was using terms which had become commonplace at the time. Writing of the different styles adopted by different temperaments, Pérez del Barrio Angulo wrote in 1635: “There will be some who find themselves more comfortable with plainsong than with the grace and sweetness of counterpoint” (“avrá algunos que se acomoden más al canto llano que a la graciosidad y dulçura del contrapunto”. Gabriel Pérez del Barrio Angulo, Secretario de señores, y las materias, cuidados y obligaciones que le tocan, estilo y exercicio dél (En Madrid: por María de Quiñones, 1635), 3.
distinctions and ramifications, opens a path to investigate and perfect the art of making “contrapunto” possible.\textsuperscript{646}

\textsuperscript{646} As discussed in Chapter Two, treatises on acuity of wit such as those by Sarbiewski and Peregrini incorporate, together with the inquiry into the nature of wit, a method for the invention of forms containing acuity—generally through the adaptation of a system of places, or topics.
There is one facet of the study conducted so far that I have bracketed until now. I am referring to the role played by the audience when it comes to feeling pleasure at the acuity of wit of some poet or speaker.

So far, and for practical reasons, it has been taken for granted that it was somehow obvious for anyone to notice the difficulty overcome by the artificer as s/he devised a plot, a maxim, or a metaphor in a way simultaneously reasonable and surprising; even more wishfully, it has been assumed that it was only natural to experience a feeling of pleasure at the perception of wit and artifice displayed by someone else.

The aim of the present chapter is precisely to reconsider the enjoyment of the acuity of wit from the point of view of those who actually feel the pleasure—that is, the audience. Looking closely at the way in which sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scholars understood the process taking place as listeners or readers reacted to wonder will certainly confer greater depth to the study of the appreciation of “beauty” and “pleasure” that scholars like Peregrini considered to be part of the effect of wit and the wonderful.

In fact, when, for instance, Gracián praises the effect of “a metaphor that involves effort” (“la metáfora que cuesta”), one might ask—and scholars since antiquity did in cases like this—whose effort is he referring to. For, after all, in order for the audience to notice that, say, a metaphor is not obvious, they first need to decode it. This, in turn, implies that they somehow

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replicate within themselves the process of connecting terms actuated by the wit of the poet or the speaker. Are they not then as ingenious as the one who “invented” it, once that they accomplish that? Likewise, when Castelvetro insists that Aristotle refers to the difficulty involved in the alteration of a plot in a probable and yet surprising way as the ingredient that makes audiences enjoy a tragedy, what exactly does he think to be the link that unites the fact that someone accomplishes something difficult, and that someone else feels pleasure because of that? How are the two things actually connected?648

Not everyone was equally interested in aspects like these. Among the theoreticians of the acuity of wit, Sarbiewski and Gracián were more directly concerned with the process of invention, and especially with the logic of paradox that begets the feeling that they identified with the spark of wit. Only Peregrini would hint at the way in which audiences somehow related the feeling of pleasure at someone else’s acuity of wit to something that was part of themselves rather than exclusively belonging to the wit of the other.

Taking Peregrini as a point of reference, and pursuing the trace of the works by which he constructs his dialogue, it is possible to reconstruct a genealogy of scholars who investigated – with greater or lesser awareness of it– the link between the involvement of the audience in the process of noticing acuity of wit, and the pleasure that they feel at the achievement. Whilst in Chapters One and Two it was the discipline of poetics, and therefore the plot, that made more easily visible the theorization by early modern scholars of the encounter of unexpectedness in what is otherwise logical, one needs to turn to the study of maxims and tropes –and, therefore, to rhetoric– to track the analysis that scholars of the time devoted to the reaction of the audience at wonder conceived in terms of cooperation.

Even if the idea that the audience may somehow feel that they are enjoying something that is partially theirs as they decode a maxim or a trope started as a curiosity and little more than a footnote in the margins of Aristotle’s and Quintilian’s theories, it would be widely extrapolated after the late sixteenth century. Eventually, it became one of the main ingredients through which scholars explained the reason why devices such as those that awake wonder –like far-fetched metaphors, laconic maxims, or contrived plots– are pleasurable to those who experience them. By then, increasing urgency to define and regulate the degree of participation assigned to audiences and readers in the process of decoding became conspicuous among rhetoricians in Italy. Popular trends and writing practices –such as the style that came to be called “laconic”, or the taste for “conceits” or “acutezze” that has been studied above– shaped and were shaped by interpretations of ancient authorities, like Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, of which commentaries had appeared in print, as had been the case with the *Poetics*, since the 1540s, and Quintilian’s *Institutio oratoria*. Similar debates would also gain momentum in Spain, and became there a topic of debate, if later, also with unprecedented virulence, as scholars took positions for or against the pleasure allegedly brought by difficulty and obscurity, starting with the dissemination in 1613 of Luis de Góngora’s *Fábula de Polifemo y Galatea* and *Soledad primera*. These served as a pole of attraction where notions of opposite signs creatively debated the possibilities offered to the reader to actively seek for meaning in the process of decoding.

The ancient sources available for the debate were rich but limited –especially insofar as they seemed to respond to interests that overlapped only partially with those of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century communities. Greek and Roman sources confined to punctual aspects –“smart sayings” where maxim and trope coalesce, and obscurity of language– the question of to what extent readers are supposed and allowed to feel pleasure from the cooperation exercised in
deciphering meaning. I study how early modern scholars broadened the scope of the discussion to the discipline of rhetoric as a whole, as well as to poetics. In a later time, coincident with the heyday of the so-called “laconic style” and the taste for metaphors able to inspire “wonder” –or, in the case of Spain, with debates concerning Luis de Góngora’s poetry—, the involvement of the reader would end up shaping a new theory of reading which entailed a discussion of the rights and the responsibilities allotted to authors and audiences as they are involved the process of creation and reception. At stake was, first, the active or passive nature of the process of reception, the relationship between the two poles of the communication, and the questioning of the hierarchy between one another. At the same time, the debate was also rich in ethical considerations. In fact, it did not take long for many to claim that what some called cooperation was actually a form of vanity, encouraging readers to feel infatuated with the skills that allowed them to complete a meaning that, in spite of how they might feel about it, was dubiously theirs.

1. Quintilian’s criticism of cooperation in the early sixteenth century

In the eighth book On the education of the orator (Institutio oratoria), Quintilian develops with a certain degree of consistency the possibility that pleasure of a certain kind may result from the cooperation of the audience as they decode a maxim, or a trope. Quintilian’s take on the issue is decidedly negative. The diatribe occurs in the middle of a claim against “obscuritas” –the vice opposed to clarity, which he greets as the first virtue of style—, and concludes when the author draws a colorful caricature of the inconveniences of what he sees as

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649 Quintilian’s disciplinary framework is decidedly rhetorical and, as a consequence, the process that he generally has in mind is aural. There is no case of a reader that can take the time to consider things twice in case something may initially appear too difficult. However, considering that I am tracing here a case of reception, I step over the distinction between orality and writing only insofar as the majority of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scholars here taken into consideration do the same, as they do not hesitate to draw conclusions bearing on the activity of reading from statements conceived by rhetoricians who referred conspicuously to listeners. Of course, I have tried to bring it to attention whenever they outline a distinction between one and the other kinds of linguistic interaction.
the lamentable fashion of speaking in a convoluted manner, and, for that, one that is not immediately understandable.

In two separate yet logically connected occasions, Quintilian speaks critically of any feeling of cooperation—sometimes referred to as co-creatorship—of the kind that infatuated audiences, as he sees them, would conceive as being part of while they understand something that is not entirely clear in and of itself.⁶⁵⁰

Quintilian condemns those who request from the audience that they use “ingenium” simply to understand what they say—that is, that they need to resort to intellectual abilities such as those that one would use to argue and invent. There are people who mistakenly believe that being clever and ingenious (“ingeniosi”) means requesting equal cleverness from the audience: “They take it that the unique sign of genius is needing a genius to understand [them]”.⁶⁵¹

Quintilian’s protestation would become a leitmotiv for the centuries to come. He retorts to them that “my view, however, is that any expression is faulty which the hearer has to make a mental effort of his own to understand”.⁶⁵² Clarity as a virtue of language implies that no speech should ever rely too much on the listener’s own work at decoding.

In fact, once they put “ingenium” to the task, the audience might be dangerously tempted to claim some kind of responsibility for the speech that they have been able to understand. Consequent with this, Quintilian addresses the possibility that one might obtain pleasure as a result of feeling cooperator, and, what is even more, co-author after having decoded a speech that seems particularly obscure:

⁶⁵⁰ See the introduction, and Chapter Two of the eighth book of Quintilian’s Institutio oratoria.
⁶⁵² “At ego vitiosum sermonem dixerim quem auditor suo ingenio intellegit”. Quintilian, The Orator’s Education, §8.2.19.
The conviction has now become widespread that nothing is elegant or refined unless it needs interpreting. Some audiences also enjoy these things, because they delight in their own cleverness when they understand them, and rejoice as if they had not so much heard them as thought of them for themselves.\footnote{“Ut id iam demum eleganter atque exquisite dictum poterat quod interpretandum sit. Sed auditoribus etiam nonnullis grata sunt haec, quae cum intellexerunt acumine suo delectantur, et gaudent non quasi audierint sed quasi invenerint”. Quintilian, \textit{The Orator’s Education}, 338-339, §8.2.21.}

Quintilian does not give further details, but his hostility to any involvement from the listener’s “ingenium” in the process of understanding remains a staple. As language becomes riddle-like, he writes, it deserves to be called corrupt (“vitiosum”). Together with the shortcomings of such a speech concerning the duty it should aim at – namely, communicating a message –, Quintilian’s tone of ridicule seems to entail also a censure of the vanity and unjustified self-pride to which the listener is pushed on such occasions. It would be the task of late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century commentators and scholars to develop the germ of Quintilian’s like thoughts in order to subvert them and make them central to a formal theory of reading of a kind that admits, and even requires, the cooperation of listeners and readers alike.

However, it would be inaccurate to presume that Quintilian’s words appeared immediately urgent and either compelling or wrong to early modern readers of the treatise. As a matter of fact, the first noticeable discussion inspired by the passages quoted above regards, on the contrary, a failure to understand that cooperation as a source of pleasure might be a possibility at all. As a result, with a few exceptions, they missed the mention completely.

The episode I would like to discuss started with the edition and commentary of Quintilian’s \textit{Institutio oratoria} curated and published in 1493 by Raffaele Regio (c.1450-1520). Posterity has
branded Regio as the scholar who eventually shelved the century-long belief that Cicero was the author of *Rhetorica ad Herennium*.\(^6\)

In 1416, Poggio Bracciolini discovered in the monastery of Sankt Gall a manuscript containing Quintilian’s *Institutio oratoria* in full. Medieval scholars had as a matter of fact enjoyed access to the treatise only in a fragmentary way. After the work’s *editio princeps*, published in Rome in 1470, Regio would eventually offer Quintilian the treatment that other fifteenth-century scholars—among them, names like Lorenzo Valla and, closer in time, Angelo Poliziano—thought he deserved.\(^3\) In addition to a commentary, Regio published a volume reviewing dubious passages, for which he explained the variants that were available as well as the choices he had adopted.\(^5\)

When Regio reaches the point in which Quintilian declares “idle” any speech requiring the participation of the reader’s “ingenium”, he proceeds to emend the passage, resulting in the radical alteration of the meaning that I discussed above. This is Regio’s comment:

“*I would call vain a speech which the hearer understands with a mental effort*. It seems to me that the meaning asks for a negative particle, so that we may read: “Does not understand”. For a speech that is not understood is called vain, insofar as it operates nothing in the mind of the audience.”\(^6\)

\(^6\) Regio’s *Quaestio utrum Ars rhetorica ad Herenium falso Ciceroni inscribatur* was published in a volume containing two hundred and eight comments on textual issues in Quintilian’s *Institutio oratoria*. See Raffaele Regio, *Ducenta problemata in totidem institutionis oratoriae Quintilliani depravationes. Eiusdem quaestio utrum ars rhetorica ad Herennium falso Ciceroni inscribatur. Eiusdem de laudibus eloquentiae panegyricus* ([Venice]: [Bonetus Locatellus], impens. Octavianus Scoti, [November 1492?]); see also James J. Murphy and Michael Winterbottom, “Raffaele Regio’s 1492 *Quaestio* doubting Cicero’s authorship of the Rhetorica ad Herennium: Introduction and Text”, *Rhetorica* 17, no. 1 (Winter, 1999).


\(^4\) Raffaele Regio, ed. *Quintilianus cum commento* ([Venice]: [Bonetus Locatellus for Octavianus Scotus], [1493]).

Regio’s *lectio facilior* reveals that the same passage that later scholars would meet with a blend of enthusiasm and refusal—for it addressed directly the question of whether it is lawful for a speech to require the reader to use “ingenium” in order to understand—, seems to have been alien enough to the expectations even of a learned reader like Regio, so as to look to him to be in want of some kind of correction. Emended by Regio, the passage read in a way that conveyed the idea that a speech was “idle”—that is, effectless—when the listener is unable to grasp any meaning from it. Regio’s emendation leaves us with a passage that, as one may notice, makes sense, and is even more easily acceptable by everyone insofar as it merely states that what is meaningless cannot impress the mind with new interpretations. What resulted from the version thus corrected was a more banal yet easier reading that would be accepted by some of the most authoritative editions of the early sixteenth century, like those by Aldo Manuzio (Venice, 1514) or Filippo Giunta (Florence, 1515).

It would take more than two decades for Regio’s emendation to be disputed and argued against in a way that demonstrated a certain degree of understanding of Quintilian’s concern against the vanity of inspiring feelings of cooperation in the hearer. The hand behind the restoration of Quintilian’s text was Josse Bade, who published a commented edition of the treatise in 1516. Bade (1462-1535) suppressed the negative particle “non” that Regius had introduced, so as to make it mean as it had before: “My view, however, is that any expression is faulty which the hearer has to make a mental effort of his own to understand” (“at ego vitiosum sermonem dixerim quem auditor suo ingenio intellegit”).

Given Bade’s decision to print his commentary side by side with Regio’s, he must have felt forced to justify why he was undoing Regio’s work. Bade had little trouble with this, and justified what he had done with two different reasons, unrelated to one another. First, Bade’s
interpretation agreed with the version found in a codex that he now possessed and which he was almost certain had belonged to Lorenzo Valla; second, the logic of Quintilian’s text of the eighth book taken as a whole seems to make the reading without the particle “non” the most appropriate. This is Bade’s contestation:

In this way [reads] Valla, and in my opinion he is right, although Raphael [Regio] advises to write “non intelligit”, and Aldus printed it in that way. He [Quintilian] wants a speech to be vain that the listener understands by means of his own wit, even though the orator did not say anything—that is, instead of understanding from the words of the speaker. He spoke similarly in the foreword to this book: “They take it that the unique sign of genius is needing a genius to understand them”.

Trusting Valla, and basing his choice on Quintilian’s repeated assertions against “ingenium” playing a role in decoding a speech—and especially the statement contained in paragraph 25 of the introduction to the eighth book, discussed above—, Bade made available to future generations of scholars a piece of argumentation that would inspire many both for and against the kind of feeling that audiences and readers face when they wonder at metaphors or maxims that appears difficult and obscure on first approach.

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659 The codex is now in Bibliothèque Nationale de France, codex Parisinus Latinus 7723. Bade also prides himself of having access to Valla’s codex in the title of his edition: he introduces himself as Badius Ascensius, “who possessed Lorenzo Valla’s codex” (“qui ad codicem quem Laurentius Vallen. et possedisse…”). For Bade’s reliance on Lorenzo Valla’s codex of Quintilian, see Jean Céard, “Josse Bade, éditeur de Quintilien à la Renaissance”, in Perrine Galand, Fernand Hallyn, Carlos Lévy and Wim Verbaal, eds., Quintilien ancien et moderne (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 292-293.
As one might have expected, not everyone accepted Bade’s restoration of the text.\textsuperscript{660} Regio’s emendation would reappear in editions that would be read by dozens of scholars and by countless schoolboys well into the seventeenth century. The persistence of Regio’s emendation may have been partly related to the reputation of some of the editors who adopted it, like Aldo Manuzio and Filippo Giunta. However, it seems fair to conclude that the increasing popularity of Valla’s and Bade’s readings in the early seventeenth century may be related to the urgency that by then enjoyed the issue of a pleasure somehow connected with the cooperation of the listener’s “ingenium”.\textsuperscript{661}

The foregoing tale of a dispute over a negative particle in a passage of Quintilian has deserved little to no attention so far;\textsuperscript{662} yet, it shows to what extent issues that would soon cause scholars across the continent to spill tremendous amounts of ink were scarcely noticed only a few decades earlier, or even failed to be understood out of sheer lack of points of reference for them.\textsuperscript{663}

\textsuperscript{660} It is not a little ironic that Bade’s successors ended up restoring the particle “non” added by Regio and rejected by Bade soon after the death of the latter in 1535. In doing so, they erased from the text the debate about the cooperation of the reader. See Marcus Fabius Quintilian, M. F. Quintilianii Institutiones oratoriae; eiusdem Declamationes : omnia ad veterum codicum fidem recognita ac restituta. ([Parisiis]: pro Hereditibus Iod. Badii Ascensii, 1536), n.p. Jean Loys was in charge of Bade’s workshop at the time when this happened.

\textsuperscript{661} However, it is also true that readers who would have been extremely sensitive to the link between obscurity and cooperation failed to identify Quintilian’s arguments because they were using editions containing Regio’s negative particle. A case in point would be Francisco Cascales, who quoted Regio’s emended passage against the obscurity of Luis de Góngora’s Soledades –a version that was certainly appropriate for Cascales’ purpose, but perhaps less than Bade’s reading. Cascales would write in the 1620s: “Quintilian mocks [the habit of obscuring speech]. But who would not? And he says his opinion on the topic: ‘I would call vain a speech that the hearer does not understand with his wit” (“De esto se ríe bravamente Quintiliano; pero ¿quién no? Y él mismo dice lo que siente acerca de esto: Ate otiósium sermonem dixerim, quem auditor suo ingenio non intelligit”). Francisco Cascales, Cartas philológicas. Es a saber, de letras humanas, varia erudición, explicaciones de lugares, lecciones curiosas, documentos poéticos, observaciones, ritos, i costumbres, i muchas sentencias exquisitas (En Murcia: por Luis Verós, en este presente año de 1634), 30r-v.

\textsuperscript{662} For instance, the existence of a second, alternative reading that might have appealed to Cascales is not mentioned in a paper about the presence of Quintilian’s ideas in Cascales: Jorge Fernández López and Millán Lozano Rivera, “Acerca de Quintiliano en el siglo de oro: la Instituto oratoria en las Cartas filológicas de Francisco Cascales”, Bercero 152 (2007). See the note above for the connection between Cascales and the object passage object of discussion.

\textsuperscript{663} There are traces left of some early modern reading experiences that attest abundantly for the wealth of meanings that contemporaries found in the passage emended by Regio and restored by Bade. In a copy of Bade’s edition in the
Quintilian’s criticism of the involvement of the listener’s “ingenium”, and therefore of certain ways of promoting cooperation in the process of decoding, would become increasingly meaningful in the second half of the sixteenth century. By then, for instance, it helped the philosopher Alessandro Piccolomini to provide a new interpretation of Aristotle’s theory of metaphor, and of the pleasure experienced by readers as they wonder at tropes and at the wit of the author responsible for them.

2. Alessandro Piccolomini on Aristotle’s Rhetoric: metaphor and self-love

In Chapter One we met Alessandro Piccolomini (1508-1579) as the author of a commentary on Aristotle’s Poetics, published in 1575. Piccolomini’s Annotationi closed what was indeed a remarkable lifelong project, through which he had planned to make the whole of Aristotle’s philosophy accessible to those unable to read Greek and Latin. Touching first on topics ranging as widely as biology, astronomy or ethics, he devoted the last period of his life to the disciplines of discourse. The commentary of the Poetics had been preceded by a translation of the Rhetoric in 1571, and by the work that forms the object of my study: a long reprint of 1527, now preserved at Salamanca’s Biblioteca general, one may see marginalia written by a reader who assents to Bade’s use of internal evidence from Quintilian’s text to prove his reading against the one found in Regio and Aldo. The reader wrote: “Raphael and Aldus think that one should read ‘does not understand’” (“Raphael & Aldus legendum putant· non intelligit”). The reader, who quotes Erasmus abundantly, shows awareness of issues related to the reaction that obscurity provoked among audiences—which are, so it seems, far more complicated than “not being understood”, or “not effecting anything in the mind”, as Regio had interpreted. In connection to Quintilian’s mention of “ἀδιανόητα” which the rhetorician exemplifies with metaphors on the verge of incomprehensibility—, the reader of the volume in Salamanca adds that the commentators, apparently in a reference to Regio, are wrong in this passage, and writes the following, in a reaction that points at the richness of affects that obscurity affords the audience, which go beyond mere lack of effect on the mind: “If they do not understand, they are filled with wonder, as says Folly in Erasmus’ book [Encomium Moriae]” (“ἀδιανόητα, quae dicuntur. Locus aut hic, ni fallor, non recte ab interpretibus exponitur”; “at si non intellexerint admirantur, ut inquit Moria apud Erasmum”). Marcus Fabius Quintilian, Marci Fabii Quintiliani Oratoriarum institutionum lib. XII... (Venundatur Parisii: via Iacoeba, a Ponceto Le Preux Bibliopola adscriptitio, MDXXVII [1527]), CXXXIIv. The volume has the call number BG/11984.

664 Cerreta, Alessandro Piccolomini, 36-37.
paraphrase of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* in three volumes—one for each book that forms the original—, published respectively in 1565, 1569 and 1572.\(^{665}\)

With both his translation and his long paraphrase in three volumes, Piccolomini entered a field that had seen the incursions of many renowned scholars since the 1540s.\(^{666}\)

Often disregarded as a communicator rather than a scholar, Piccolomini produced work that, in many aspects, was far from derivative. Even though he would rely on a text previously established—especially the edition by his friend Pietro Vettori—, Piccolomini would often question what he found there, and propose alternative readings on more than one occasion. More importantly, he practiced a method of commentary that led him to develop at length even the most marginal topics or ideas present in the text. In a passage quoted in Chapter One, Piccolomini justified the path he followed as a reaction against those who were content with simply “painting” the text they translated or commented upon. By this, Piccolomini hinted at the habit of passing over notions, or paragraphs that one fails to grasp, by merely translating word by word—a procedure that, as he would claim, implies missing the whole in the effort to avoid

\(^{665}\) They were published as Alessandro Piccolomini, *Copiosissima parafrase, di M. Alessandro Piccolomini, nel primo libro della retorica d’Aristotele…* (In Venetia: per Giovanni Varisco, e compagni, MDLXV [1565]); *Piena, et larga parafrase; di M. Alessandro Piccolomini; nel secondo libro della retorica d’Aristotele a Theodette…* (In Venetia: appresso Gio. Francesco Camotio, al segno della piramide, 1569); *Piena, et larga parafrase, di M. Alessandro Piccolomini, nel terzo libro della retorica d’Aristotele, a Theodette….* (In Venetia: per Giovanni Varisco, & compagni, 1572).

\(^{666}\) Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* would be printed relatively late, in the first volume of Aldo Manuzio’s *Rhetores Graeci* (1508). As had been the case of the *Poetics*, it had been excluded from Aldo’s edition of the complete works of Aristotle. At the same time, the dissemination of the text among those unable to read Greek remained dependent on earlier translations into Latin, which were widely printed until the mid-sixteenth century—namely William of Moerbecke’s thirteenth-century translation, and the one from the fifteenth century by George of Trebizond. Everything changed with the appearance in 1544 of Ermolao Barbaro’s Latin text, accompanied by a commentary that his son Daniele had prepared. Barbaro’s would be a text of reference well into the seventeenth century. For example, it is the one that Francisco de Quevedo would use and annotate. See the edition of Quevedo’s notes in Luisa López Grigera, *Anotaciones de Quevedo a la Retórica de Aristóteles* (Salamanca: [s. n.], 1998). Pietro Vettori’s edition of 1548 is a scholarly milestone in the process of reception, which contained a revised version of Aristotle’s Greek text, and a new commentary in Latin. Important Latin commentaries would also be those by Marco Antonio Maioraggio (1571) and Antonio Riccoboni (1579). However, a major step towards the dissemination of the text was its translation into a vernacular by Bernardo Segni, mentioned in Chapter One as the translator of the *Poetics*. Both texts, as a matter of fact, appeared in the same volume, first published in 1549. Annibale Caro would follow with his own version in Italian in 1570.
taking chances. Unlike them, Piccolomini aims at explaining everything, and generally pursues the argument wherever it leads him, no matter what are the conclusions he is constrained to accept. He accumulates abundant examples and parallels, making of his work a thermometer of the intersections between scholarship and popular trends and tastes in the late sixteenth century—or this was the case, at least, concerning the connection between something as old as metaphor and the cooperation of the audience or the readers as they decoded it.

Piccolomini’s discussion of metaphor is striking from the outset. This is so because he conflates Aristotle’s treatment of metaphor in Rhetoric 3.2 with the references to it contained in 3.10. In the latter, however, Aristotle had resorted to metaphor only as one of the devices, together with enthymemes, that take part in the formation of “smart sayings” ("ἀστεῖον"). Piccolomini comments on both sections separately, but includes conclusions in the former that Aristotle had only considered for the latter. In other words, Piccolomini incorporated into metaphor considered generally a series of accidental properties belonging to a kind of metaphor that would appear “smart” or “ἀστεῖον”, a term that, in turn, seventeenth-century scholars like Peregrini would understand as a predecessor of the notion of acuity of wit. Piccolomini transferred to metaphor taken as a whole characteristics associated only with one kind. In doing

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668 Aristotle, Rhetoric, 394-397, §3.10.1-4, 1410b. The relationship of “ἀστεῖα” with “ἄστυ” (meaning “city”) afforded early modern scholars the occasion for a debate, supported by the fact that the equivalent in Latin, “urbanitas”, derived also from “urbs”. Both terms displayed a spectrum of meanings that ranged from the elegance and cultivation proper to a dweller of the city to humor, with the connection between the former and the latter also providing ground for discussion. Piccolomini suggested that “urbanitas” was “a certain civil charm, and, so-to-speak, a kind of nobility in speaking that renders speech not inapt, and without salt or taste, but rather pleasant, full of charm, and appropriate with men who are not entirely rough, or rustic, or peasants, but, on the contrary, civil, and nourished in the cities” (“un certo lepor civile, & una certa, per dir così, nobiltà di parlare, che lo rende, non inetto, senza sale, o sapore, ma gustoso, gratioso, & accettabile appresso degli huomini non rozi in tutto, né rustici, & contadineschi, ma civili, & nelle città nutriti”). Piccolomini, Piena e larga paraphrase … nel terzo libro, 304. For the fluctuation of the term according to periods and authors in the context of ancient Rome, see Edwin S. Ramage, “Urbanitas: Cicero and Quintilian, a Contrast in Attitudes”, American Journal of Philology 84, no. 4 (Oct., 1963). Unlike sources like the second book of Cicero’s De oratore, which contains a discussion of “argutiae” and “facetiae”, Aristotle’s treatment of “ἀστεῖα” was independent enough from humor so as to adequately perform as a blueprint for seventeenth-century notions of the acuity of wit, such as contemporaries perceived it.
so, he projected onto language in general—in which metaphor is omnipresent—the quality of smartness or “ἀστεῖον” that Aristotle seems to have intended as restricted to particular functions and circumstances of a speech.

Taking as a point of departure Piccolomini’s explanation of why metaphors are pleasurable, I will show the indebtedness it bears to Aristotle’s notion of “ἀστεῖα” and, eventually, the latency of Quintilian’s theorization of cooperation as a source of pleasure for the audience.

Metaphor, according to Piccolomini, takes place when a word operates within a context in which it is alien:

Transported, or metaphoric words […] removed from the place where they are proper, or, even better, appropriate, are transported to another place, where they are not proper, but alien.669

Proportionality of some kind or other justifies the transfer of the word. For instance, this is how Piccolomini describes the process of cognition involved in a metaphor that would substitute “the lamp of the day” for the word that normally belongs there—namely, the sun:

If someone should say that “the lamp of the day hangs over our heads”, such words fail to explicitly provide the cognition that the sun is already here. However, they will give me the occasion, through the similitude between the lamp and the sun, to earn that cognition by myself with quick and imperceptible reasoning: as though I argued that, since the sun and the lamp meet in this third term of “giving light”, they meet as well with one another. Therefore, in a certain way the lamp can mean the sun [italics added].670

669 “Le parole trasportate, overo metaforiche […] tolte dal luogo dove le son proprie, o per dir meglio, appropriate, si trasportano ad altro luogo, dove non son proprie, ma aliene”. Piccolomini, Piena e larga parafrase … nel terzo libro, 35. Aristotle had defined metaphor as “the application [“ἐπιφορά”] of a word that belongs to another thing”. Aristotle, “Poetics”, 104-105, §21, 1457b.
670 “Ma se alcuno mi dirà, gia trovarsi la lucerna del mondo sopra dei capi nostri, senza dubio alcuno, tali parole non daranno espressa notitia, né mi diranno espressamente che il sole sia quivi arrivato: ma mi daran bene occasione, che mediante la somiglianza, che è tra la lucerna, & il sole, io vada per me medesimo con veloce, & impercettibil
As the mind apprehends that “lamp” and “sun” meet because they share the feature “giving light”, Piccolomini adds, it experiences cognition of a certain kind as a result.

Piccolomini draws inspiration from Aristotle’s passage of *Rhetoric* 3.10 on metaphors that qualify as “ἀστεῖα”, in which the philosopher emphasizes the ability they have to make audiences learn. They do so, according to Aristotle, by making them understand what is common to the terms paired by the inventiveness of the author.671

In conclusion, metaphor takes place when a term performs as alien, after a transfer based on proportionality of some kind, and in such a way that it results in cognition.

The question remains: why is this supposed to be pleasant to the audience?

The first answer, rejected as insufficient, repeats Aristotle’s principle that learning is naturally pleasurable to human beings. This is Piccolomini’s paraphrase of the idea:

> The desire to learn as such is most natural to man; accordingly [...] cognition is pleasant too. And since everything becomes better known, more evident, and also more deeply understood by the use of metaphoric words [...] it follows that these bring greater pleasure too.672
Piccolomini accepts that if learning is pleasurable and metaphors make us learn by pointing at the way things share something with one another, it follows that those are sources of pleasure. The reason why he remains unsatisfied has to do with the premise that “learning is pleasurable”, which looks to him to belong less to the order of axioms than to that of things that result, in turn, from something else.

To find out the root cause of the pleasure inherent in learning, Piccolomini has been preparing the ground all along in his introduction to metaphor. In the first place, he has built a framework that explains metaphor as sharing in the mechanism that Aristotle had described in *Poetics* 4, 1448b for the recognition of imitations in portraits. In metaphors, we determine through reasoning (“discorso”) – and, more exactly, through syllogism – the identity of the terms, as in a portrait we do the correspondence that exists between the painting and the object it depicts.673

However, the form of reasoning involved in recognition takes place “so quickly that it tends to go unnoticed”.674 The rapidity of the process allowed nonetheless for the insertion of a certain ingredient that had been absent from any of the places in which Aristotle dealt with the connection of metaphor and learning. In a passage quoted above, Piccolomini was careful to add that whenever the mind finds a metaphor, similitude allows for it to gain cognition “by itself”, and to do so “with quick and imperceptible reasoning”.675 Piccolomini becomes even more

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Aristotle had stated: “Understanding gives great pleasure not only to philosophers but likewise to others too” (“µανθάνειν οὐ μόνον τοῖς φιλοσόφοις ἢδιστον ἄλλα καὶ τοῖς ἀλλός ὁμοιώς”). Aristotle, *Poetics*, 38-39, §4, 1448b. 675 In *Poetics*, 4, 1448b Aristotle had referred to the pleasure obtained from portraits, described through the verb “συλλογίζεσθαι”, meaning precisely “to infer”, but also evoking to a reader like Piccolomini the syllogism as the form through which inference takes place. Aristotle, “Poetics”, 38-39, §4, 1448b. 674 “Tanto velocemente, che apparir suole inpercettibile”. Piccolomini, *Piena e larga parafrase ... nel terzo libro*, 74. 675 “Da me stesso”. Piccolomini, *Piena e larga parafrase ... nel terzo libro*, 74. See above for the passage quoted in full.
explicit as he traces the parallel with the inference that the subject operates in the contemplation of a portrait, where he states that

with this syllogism that I build […] I gain knowledge by myself taking occasion of the painting that I have before my eyes [italics added].

The emphasis placed on the receptor of either metaphor or painting as responsible for the formation of the syllogism was new in the literature on the subject. Fully aware of the innovation he was introducing, the topic would form the object of a clarification in which Piccolomini relocated in the audience or the spectator the source of the pleasure inherent to both metaphors and imitative arts. Men find learning pleasant because they feel responsible for the reasoning involved for it to take place. They love what they learn because they feel it to be somehow theirs. This is the premise that turns metaphors into a source of pleasure, rather than Aristotle’s postulate of a delight inherent in learning, which failed to appear self-explanatory to him. According to Piccolomini,

it is natural for human beings to love themselves more than they love others; and also to love their own things, and their own deeds, and actions, more than they love those of others […] The mere act of acquisition becomes pleasant. Wherefore, if in the cognition brought to us by words [sc. metaphors] […] we win and acquire by ourselves some additional knowledge, this increased knowledge will bring us delight because it will seem to be something ours [italics added].

676 “Con questo dunque sillogismo fatto da me […], vò io stesso con l'occasion della pittura, che mi è posta innanzi guadagnandomi la notitia” [italics added]. Piccolomini, Piena e larga parafrase … nel terzo libro, 74.

677 “È cosa naturale, che l’huomo non solo ami sé stesso, più che non ama gli altri, ma ancora ami le cose sue, & le sue opere proprie, & le sue proprie attioni, più che le altrui […] viene ancor l'acquisto di quelle a portare diletto. Onde se nella cognitione,che si genera in noi dalle parole che ci sien dette […] qualche notitia di più ci guadagniamo, & ci procacciamo da noi medesimi; verrà questo accrescimento di notitia, per parerci cosa propria nostra” [italics added]. Piccolomini, Piena e larga parafrase … nel terzo libro, 73.
Piccolomini prides himself on having attained more than any of his predecessors in the quest for Aristotle’s meaning.\footnote{In 1594, Scipione Bargagli would paraphrase Piccolomini’s explanation of the connection between self-love and the pleasure of metaphors almost verbatim. Scipione Bargagli, \textit{Dell’imprese di Scipion Bargagli gentil’huomo sanese, alla prima parte, la seconda, e la terza nuovamente aggiunte…} (In Venetia: appresso Francesco de’ Franceschi Senese, MDLCHIII [1594]), 45. The book, of which earlier editions had appeared in 1578 in Siena and in 1589 in Venice, included Bargagli’s oration on the death of Piccolomini.}{678}

The question remains now as to where Piccolomini found justification to project onto Aristotle’s text the emphasis on the audience as actively decoding metaphors, for he claimed this not to be a contribution of his own, but rather something that somehow was present already in the text of the philosopher.

The answer has to do with the generalization of characteristics that Aristotle assigned to smart sayings (“ἀστεία”) in \textit{Rhetoric} 3.10 and to metaphor in general. By turning to that section, it will be possible for us to recover the thread of thought that allowed Piccolomini to assert—and to do so with inner conviction— that he was expressing Aristotle’s true opinion on metaphors.

For one thing, Piccolomini seems to have been hunting for instances where Aristotle grants the audience a certain amount of space for cooperation, and to somehow feel pleasure as a result of being actively involved in the creation of meaning. In \textit{Rhetoric} 3.10.3, for instance, Aristotle would state that similes are less pleasant than metaphors. This is so because the former take longer, as they include a particle of comparison that is absent from metaphor. As a result, according to Aristotle, the explanation brought by the simile spares the mind the constraint to make some kind of “mental effort” such as would examine the association implied by the metaphor—literally, he writes, the mind \textit{does not inquire} in the simile (“οὐδὲ ζητεῖ”).\footnote{“The simile […] is a metaphor differing only by the addition of a word, wherefore it is less pleasant because it is longer; it does not say that this \textit{is} that, so that the mind does not even examine this” (“ἔστι γὰρ ἢ εἰκόν […] μεταφορὰ διαφέρουσα προσθέασι· διὸ ἦττον ἢδυ, ὅτι μικροτέρος· καὶ οὐ λέγει ὡς τοῦτο ἐκεῖνο· οὔκ οὖν οὐδὲ ζητεῖ τοῦτο ἢ ψυχή”). Aristotle, \textit{Rhetoric}, 396-397, §3.10.3, 1410b}
The verb “ζητεῖν” recurs in the Rhetoric in connection with a part of “mental effort” that certain forms of reasoning require from the audience. Yet it is important to bear in mind that Aristotle’s distinction between simile and metaphor is actually part of a treatment of smart sayings. This alone might explain his focus, unusual in the rest of the treatise, on challenging the intelligence of the audience.

What Aristotle explained in terms of requiring “mental effort”, Piccolomini glosses in terms of involvement of the listener functioning “by himself”. He writes that

Simile is less agreeable […] than metaphor […] He who hears explained, asserted, and manifested in detail the similitude found between the thing being compared and the one with which it is compared—in the simile—lacks any occasion to gain that cognition by himself, as it happens, conversely, in the case of metaphor; in which hearing a name transported from one thing to another, and one thing said to be another, he immediately knows by himself that the cause is the similitude between the one and the other thing, and through that similitude he knows by himself, as if by inference (quasi sillogizando).

Adding further to Aristotle’s succinct and precise account of the difference between simile and metaphor, Piccolomini explains that if the speaker shows in detail the way in which two objects are alike, insofar as the listeners do not make a kind of “mental effort” to figure out

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680 According to The Online Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon, the verb “ζητεῖν” means: “1. seek, seek for […]; 2. inquire for […]; 3. search after, search out […]; 4. search or inquire into, investigate, examine, of philosophical investigation” http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu [accessed August 16 2015]. “Mental effort” is Freese’s translation of the verb “ζητεῖν”. A literal translation of the former passage is that of Annibale Caro, who translates οὐδὲ ζητεῖ as “one does not need to seek them” (“non bisogna punto cercargli”). Annibale Caro, Rettorica d’Aristotele fatta in lingua toscana dal commendatore Annibal Caro (In Venetia: al segno della salamandra, 1570), 229.

681 “È dunque men […] gioconda l’imagine, che la metafora […] Onde viene a mancar nell’imagine l’occasione a colui, che ode di poter egli stesso cercar di guadagnarsi cognizione alcuna: come quello che sentendo esplicare, affermare, & manifestar minutamente nella imagine la somiglianza, che si trova tra la cosa comparata, & quella, a cui si compara; non può havere occasione di guadagnarsela da sé stesso, come gli avvien nella metafora. Nella quale sentendo egli trasportar’ il nome d’una cosa ad un’altra, & dir questa esser quella, per sé medesimo poi conosce la causa di questo esser la somiglianza tra l’una, & l’altra cosa; & mediante tal somiglianza, egli da sé stesso, quasi sillogizando conosce, che cosa s’habbia da intendere per quel nome trasportato”. Piccolomini, Piena e larga parafrase … nel terzo libro, 308-309.
the connection, this amounts to “watering down” any pleasure (“inacquar il diletto”) that gaining it “for themselves” might have afforded them.682

In addition to the contrast of simile and metaphor, Piccolomini found in Aristotle’s treatment of smart sayings in Rhetoric 3.10 instances of a link between cooperation and pleasure that was apparently unrelated to metaphor. Smart sayings, in fact, comprise not only tropes, but also rhetorical syllogisms, or enthymemes.683 These, Aristotle explains, produce the impression of smartness, and therefore bring pleasure, insofar as they make us learn, as was the case with metaphors, through a certain degree of “mental effort”. For that, they should be neither too easy nor too difficult. As explained by Aristotle,

of necessity, therefore, all style and enthymemes that give us rapid information are smart. This is the reason why superficial enthymemes, meaning those that are obvious to all and need no mental effort, and those which, when stated, are not understood, are not popular, but only those which are understood the moment they are stated or those of which the meaning, although not clear at first, comes a little later; for from the latter a kind of knowledge results, from the former neither the one nor the other [italics added].684

The reference to “mental effort” (“ζητεῖν”) parallels the one that occurs on occasion of the contrast between metaphor and simile. In fact, this is precisely the ingredient that allows Aristotle to link metaphors and a certain kind of enthymeme in order to build out of the two of them a separate category of things that produce the impression of smartness. If metaphor leads to mental effort because it leaves something for the mind of the reader to figure out, to “seek” or

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682 Piccolomini, Piena e larga parafrase … nel terzo libro, 308.
683 Aristotle defines the enthymeme as “the strongest of rhetorical proofs”, and as “a kind of syllogism” (“συλλογισμὸς τις”). Aristotle, Rhetoric 8-9, §1.1.11, 1355a. See also Aristotle, Rhetoric, 18-21, §1.2.8, 1856a-b. Aristotle asserts that enthymemes differ from syllogisms in various ways, one of them being that “the conclusion must neither be drawn from too far back nor should it include all the steps of the argument”. Aristotle, Rhetoric, 288-289, §2.22.1, 1395b.
684 “Ἀνάγκη δὲ καὶ λέξιν καὶ ἐνθυμήματα ταύτης ἐστείλα, ὡσα ποιεῖ ἤμιν μάθησιν ταχέως. διό οῦτε τά ἐπιπόλαια τῶν ἐνθυμημάτων εὐδοκιμεῖ (ἐπιπόλαια γὰρ λέγομεν τά παντί δήλα, καί ἀ μηδέν δαι ζητήσαι), οὕτε ὡσα εἰρημένα ἄγνοιομενα εστίν, ἀλλ' ὅσον ἢ ἁμα λεγομένων ἢ γνώσεις γίνεται, καὶ εἰ μη πρότερον ὑπήρχει, ἢ μικρὸν ἀστερίζει ἢ διάνοια· γίγνεται γάρ οἷον μάθησις, ἕκεινος δὲ οὐδέτερον”. Aristotle, Rhetoric, 396-397, §3.10.4, 1410b.
“inquire” as to why something is similar to something else, enthymemes pursue the same end through the phenomenon of “truncation” – that is, through the ellipsis of one of the premises of the argumentation so as to compel the hearer to look for what connects the remaining parts.  

For “mental effort” to become a source of pleasure, however, it needs to take place within certain boundaries: the enthymeme that provokes it should be neither superficial and immediately understandable (“ἐπιπόλαιον”) nor too obscure. While the former would not allow the listener to be aware that there is a process of decoding actually going on due to the excess of transparency of the meaning, the latter would result in failure to grasp anything, because the audience would be unable to take the process of argumentation to completion. Piccolomini follows closely the reasoning of Aristotle. This states that cognition brings pleasure whenever it is rapidly obtained through perceptible yet moderate amounts of mental effort. Since they do all of this, metaphors and enthymemes are pleasant too.

However, this still leaves the question open as to Aristotle’s alleged suggestion that “mental effort” leads the audience to feel that they somehow “own” the cognition they acquire in metaphors and enthymemes.

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685 Truncation, as I will explain below in connection with the work of Jacopo Zabarella, was a key notion in the generalization of pleasure-oriented cooperation in rhetoric that characterizes the late sixteenth century.

686 As Piccolomini’s predecessor, Vettori is of great help to understand Aristotle’s delimitation of a contour for the mental effort required in “ἀστεῖα”. Audiences, according to Vettori, decode superficial enthymemes without their minds being stirred at all: “Nulla mentis agitatione indigent”. The listener has to understand “easily” (“ῥᾳδίος”), which he renders as “sine ulla molestia” (“without any trouble”). Vettori sets the mean that seems to be necessary for the success of “ἀστεῖα” in a space that lags between stir and trouble: it is mandatory that the listener feels that he is somehow exercising the mind, but he should not be discouraged by too much difficulty. Vettori, Commentarii, 540 and 539 respectively. Such a position seems to have been commonplace in the literature of the time, and finds application in every kind of language. Attesting for it is Paolo Giovio’s often repeated advice about “imprese” or devices: “Let it not be obscure in such a way that it may need the sybill as interpreter in order to be understood, nor so clear that every plebeian may understand it” (“ch’ella non sia oscura di sorte ch’abbia mestiero della sibilla per interprete a volerla intendere, né tanto chiara ch’ogni plebeo l’intenda”). Paolo Giovio, Dialogo dell’imprese militare e amorose, ed. Maria Luisa Doglio (Roma: Bulzoni, 1978), 37.

687 “Easy learning is naturally pleasurable to all” (“τὸ γὰρ μανθάνειν ῥαδίος ἲδο φύσει πᾶσιν ἐστί”). Aristotle, Rhetoric, 394-395, §3.10.2, 1410b.
For this, I suggest that one should look at Piccolomini’s commentary on Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* 2.23.30, which contains not only Aristotle’s “authorization” for Piccolomini’s views on cooperation and ownership as part of the decoding of metaphors and enthymemes, but also, in the explanation of the commentator, a proof that the latter was well aware of Quintilian’s opinion on the issue which, moreover, seems to have provided him relevant insights.

In the section in question, Aristotle introduces a kind of enthymeme that wins audiences by making them feel that they are able to predict the conclusion of the argument before the text reaches it. If the enthymeme appears smart, it is because it makes the listeners feel smart first. Aristotle writes:

> Of all syllogisms [...] those are specially applauded, the result of which the hearers foresee as soon as they are begun, and not because they are superficial (for as they listen, they congratulate themselves on anticipating the conclusion); and also those which the hearers are only so little behind that they understand what they mean as soon as they are delivered.\(^{688}\)

This is Piccolomini’s gloss:

> The listener takes [...] a certain pleasure, born from the satisfaction at his own wit, and from the impression that he has earned that knowledge by himself, as if it were born from his own ability, rather than from the words of the orator. As a result, he accepts this knowledge something of his own, and, as such, he esteems it.\(^{689}\)

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\(^{688}\) “Πάντων δὲ [...] σύλλογισμῶν θεωρεῖται μάλιστα τὰ τοιαύτα διὰ ἀρχήμενα προορίωσι μὲ τὸ ἐπιπολῆς εἶναι (ἀμα γὰρ καὶ αὐτοὶ ἢ φ’ αὐτοὶς χαίρουσι προασκηταίοι), καὶ ὅσοι τοσοῦτον ὑστερίζουσιν ἐςβ’ ὅμω εἰρημένων γνωρίζειν”. *Aristotle, Rhetoric*, 324-325, §2.23.30, 1400b.

\(^{689}\) “[L’ascoltante] prende [...] un certo diletto, nato dal compiacersi del proprio ingegno, & dal parergli haversi guadagnato quella notitia, come che più tosto sia nata da valor proprio, che dalle parole dell’oratore; & conseguentemente come cosa sua l’accetta volontieri, & l’ha cara.” *Piccolomini, Piena, et larga parafrase … nel secondo libro*, 436-437. To understand Piccolomini’s emphasis on a reciprocity between the speaker who creates a metaphor and the listener who feels somehow equal to the speaker, it is important to mention that Piccolomini speaks at length of the different degrees of “acuity of wit” that are necessary on behalf of s/he who devises a metaphor, according to whether the latter is obvious or difficult to conceive. As a matter of fact, the similitude that makes a metaphor possible “will be sometimes so evident that every mediocre wit will discover it; but at other times they will be so concealed, that only the understanding that is is full of acuity will be able to find it” (“le quali somiglianze se saranno alle volte tanto manifeste, che ogni mediocre ingegno le potrà conoscere; & alle volte
I suggest that, as Piccolomini commented on Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* 2.23.30—precisely the passage in which the philosopher came closer to imagining the audience satisfied and even proud of the ability they prove at decoding a piece of argument—, he did so in the form of a paraphrase of Quintilian’s *Institutio oratoria* 8.2.21 which, as shown above, contains the depiction, together with the condemnation, of the same feeling. In Piccolomini’s paraphrase of Aristotle it is not only the argument of Quintilian that comes to life, but also the terms, and some turns of phrase that the latter had directed against orators who are obscure enough to give audiences the occasion to feel co-creators of what they listen to. As a matter of fact, Piccolomini’s statement that the pleasure at the enthymeme is born “from the satisfaction at [the listener’s] own wit” (“nato dal compiacersi del proprio ingegno”) is germane to Quintilian’s “acumine suo delectantur”; likewise, Piccolomini’s assertion that the listener enjoys “as though [the argument] were born from his own value, rather than from the words of the orator” echoes Quintilian’s hypothesis that audiences enjoy “as if they had not so much heard them as thought of them for themselves” (“non quasi audierint sed quasi invenerint”).

The connection just pointed out would make Piccolomini’s commentary among the earliest instances of the encounter of Aristotle’s treatment of enthymemes and metaphors with Quintilian’s ideas on the reaction of the audience to obscurity of speech. As I will show in what follows, cooperation, self-love and obscurity would team together to make a familiar explanation for the pleasure obtained from devices associated with acuity of wit, such as maxims and

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690 The passage, translated and quoted in full in section one, reads as follows: “Ut id iam demum eleganter atque exquisite dictum patuerat quod interpretandum sit. Sed auditoribus etiam nonnullis gratia sunt haec, quae cum intelleexerunt acumine suo delectantur, et gaudent non quasi audierint sed quasi invenerint”. Quintilian, *The Orator’s Education*, 338-339, §8.2.21. Donald A. Russell’s translation of “ingenium” in Quintilian’s *Institutio oratoria* as “mental effort” matches Freese’s rendition of Aristotle’s requirement of cooperation of the audience in “ἀστεια”. In case this were only a coincidence, it would be a felicitious one.
metaphors. The link between the three terms will be explicit in some of the manifestoes of the style of prose called “laconic”, like Virgilio Malvezzi’s preface to his Discorsi sopra Cornelio Tacito (1622). In Piccolomini’s time, however, it represents a development in which a commentator often disregarded as derivative in relation to other more prominent names, and a communicator rather than a scholar, was able to compose a reading of Aristotle’s theory of metaphor that was more in tune with prevalent expectation and tastes in the late sixteenth century. This he did by applying to metaphor in general ideas that Aristotle had restricted to the small province of “ἀστεία” or smart sayings and which, moreover, Piccolomini reshaped through the lens of Quintilian’s attack on a kind of pleasure born from a spurious feeling of cooperation, now recast into a framework able to explain tropes in general.

Before I focus on the popularization of the link between obscurity, cooperation and pleasure that came with the laconic style in the early seventeenth century, I would like to linger on the work of a scholar who, roughly at the same time as Piccolomini, would also claim to have identified a relationship, neglected so far, between the feeling of cooperation and pleasure.

Jacopo Zabarella (1533-1589) was a professor in Padua when Piccolomini issued his commentary on Aristotle’s Rhetoric in the years around 1570. Zabarella would underline the importance of the cooperation of the audience in order for a speech to work effectively according to the principles of rhetoric. This means that he considers pleasure only insofar as it is instrumental to persuade people to action—which is, after all, the end of the discipline.

Zabarella emphasized cooperation in relation to enthymemes. As explained above, these, together with metaphor, had elicited from Aristotle a treatment of the response of the audience in the chapter of the Rhetoric on “ἀστεία”. What matters here is that, insofar as Zabarella takes
enthymeme to be the basis of most cases of argumentation in rhetoric, he somehow expands the claims he advances concerning the relationship between enthymemes and cooperation to the discipline as a whole.

As a matter of fact, for Zabarella, cooperation is all pervading and characterizes rhetoric in opposition to dialectic. He considers poetics, rhetoric and dialectic as branches of logic, and consequently proceeds to investigate the specific differences of each of them.\(^691\) About the distinction between dialectic and rhetoric—a question that scholars tend to solve by glossing Aristotle’s statement that rhetoric is “antístrophos” (“ἀντίστροφος”) to dialectic—, Zabarella answers that disciplines are said to differ from each other according to their ends. Hence, while the goal of dialectic is to make people learn something, rhetoric, as suggested above, aims at persuading to action.\(^692\) Zabarella argues accordingly in terms of the lesser or greater means required in order to accomplish either end, and concludes that dialectic, which asks for something easier, may be satisfied with nude speech and syllogism. Rhetoric, on the other hand, may be able to effect harder tasks, but only thanks to the addition of “ornatus” to speech, and to the use of enthymemes.

Zabarella defines enthymemes as truncated syllogisms.\(^693\) These are more efficacious than reasoning stated in full for two reasons. In the first place—closely following Aristotle’s description of truncation—, enthymemes do not distract listeners with information they already

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\(^{691}\) As discussed in Chapters One and Two, the consideration of dialectic, rhetoric and poetics as branches of logic is a characteristic usually associated with the inheritance of Averroes’ interpretation of Aristotle’s philosophy, extremely influential in the ambience of Padua, where Zabarella developed his career.


\(^{693}\) As mentioned in Chapter Two, Boethius had popularized in the sixth century AD a way of understanding enthymemes as syllogisms of which a premise is missing—precisely what is called “truncation”, something that Aristotle had considered to be the case in a particular class of enthymemes alone. Boethius’ understanding of the issue survived in the vulgate of medieval logic, and well into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.
have, but, by skipping already-known premises, the speaker is more capable of concentrating on
the point that needs demonstration. After insisting, with Aristotle, on the fastidiousness of
repeating things that are well known, Zabarella adds:

There is another reason why the orator uses enthymemes with greater frequency than the
entire syllogism, namely because he wants to praise the audience through the omission
of one of the propositions, and by such means obtain their good will; for he lets them
know that they are experienced and learned, such as may know many things that it is not
necessary to explain [italics added].

Zabarella emphasizes the pride in being considered equal to the task of supplying the
omitted premise. To persuade the audience to action, the speaker builds a sort of pact through the
truncation of what would have been a syllogism: silence acquires the value of trust. The listener
feels flattered, and consequently pleased.

As discussed above, Aristotle had not ignored the results of cooperation in enthymemes.
For the ingredient of flattery, however, the case that appears closer to the one described by
Zabarella is the account in Rhetoric 2.23.30 of a kind of enthymeme that makes audiences feel
empowered as they foresee the conclusion by themselves. Despite the similarities, Aristotle
seems to be contemplating a virtue of certain enthymemes rather than, as it is the case in
Zabarella, a feature inherent to truncation that generally characterizes the form of argumentation

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694 “The orator pays attention to omitting everything that might be tedious or fastidious to the audience. For this
reason he tends to use not entire syllogisms, but truncated ones, which are called enthymemes. For it is often the
case that one of the propositions is already known, which then the orator omits whenever sure that the hearer will
understand it with his mind. For indeed he brings annoyance when he repeats things already known” (“eandem
causam animadvertit orator, ut omnia missa faciat, quae auditoribus taedio, ac fastidio esse possint; idcirco solet non
integro, sed truncato uti syllogismo, quod enthymema dicitur; ut plurimum enim contingit ut nota sit altera
propositio, quam omittit orator, quum certo sciat auditorum mente illam subintelligere: fastidio enim afflicit, dum res
notas commemorat)” Jacopo Zabarella, Iacobi Zabarellae Patavini Opera logica: Quorum argumentum, seriem &
utilitatem ostendet tum versa pagina, tum affixa praefatio... Editio tertia (Coloniae: sumptibus Lazari Zetzneri,
1597), 88B-C. I always quote from this edition, the first to contain all the parts it eventually had.
695 “Alia quoque est ratio, cur frequentior sit apud oratorem usus enthymematis, quam integri syllogismi: vult enim
per alterius propositionis omissionem laudare auditores, & ab eis hac ratione benevolentiam captare; eos namque
significat expertos & eruditos viros esse, & qui multa noscant, quae ipsis enarrare non opus sit.” Zabarella, Opera
logica, 88E.
as it takes place in rhetoric. Zabarella extrapolates to the entire field of rhetoric the ingredient of flattery—which he takes as a request for cooperation and a reward for the ability to comply with it—from a group that, in Aristotle, was proper only to the most excellent kind of enthymemes and to smart sayings, or “ἀστεῖα”.

As a component of the enthymeme, flattery mediates in the relationship between speaker and audience normalized by the art of rhetoric, as opposed to dialectic. By engaging the audience to cooperate in the unfolding of argumentation, one achieves a closer relationship between the parts involved in communication, such as to make rhetoric more powerful than dialectic, as befits a discipline committed to persuade people to action.

Piccolomini and Zabarella suggested for metaphor and enthymeme a revised, widely enthusiastic version of ideas on cooperation that had occupied only a marginal role in ancient Greek and Roman rhetorical theory. In doing so, they laid down the foundations for a framework able to theoretically account for new trends, tastes and genres that enjoyed great popularity in subsequent decades.

3. Intense reading and the laconic style

The idea that cooperating to unfold reasoning and to decipher meaning may somehow enhance the experience of the audience and the reader gained currency some time before 1600. To a great extent, this fostered, and in turn resulted from, the increasing popularity of a style generally referred to as “laconic”. The latter had become fashionable as a reaction, both theoretical and practical, to a kind of language commonly labeled “Ciceronian”, rich in long and
abundant periods. To the tyranny of syntax and long-winded diction, laconism opposed a pattern of maxims and brief clauses linked by meaning rather than grammar.\textsuperscript{696}

The noun “laconism” and the adjective “laconic” would experience a wave of transformations by the end of the sixteenth century. Originally referring to things pertaining to ancient Sparta, “laconic” may be found employed as late as the mid-sixteenth century with connotations of roughness and rusticity. In such cases, it refers to a preliminary and unrefined version of Atticism, which denoted, in turn, the ideal of elegant brevity.\textsuperscript{697} It is against a context like this that one may appropriately weigh Erycius Puteanus’ work of reappraisal of the term “laconic” in the early seventeenth century. Puteanus would speak of “that [eloquence] that the people of Sparta once cultivated by Lycurgus’ ordinance – trustworthy, compressed, and as though built out of the darts of vibrating maxims”.\textsuperscript{698} Soon the denomination would become


\textsuperscript{697} For instance, in the mid-sixteenth century Alfonso García Matamoros extolled the splendor of contemporary Spanish letters by stating that “the laconic brevity that [Spain] used has been transformed into Atticism” (“Laconumque illa breviloquentia, qua utebatur, in Atticam conversa est”). Alfonso García Matamoros, \textit{Apologia “Pro adserenda Hispanorum eruditione”}, ed. José López de Toro (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1943), 214. Atticism featured since at least Cicero’s \textit{Brutus} as a style defined for brevity and concision in opposition to the pomp of Asianism. In paragraph 13, he had explained the distinction as a result of the expansion of eloquence from Athens to Asia, where it became swollen through the adoption of the local ways of speaking. As for Matamoros’ statement, it implies that Laconism has to be understood as a stage prior to Atticism: equally brief, yet lacking the refinement of a style worthy of praise.

commonplace for a style punctuated with “sententiae”, aiming at brevity and concision. As soon as the early seventeenth century, laconism and Ciceronianism come to designate the two ends of the opposition that once existed between Atticism and Asianism—a result, to a great extent, of the connotations that each of these gradually acquired in the course of debates and with the gradual shifts in taste.

Over time, laconism came to be thought of in close connection with certain genres and currents of thought— even with a philosophy. Those who championed the laconic style resorted to the roots it allegedly had in ancient Sparta to commend a severe, strong, and austere virtue that they opposed to the luxury and corruption associated with the excesses of a certain version of Ciceronianism.

In lieu of Cicero, partisans of laconism proposed Seneca and Tacitus as models of writing. Lipsius, discussed in Chapter Three in connection with the rise of Tacitus’ popularity, did much to establish the fame of the latter with the edition he first published in 1574, but also gave rise to a passion for Seneca with the edition of his works which appeared in 1605. Earlier on, Lipsius had created the context for the reception of the philosopher with the publication of *De Constantia* more than two decades earlier, in 1584—a book that enjoyed enormous popularity.

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699 In the 1640s, the term “laconic” had become ubiquitous to refer to works written in a style full of maxims and aiming at concision. A large group of these was the works of Malvezzi and of his imitators, which I have discussed in Chapter Three, section three. For instance, the bookseller that paid for the expenses of a translation of Malvezzi’s works into Spanish (Lisbon, 1648) would write that the marquis had surpassed the ancients, “especially in the laconic, and political style in which he has obtained such great reputation” (“principalmente no estillo laconico, & politico em que se fez tanto lugar.”). Leite Pereira, “Dedicatoria”, n.p. Fernández de Heredia—which I studied in Chapter Three in connection with his book *Séneca y Nerón*, published under the pseudonym Diez de Aux in 1642—, was praised in Bartolomé López de Leguizano’s “aprobación” as having “lacónica erudición”. Bartolomé López de Leguizano, “Aprobación”, in Diez de Aux, *Séneca y nerón*, n.p.

across the continent, promoting a version of Stoicism.\textsuperscript{701} Tacitus and Seneca would provide late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century scholars and writers with a model of style that recovered a different side of antiquity, and which often came with Seneca’s Stoic philosophy and Tacitus’ ethical, political and historiographical viewpoints as integral components of the same package.\textsuperscript{702}

The laconic style would become extremely popular after the late sixteenth century. At the same time, it would be subject to ferocious criticism, often directed to the person of Lipsius, considered by many as the promoter of a pernicious alternative to Ciceronianism both through his works and from his chair at the University of Louvain.\textsuperscript{703} This, however, is in stark contrast to the opinion advanced by Lipsius earlier, in a letter he sent in 1589 to his former disciple Dirck Leeuw in connection with his work \textit{Politicorum libri sex}, published the same year. There, Lipsius described his style as aphoristic and unattractive to the common reader, formed, as it was, of brief maxims, not those long and subtle arguments in which the common people gets caught; for that, I am aware they will be met with less favor among readers of the kind.\textsuperscript{704}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{701}{Justus Lipsius, \textit{De constantia libri duo, qui alloquium praecipue continent in publicis malis} (Antuerpiae, apud Christophorum Plantinum, MDLXXXIV [1584]). The bibliography for the increasing popularity of Seneca in late sixteenth-century Italy and Spain is extensive. For Spain, a classic study that covers the medieval and early modern periods is Karl Blüher, \textit{Seneca in Spanien : Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Seneca-Rezeption in Spanien vom 13. bis 17. Jahrhundert} (München: Francke, 1969).}
\footnote{702}{Of course, Ciceronian style was often conflated with ethical and political views as well. As one may easily imagine, formations as such were liable to become blended with one another at every moment. At any rate, it is worth noticing that the assimilation of stylistic and philosophical characteristics exemplifies what “style” means in the early modern period. Authors like Hugo Grotius, Virgilio Malvezzi or Baltasar Gracián tended to establish, for the case of Tacitus, a continuum between the paucity of words, silence, and the exploration of inner thoughts and intimacy. For the perceptions of Tacitus’ style, see Jan Waszink, “Your Tacitism or mine? Modern and early-modern conceptions of Tacitus and Tacitism”, \textit{History of European Ideas} 36, no. 4 (2010).}
\footnote{703}{For the reactions against laconism, the literature is overwhelming. For the reservations against the so-called Lipsian style in Milan at the time of Puteanus’, see Ferro, \textit{Federico Borromeo ed Eracio Puteano}, 275-316. For the hostility that it met in Jesuit contexts, see Henry F. Fullenwider, “Die Kritik der deutschen Jesuiten an dem lakonischen Stil des Justus Lipsius im Zusammenhang der jesuitischen Argutia-Bewegung”, \textit{Rhetorica} 2, no. 1 (Spring, 1984).}
\footnote{704}{“Breves sententiae sunt, non longi illi et subtiles discursus, quibus capitur vulgus, ideoque minus gratiae, scio, inventent apud vulgus”. Quoted in Morford, “Tacitean prudentia”, 142.}
\end{footnotes}
The fact that a style presented in 1589 as catering only to the elite would be decried and battled against as if it were a plague only some years later bears witness to the rapidity and to the magnitude with which the fashion of laconism became central to the landscape of prose writing after 1600.

What matters now is that the preference for one model of style over the other entailed the promotion of a different conception of the reading process and the satisfaction or pleasure associated with it. In what follows, I will show that the laconic style brought to the fore a new emphasis on the cooperation between reader and author that formalized and provided actual instances for the developments in rhetoric explained in section two above.

In the year of Lipsius’ death, his disciple Erycius Puteanus (1574-1646) – who had arrived in Italy with a recommendation from his professor and then occupied a chair in Milan’s scuole palatine – published two short orations in praise of the laconic style, entitled Laconismi encomium and Laconismi patrocinium (1606). The former was a defense of laconism; the second contained a response against the objections advanced by his friend Henricus Farnesius to Laconismi encomium. Some years later, Puteanus would reunite the two, together with Farnesius’ part in the controversy, under the title De laconismo syntagma (1609). Puteanus defined the laconic style as one that uses such means as are strictly necessary to convey an idea,

705 For Puteanus’ experience in Milan, and the relations he entertained with the cultural environment of cardinal Federico Borromeo, and with the Juan Fernández de Velasco – condestable of Castile and mentioned in Chapter One as part of the audience of Talentoni’s Discorso on marvel–, see Ferro, Federico Borromeo ed Ericio Puteano, passim.

706 I always quote from Puteanus, De laconismo syntagma. The two earlier works appeared as Laconismi encomium (Mediolani: Typis Curialibus, apud Malatestas, MDCVI [1606]), and Laconismi patrocinium. Dialogus. Quo breviloquentia firmatur aut munitur: & H. Farnesi ἐπιχειρήματα leniter diluuntur (Mediolani: Typis Curialibus, apud Malatestas, MDCVI [1606]).
in contrast with what he perceived as the verbosity and lack of precision characteristic of bad representatives of Ciceronianism.

In addition to Puteanus’ compendium of 1609, I will consider the support of Tacitus’ laconism promoted in the preface written by Virgilio Malvezzi to his Discorsi sopra Cornelio Tacito, a work mentioned already in Chapter Three.707

As a point of departure, Malvezzi inquires into what causes the reading of Tacitus to be enjoyable to such a degree.

Although this is partly due, he writes, to the subjects he narrates—tales of kings that suit a time of monarchs such as his own—, emphasis falls on the way in which the historian recounts these, namely “in the laconic style, which pleases more than Asianism as much as wine, if pure, pleases more than watered down”.708 Malvezzi compares laconism and Asianism through the same metaphor that had helped Piccolomini distinguish between metaphor and simile: that of pouring too much water into the wine, wasting the pleasure afforded by the need to apply “mental effort” (Aristotle’s “ζητεῖν” for smart sayings or “ἀστεῖα”) to the process of understanding.709

Malvezzi’s description of Tacitus’ style as “laconic” places him in relation to Puteanus’ dialogues. The fact that Malvezzi shared with Puteanus a position favorable to laconism is

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707 Virgilio Malvezzi, Discorsi sopra Cornelio Tacito del conte Virgilio Malvezzi. Al serenissimo Fernando II Gran Duca di Toscana (In Venetia: presso Marco Ginami, 1622). See Chapter Three, section three for Malvezzi’s works and the popularity they enjoyed in the court of Philip IV in the days of Olivares’ “privanza”.

708 “Nello stile laconico, il quale tanto più piace dello asiatico, quanto il vino puro dall’inacquato”. Malvezzi, Discorsi, n.p. See Chapter Three, section one for the affinity that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scholars perceived between the subjects narrated in Tacitus’ histories and the political situation in which they lived.

709 A different but parallel metaphor sometimes associated with the laconic style was that of a distilled liquor in contrast with a decoction – laconism is about getting rid of everything but the essence. Malvezzi would use precisely that pharmacological contrast in Il Romulo (1629). In his preface to the reader, he writes that the illnesses of the princes “are treated with quintessences, instead of being sickened with decoctions (“si medicano i loro malori con le quinte essenze, non si nauseano co’ decotti”). Malvezzi, Il Romulo, n.p. About the metaphor that opposes distillation and decoction, see Clizia Carminati, “Alcune considerazioni”, 93.
confirmed by Malvezzi’s arguments in favor of Tacitus’ prose and his attack against loquaciousness.

Yet a gap opens between them wide enough to deserve attention. Through a reading in parallel of Malvezzi’s preface and Puteanus’ dialogues, I will consider how each of them takes a position that equally supports the viability of a model for which cooperation, and therefore a model of active, attentive and intense reading, are understood as a source of pleasure and, to a certain extent, as the ultimate justification that calls for a preference for the laconic style over other alternatives.

Malvezzi’s mention that styles other than the laconic are so to speak watered down and inessential is reminiscent of Puteanus’ claim that Asianism as a pattern tends to indulge in things alien and excessive to the substance of speech.710 Puteanus’ comparison between laconism and a line going straight between two points has a counterpart in Malvezzi’s justification of brevity in practical terms: books for princes such as Tacitus’ – and, he writes, that is what Tacitus’ writings are – should avoid causing readers to waste time with redundancy.711

However, Puteanus and Malvezzi seem to think differently in terms of whether or not laconism implies obscurity. As a consequence, they have views that are often far from identical concerning the process of unfolding maxims and metaphors, and, generally, of reading.

For Malvezzi, for instance, there is no doubt that the laconic style is obscure by nature and deserves praise for being so. Tacitus’ obscurity

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710 Puteanus, De laconismo syntagma, especially 21-3 and 25.
711 Puteanus, De laconismo syntagma, 27; as for Malvezzi: “It is a great satisfaction when one does not lose time in reading many lines in which there is no learning” (“è di gran sodisfattione il non perdere tempo a leggere molte righe, nelle quali non sia qualche insegnamento”). Malvezzi, Discorsi, n.p. Such a statement is commensurate with Aristotle’s remark that “ἀστεῖα” are pleasant, among other things, because they are inherently brief. They give “rapid information” (“μάθησιν ταξιδίων”). Aristotle, Rhetoric, 396-397, §3.10.4, 1410b.
offers great pleasure to whoever finds its true meaning through effort, for he judges it to be the offspring of his own intellect. He seizes the occasion of those maxims to get out of the thing that he reads, and, going out of it without error, he receives that pleasure that the hearers of metaphors usually get.\footnote{L’oscurità sua [of Tacitus] dà grandissimo gusto a chiunque affadigandosi, ne trova il vero senso, giudicandolo parto del proprio intelletto; il quale [the reader] ricevendo occasione da quelle sentenze d’uscir fuori della cosa che legge, ed uscendo senza ingannarsi, riceve quel godimento, che trar sogliono gli uditori delle metafore”. Malvezzi, Discorsi, n.p. The idea that someone may take something heard or read as if s/he—and not someone else—had conceived it seemed appealing to seventeenth century scholars. This is true also in fields such as politics. For instance, Saavedra Fajardo wrote in Empresas políticas (1643) that there are rulers of such temperament that they never accept the opinion of others (“parecer ajeno”). For those it is better to say things in such a way that they feel they are co-creators of them, and therefore may admit them out of self-love. See Saavedra Fajardo, Empresas políticas, 430.}

Malvezzi connects laconism with “mental effort”, and with the feeling of having somehow cooperated, and even become co-creator of what one merely listens to or reads. In doing so, he makes a premise out of Piccolomini’s point of arrival – with what degree of awareness of the work of his predecessor, we cannot know. What matters is that ideas presented by Piccolomini in 1572 in the form of a new contribution able to challenge previously held conceptions of the pleasure involved in metaphors seem now, fifty years later, to be in circulation and, to a certain extent, widely acknowledged.\footnote{The link between involvement of the reader and co-authorship would become a commonplace to which scholars and writers frequently resorted. Sometimes they even parodied the notion, or got close to it, as it happens when Francisco Manoel de Mello challenges his reader in 1645 to compose “philosophical and political aphorisms” from the narration contained in his history of the wars of Catalonia, “drawing learning by yourself out of my knowledge, so that both of us may be called the authors” (“sacando de mis letras dotrina por ti mesmo; y ambos asi nos llamaremos autores”). Francisco Manoel de Mello, “Hablo a quien lee”, in Historia de los movimientos, y separación de Cataluña, y de la guerra… (En San Vicente: por Paulo Craesbeeck, Impresor de las Ordenes militares, año 1645), n.p.} At the same time, Quintilian’s notions concerning the reaction of the audience to obscure language have become widespread and appropriated in a tone that is now unapologetic and convincing in favor of a relationship between difficulty and pleasure.

Malvezzi describes the process of reading a text in the laconic style in terms of “going out” of the thing being read. This, explicitly assimilated to the process of understanding metaphors, seems to refer to the inference of a meaning that is only implied as part of the
structure of argumentation. However enigmatic, I suggest that Malvezzi’s statement is parallel to a similar one advanced some decades earlier in Talentoni’s *Discorso sopra la maraviglia* (1596) in connection with things that inspire wonder. We read there that “as it feels marvelous, the soul tends to withdraw from the object, because the latter appears as if clothed with excessive difficulty”.

The connection between tropes and enthymemes was something that readers of Piccolomini could have reconstructed with ease from the similarity of the arguments he advances concerning both forms. Yet this becomes even more unambiguous in Malvezzi’s formulation, something that should come as no surprise in light of the fact that Aristotle had referred to both indistinctly in relation to the formation of smart sayings or “ἀστεῖα”. Matteo Peregrini’s *Delle acutezze* would echo this in 1639 by treating them as equivalent. It seems fair to conclude that in order to understand the shift in taste that culminates in what seventeenth century scholars would call “acuity of wit”, it is necessary to focus on the set of priorities that normalized the consideration of metaphors and truncated arguments as devices that host analogous processes of codification and decoding.

As critics immediately noticed, Malvezzi’s praise of obscurity inverts a taboo prevalent in stylistic theory since Greek and Roman antiquity. In a diatribe nominally targeted against Pierre Mathieu, but representing even more directly a derision of Malvezzi, Agostino Mascardi criticized the laconic style as obscure by imagining a writer who ironically quotes Quintilian’s

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714 “Essendo soliti gli spiriti in quella [nella meraviglia] a ritirarsi dall’oggetto, perché se gli presenta armato di troppa difficultade”. Talentoni, *Discorso*, 26. For the discussion of Talentoni’s thought, see Chapter Two, section two.

715 The reluctance to accept the identity established by Malvezzi between maxims and metaphors is responsible for a traditional, misleading division in scholarship in the seventeenth century between the study of a taste for wonder embodied in metaphors –from Giovanni Battista Marino to Góngora–, and a preference for brevity and laconism characteristic of prose writers such as Malvezzi, Francisco de Quevedo and Gracián. For a crucial contribution oriented to dispel such distinction, see Carminati, “Alcune considerazioni”.
words in defense of the idea that the reader needs to make some effort in order to appear ingenious. Mascardi writes:

It will be more likely, then, that [...] as a man of lofty spirit, he would like to show himself as such by means of obscure speech, considering the insufferable effort of the reader at understanding the work to be irrefutable proof of his own value [sc. the author’s] in composing it; *tum demum ingeniōsī scilicet, si ad intelligendum nos opus sit ingenio*, Quintilian says [8.Pr.].

The preceding seems to prove that Quintilian’s opinion concerning the cooperation of the reader was at hand both to Malvezzi and to the detractors of the latter. As a matter of fact, scholars of the first half of the seventeenth century tend to use such statements from *Institutio oratoria* to defend both a one case and its opposite.

Unlike Malvezzi, Puteanus had tried to remain within the boundaries of Aristotle’s praise of moderation as requisite for audiences to enjoy: only between what is obvious and superficial and what is too hard to be understood is it possible for pleasure to take place.

Countering the idea that the laconic style had anything to do with “obscuritas”, Puteanus quoted freely from Aristotle’s *Poetics* 22, 1458a, where the philosopher warned against the abuse of what requires too much “mental effort” at decoding, and thus becomes “enigmatic”. Aristotle had written:

Impressive and above the ordinary is the diction that uses exotic language (by ‘exotic’ I mean loan words, metaphors, lengthenings, and all divergence from the standards). But if

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one composes entirely in this vein, the result will be either a riddle or barbarism—a riddle, if metaphors predominate; barbarism, if loan words [italics added].\(^{717}\)

Echoing the quote above, Puteanus demarcates laconism in sharp opposition to any characterization of the style as obscure:

One thing, I say, is a riddle [“gryphum”, “aenigma”], and another laconism and apothegm. In the first there is obscurity, but clarity in the second; vice there, here virtue: a virtue, I say, which assembles words in shorthand, and contracts them, explaining and showing the thing itself through fertility of meaning.\(^{718}\)

Style aims at a term that lies halfway between extreme ends, defining clarity as moderation between the humility of common speech and the riddle or “aenigma” that results from excess of obscurity. The structure of *De laconismo syntagma* is a reflection of Puteanus’ concern about complying with received standards of style, no less than of his support of the status of clarity, generally undisputed among ancient rhetoricians.\(^{719}\) The volume, as mentioned above, reproduces through speeches and letters the exchange between Puteanus and his friend Henricus Farnesius or Henri du Four. While agreeing on certain characteristics that a good style must possess, they diverge as to whether laconism may possibly represent the ideal of clarity that

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\(^{717}\) “Σεμινὴ δὲ καὶ ἔξαλλάτουσα τὸ ἱδιωτικὸν ἢ τοῖς ἕνεκι κεχρημένη· ἔνεκον δὲ λέγω γλῶτταν καὶ μεταφορὰν καὶ ἑπάκτουσιν καὶ πάν τὸ παρὰ τὸ κύριον. ἢλλ’ ἂν τις ἄμαντα τοιοῦτα ποιήσῃ, ἢ α’νγημα ἔσται ἢ βαρβαρισμός· ἄν μὲν ὄν ἐκ μεταφορῶν, ἄνγημα, ἢ μὲν ἐκ γλῶττῶν, βαρβαρισμός”. Aristotle, “Poetics”, 108-111, §22, 1458a.

\(^{718}\) “Aliud inquam, scio gryphum & aenigma esse, aliud laconismum atque apophthegma. Isthic obscuritas, hic brevitas est. isthic vitium, hic virtus. Virtus inquam, quae verba compendio colligit & contrahit; rem ipsam ubert sensus extendit et ostendit”. Puteanus, *De laconismo syntagma*, 96-97.

\(^{719}\) For clarity of speech as the first principle of elocution, see especially the notion of “σαφήνεια” in Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, §3.2.1-5, 1404b and *Poetics*, §22, 1458a, and that of “perspicuitas” in Quintilian, *The Orator’s Education*, 350-353, §8.2.22. See also Hermogenes, *De ideis*, 1.2-4 for the appreciation of clarity or perspicuity in a framework that would prove extremely influential in early modern times. Hermogenes, “Les catégories stylistiques du discours (*De ideis*)”, in Michel Patillon, ed., *Corpus rhetoricum*, vol. 4 (Paris: Les belles lettres, 2012), 35-50, §1.2-4.
they theoretically share. Puteanus persuades his correspondent that by laconism he too intends a model of clarity without verbosity.

Even if partially, Puteanus seems to be of a mind with his teacher, Lipsius. One decade earlier, the latter had written that Tacitus’ style remains within the realm of clarity, and appears obscure only to readers who lack “acumen” and therefore fail to meet the expectations that the author had conceived for his readership. Tacitus, Lipsius writes, “seems rough and obscure to some. Is it his vice or theirs? For I confess that he has written sharply and wittily, and such must be his readers too”. Rather than being obscure, Tacitus presupposes a reader with certain characteristics. “Acumen” is one of the qualities, together with “prudentia” and “iudicium”,

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720 Henri du Four (†1610) had published a treatise De imitatione Ciceronis in 1571. With such a precedent, one would expect a confrontation between two opposed views of style, and, at least partially, this is the feeling we get at the beginning of the confrontation. Yet Farnesius adds a palinode that apparently resolves the conflict through a praise of a style that is neither excessively brief nor too redundant, complying with the requirements of both Puteanus’ laconism and Farnesius’ cult of Cicero. Names such as laconism or Ciceronianism become useless in the debate, or at least that is what Puteanus’ conviviality tries to present the readers with. Important is only the ideal of “good style” that they refer to. Farnesius’ conclusion emphasizes this by arguing that he likes this laconism – that is, one that pursues concise clarity instead of obscure roughness and rusticity.

721 I try to suggest that it is common for partisans of opposite notions of style in the conflict between Ciceronianism and laconism to defend choices that, although nominally different, are cast in terms that sound identical. The debate tends to be about how the practice of each represents best the theory upon which all – friends and enemies alike – entirely agree. In addition to the debate between Puteanus and Farnesius, consider Mascardi’s definition of a style alternative to the vice of laconism that sounds much like Puteanus’ definition of the latter. Bellini, Agostino Mascardi tra ‘ars poetica’ e ‘ars historica’, 222-225.


723 Mascardi seemed to be even more offended at positions like these than at those who champion obscurity: “That at which I marvel most is the following: that speaking one day with one of them and with the book in my hand, as I complained modestly about some obscurity I could never obtain from him that he recognized it, while he swore that all that he had written was clearer than the sun” (“quello di che gran maraviglia mi prende si è, che favellando un giorno con un di loro, e co’l libro in mano, di qualche oscurità modestamente dolendomi, non potetti ottenere mai, che riconoscerla, in compagnia degli altri, volesse; giurando, quanto havea scritto, esser più chiaro del sole”). Mascardi, Dell’arte historica, 678.
which the reader will exert in the reading of Tacitus’ histories in a way unparalleled by the work of other historians.724

Puteanus’ view of Tacitus’ style agrees with Lipsius’ in that both scholars deny that the author of *Annales* writes obscurely: “Mental effort”, and therefore a degree of cooperation, may be required as part of the reading process, but this does not mean that he incurs what rhetoricians since antiquity pointed at as a vice. While Malvezzi describes reading in terms that proudly emphasize “effort” (“fatica”), Lipsius and Puteanus speak, respectively, of a reader who is able and prepared for the task, and one that simply pays close attention to what he reads.

Puteanus’ goal is to harmonize the requirement for clarity and for a process of reading portrayed as attentive and intense. The reader he depicts matches to a great extent the one imagined by Malvezzi: s/he participates in a style that indulges in sententiousness, and which continually offers the task of completing things only hinted at. Refusing that this has anything to do with obscurity, Puteanus writes that

> the laconic style makes—so that I may agree with Quintilian— that it signifies more than it says, and even that which it does not say. A reply, and indeed every speech, should be restrained, and some words need to be suppressed and even separated, so that a deeper meaning may come out.725

The passage of Quintilian that Puteanus has in mind seems to be the definition of “emphasis” found in the eighth book of *Institutio Oratoria*. According to it, “emphasis” operates

724 In line with this, Lipsius defines Tacitus’ excellence among historians, and especially in comparison with Livy, “not because of eloquence, or other virtues, but due to those that we are considering now, namely prudence and remarks about judgment” (“non eloquentia, aut aliis virtutibus: sed iis quas nunc consideramus, prudentiae & iudicij notis”). Lipsius, “Appendix 2. Lipsius’ Notae to the *Politica*”, 733.
“by offering a deeper meaning than words of themselves declare”.

It is a figure of “ornatus” that the orator would use to make the audience pay close attention every time s/he says more than s/he seems to be saying. By virtue of the mechanism of generalization responsible for many of the transformations discussed heretofore, Puteanus’ description of laconism implies turning the mechanism of understanding just mentioned into the norm of any speech, rather than a punctual feature or a figure. This makes of reading a procedure characterized by extreme meticulousness, engagement and attention.

Quintilian had defined “emphasis” as a quality neighboring brevity, although of greater virtue (“amplier virtus”); it makes sense therefore for Puteanus to describe laconism not by recourse to brevity—a device that proves frequently ambiguous, which rhetoricians too often saw degenerating into obscurity—, but through the good, inherently positive figure of emphasis. As a consequence, speech remains determined by a modality of signification within which everything suggests more than it seems actually to mean.

As had happened when Piccolomini

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726 Puteanus literally echoes a part of Quintilian’s definition: “Next to the aforementioned quality [sc. brevitas], but of greater virtue, lies emphasis, which offers a deeper meaning than words themselves declare. It is of two kinds: the one signifies more than it says, while the other signifies also that which it does not say” (“Vicina praedictae [sc. brevitas], sed amplier virtus est emphasis, altiorem praebens intellectum quam quem verba per se ipsa declarant. Eius duae sunt species: altera quae plus significat quam dicit, altera quae etiam id quod non dicit.”). Quintilian, *The Orator’s Education*, 386-387, §8.3.82-83.

727 As late as the 1680s, one may find evidence that a connection between the figure of “emphasis” and a text that appears difficult was common in scholarly language, and that partisans of clarity might easily relate emphasis to the vice of obscurity. For instance, this is what we find in Juan Cortés Osorio’s “Aprobación” to Joseph del Olmo’s “relación” of the auto general de fe celebrated in the same year in Madrid, in which the author speaks of “the mysterious emphasis of what is obscure” ("los énfasis misteriosos de lo oscuro"). Juan Cortés Osorio, “Aprobación”, in Joseph del Olmo, *Relación histórica del auto general de fe, que se celebró en Madrid este año de 1680* ([En Madrid]: Impreso por Roque Rico de Miranda, año 1680), n.p. As discussed in Chapter Three, “misterio” was often used in a sense derived from the one it has in religion, to mean anything that contains more than it shows at first sight. This is the meaning it often has, for instance, in Gracián’s *Oráculo manual and Agudeza*.

728 That the virtue of brevity often results in the vice of obscurity was commonplace in early modern rhetorical treatises. The vast majority quoted Horace’s *Ars poetica*, ll. 25-26. Quintilian himself wrote that those “male imitantes” turn “brevitas” into “obscuritas”. Quintilian, *The Orator’s Education*, 386-387, §8.3.82.

729 The idea that Tacitus implies things rather than saying them was widespread in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Strada, who wrote that he was “more to be understood than read” (“magis intelligendum quam legendum”), would state that Tacitus “would never entirely open the meaning he has in his soul; for that he uses a speech that remains suspended, ambiguous, and made of words that struggle out of him and can be made to signify anything and the opposite of it” (“sensa animi numquam penitus aperienda: ob idque oratione utendum suspensa,
transferred to metaphor in general the qualities of some kinds of metaphor, we see here a change of taste theoretically justified through the projection to speech as a whole of a feature originally intended for a particular and delimited usage.\textsuperscript{730}

Malvezzi’s description of Tacitus’ brevity and manner of leaving things half said, with abundance of “sententiae that punctuate and comment on austere pieces of narration” echoes similar assertions from Puteanus, who wrote that

if we use few words, of necessity some of them need be suppressed that insinuate and reveal themselves through silence. Wherefore sometimes in only a word there is a full and eloquent sentence, which while keeping suspense, drags and penetrates the soul of the reader with some sudden sting or dart.\textsuperscript{731}

Puteanus had asserted that laconism meant using the necessary means of expression with neither lack nor excess. However, in a persuasive proof of the juggling required to accommodate clarity and laconism, Puteanus sometimes goes beyond something uncontroversial such as the absence of the superfluous and ventures into a more radical version of it, by promoting that one may sometimes suppress elements that, while perhaps are not strictly necessary, are nonetheless

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\textit{perplexaque, atque eluctantium verborum quae utroque trahi possint“}. Strada, \textit{Prolusiones academicæ}, 27. Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas says that Tacitus “wished to leave to the mind of the reader something to ponder” (“quiso más dexar algo que pensar en el ánimo del lector”). Herrera y Tordesillas, \textit{Discursos}, 3, while the jurist Antonio de Covarrúbí y Leyva stated: “The way of speaking characteristic of Cornelius Tacitus [is] brief and acute, and compressed, and so-to-speak hasty; and when it seems that he is going to say the thing, and the reader goes on waiting for it to be said in order to understand it, he leaves it as if said, imitating in this, and in everything he was able to, the two most excellent historians, the Latin Sallust and the Greek Thucydides” (“la manera de dezir y frasis de Cornelio Tácito breve y aguda, y recogida, y como apressurada, y que cuando parece que ha de dezir la cosa, y el lector passa adelante esperando a que la diga, para entenderla, la dexa dicha, imitando en esta parte, y aun en todo quanto pudo, a dos excelentissimos historiadores, Salustio latino, y Tucídides griego”. Covarrúbí y Leyva, “Aprobación”, n.p. Gracián called Tacitus “he who means the double of what he says” (“aquel que significa otro tanto más de lo que dice”). Gracián y Morales, \textit{Agudeza}, 617. Interestingly, he depicts Malvezzi in similar terms, as someone who requires attentive and intensive readers: Malvezzi is a historian who “encloses a soul in every clause, and for that requires a lively attentiveness” (“en cada cláusula encierra un alma, por eso requiere viva atención”. Gracián y Morales, \textit{Agudeza}, 639.\textsuperscript{730} For Piccolomini, see section two above.\textsuperscript{731} “Si paucis, quaedam supprimenda necessario sunt, quae ipso silentio suaviter se insinuent ac prodant. Unde, in uno interdum verbo pleno & facunda sententia est, quae dum suspendit, trahit & penetrat audientis animum repentino quodam aculeo, sive telo”. Puteanus, \textit{De laconismo syntagma}, 96.
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usually expressed. The absence of words, Puteanus intimates, creates silence. This, in turn, suspends the process of signification during a pause or a time of wait after which the reader, through a degree of “mental effort”, eventually attains the meaning. As the latter comes to be perceived, it penetrates the intellect in a way likened to a dart, following the metaphor of something that, after it has accumulated force or tension, is suddenly released. At the same time, this is nothing but a description of the process of hesitation before some difficulty, together with the subsequent pleasure at actively deciphering what at first was hidden or latent. The reference to this as aculeus introduces us to the realm of “acumen” or wit – which corresponds, in a certain way, to Aristotle’s smart sayings or “ἀστεῖα”. The term “aculeus” is also reminiscent of the anthology of witty sayings and fragments published in the same volume with De laconismo syntagma, entitled Stili et sermonis aculei.732 In the introductory epistle to Maximilianus Plowierius, Puteanus defined such kind of inscriptions or “aculei” as “some little fiery inscriptions, sudden, and utterly unexpected”.733 Spirit, suddenness and improvisation are characteristics that, in subsequent years, are going to populate writings on wit or “acumen”.

Laconism, therefore, sharing the features associated with “aculeus”, becomes one of the concrete manifestations that turn wit from a particular feature of language, historically connected with Aristotle’s “ἀστεῖα”, into the form of language as a whole. Moreover, it is worth noticing that as early as Castelvetro’s commentary on the Poetics of 1570, wonder, as that which arouses the impression of “acuity of wit”, was already compared to a dart.734 Laconism, in the way theorized by Puteanus and Malvezzi, appears as a field in which certain notions about the psychology

733 “Scriptiunculae quaedam calidae, repentinae, ac prorsus extemporaneae”. Puteanus, Thyrsi Philotesii, 6.
734 Castelvetro speaks of “the arrow of wonder” (“la saetta della maraviglia”). Castelvetro, Poetica, 221v.
involved in decoding and unfolding arguments become normalized and even commonplace before they are taken over, some years later, and made into objects of study by theorists of wit.

The feeling of cooperation and co-creation as a source of pleasure is central to Matteo Peregrini’s *Delle acutezze*, the first treatise on wit ever to appear in print, in 1639. Peregrini was a friend of Malvezzi, and also came from Bologna.

Peregrini’s contribution to the debate on the cooperation of listeners and readers and the pleasure involved in it touches only accidentally on the issue of obscurity. In fact, for Peregrini, acuity of wit ("acutezza") relates to obscurity only insofar as the audience is asked to apply a certain amount of "mental effort" such as enables them to perceive the link that a trope or a figure establishes between two things—what he calls "legamento figurato". Constraining the audience to explore the proportionality established among things, writers fill the hearers with wonder. In fact, as the latter consider what they hear or read, they ascribe to the author a certain excellence or virtue of wit. Peregrini writes that

> whenever the connection by trope or figure obtains such a rare and befitting agreement among the linked parts that the virtue of wit becomes the main object of admiration in the saying, then it will possess admirable acuity of wit.

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735 Matteo Peregrini. *Delle acutezze, che altrimenti spiriti, vivezze, e concetti, volgarmente si appellano* (In Genova: per Gio. Maria Farroni, Nicolò Pesagni, & Pier Francesco Barbieri, 1639). For more information on the editions of the treatise, and a discussion on Peregrini’s notions of “acutezza”, see Chapter Two, section two.

736 For Peregrini’s siding with Malvezzi, and the rivalry with Mascardi, see Carminati, “Una lettera”.

737 Through repetition across the treatise, Peregrini makes of many of the phrases in the following passage almost technical terms: “Quando adunque il legamento figurato giugnerà a formare una tanto raraaconcezza vicendevole tra le parti collegate, che la virtù dell’ingegno facciasi in esso principale oggetto di ammirazione; haveremo nel detto l’acutezza mirabile”. Peregrini, *Delle acutezze*, 43.
Yet to the identification of the author’s wit inherent in the phenomenon of “acutezza”, Peregrini also adds the cooperation of the listener or the reader. He considers this aspect in relation to one of the sources of wit, which he calls “sottointeso” (“implied”, “understood”).

“Sottointeso” entails leaving something half said, and therefore it is no coincidence that Peregrini’s description is reminiscent of Puteanus’ words about laconism, quoted in turn from Quintilian’s definition of “emphasis” and then adopted by Malvezzi, so to speak, as the general principle of Tacitus’ writing. “Sottointeso” happens, according to Peregrini, “every time that by a figure, one means and intends things that the words do not express”. 738 He adds:

The hearer is delighted because of several reasons. One of them is the shrewdness of the speaker’s wit, which becomes in itself a very pleasant object. Another one is the act itself, which because it is entirely natural is consequently delightful. Yet another one is the reflection about the part of the reader in the understanding of such sayings. For if the speaker wants to be understood in things that he does not say, it follows necessarily that the hearer has to cooperate somehow with his own sagacity – a pleasant thing indeed. Witness the fact that many enjoy hearing, or reading obscure things, because (as Quintilian says), when they understand, they rejoice as if they had not so much heard them as thought of them for themselves. For after all everything through which the cognition and consideration of our own value takes place, as Saint Thomas said, is always pleasant. 739

Peregrini’s description of the pleasure at things that remain half said gains perspective when compared with the description of metaphor proposed by Piccolomini in 1572. Both admit

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738 “Ogni volta, che mediante la figura si dicono, & intendono quelle cose, che non suonano le parole”. Peregrini, Delle acutezze, 125.
739 “L’ascoltante si diletta per più ragioni. Una è l’accortezza dell’ingegno del dicitore, che da sé stessa fa oggetto molto diletto. L’altra è il proprio atto, il quale per esser grandemente naturale, gli è conseguentemente molto gioco: un’ altra è la riflessione sopra la parte, ch’egli ha nell’intelligenza di detti simili. Percioché, volendosi essere inteso in quello, che non si dice, segue necessariamente che l’ascoltatore in un certo modo particolare cooperi con la propria sagacità. Cosa dilettevole, a segno che molti si godono d’udire, o leggere, cose oscure, perché, dice Quintiliano, Cum intellexerint, suo acumine delectantur, non quasi audierint, sed quasi invenerint. Percché in somma tutto quello, per lo quale Fit in nobis aliqua cognitio, & existimatio, proprii boni, come diceva S. Tomaso, ci è sempre dilettoso”. Peregrini, Delle acutezze, 125-126. Subsequent theorists of “acuity of wit” would add to the perspective here sketched by Peregrini. As M. J. Woods has shown, Pietro Sforza Pallavicino—a Jesuit as well, and Malvezzi’s nephew—intimated that whenever a maxim fails to be brief, it is not noticed as containing “acuity of wit”. In fact, the audience receives no surprise from it, and even though they foresee the conclusion—as with the enthymemes imagined in Aristotle’s Rhetoric, 2.23.30–, they feel that this is so because the maxim is too easy rather than because they have unfolded it with ingenuity. See Woods, Gracián meets Góngora, 88.
that the active role of the listener or the reader as cooperator and, allegedly, co-creator is the actual cause of pleasure. The reference to Quintilian, present but unacknowledged in Piccolomini’s paraphrase of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* 2.23.30, is central and explicit in Peregrini’s treatise. Peregrini reverses Quintilian’s condemnation of obscurity in *Institutio oratoria* 8.2, or at least places the latter in a position as ambivalent as Peregrini’s own relation to wit. The authority of Thomas Aquinas, absent from Piccolomini’s paraphrase, reinforces the statement of Quintilian in a space of ambivalence: both authors serve to explain a phenomenon—namely, the satisfaction at one’s own ability and ingenuity—in a context that appears new and alien to both.

Moreover, even though both Piccolomini and Peregrini failed to get rid entirely of Aristotle’s so-called “natural cause” for the pleasure involved in learning—the notion that the latter is inherently pleasurable to humans—, they showed disagreement by transforming the act of acquiring knowledge into a mere means towards some other thing that they considered to be the actual occasion for pleasure. In the case of Piccolomini, delight resulted from the feeling of self-love unchained by the ability to grasp something and learn it; for Peregrini, the pleasure of cooperation was the result of a sort of interpersonal relationship in which the author and the receptor measure their wit against each other. Peregrini refuted Aristotle by writing that

> such pleasure does not depend on learning, or seeing many things in few words—although this is not absent from it—, but rather from the particular virtue of the wit of the poet, which marvelously shines in the saying.\(^{740}\)

Yet Peregrini seems to have seen a negative side to this.\(^{741}\) In fact, the pleasure thus conceived for the acuity of wit transforms language into a space in which the audience identifies

\(^{740}\) “Simil diletto non dall’imparar, o veder molte cose in poche parole, anch’ché questa condizione non vi manchi; ma principalmente dalla particular virtù dell’ingegno del poeta, che ammirabilmente risplende in esso chiaramente dipende”. Peregrini, *Delle acutezze*, 66.
a quality that inspires wonder, and for which both the author and the listener or the reader are accountable as alleged co-creators. Peregrini’s complaint is that communication becomes intransitive and more focused on the reciprocity between author and audience than on the content that one may learn through language.

Peregrini is explicit about that what is not. As seen above, if it is pleasant, this is not because it causes us to learn or “[see] many things in a few words”. Wit has nothing to do, therefore, with the ability of a speech to teach us (“docere”), or to make us “see” things. Peregrini’s allusion is not precise, yet it doubtless points to qualities such as “ἐνάργεια” / “evidentia”: these, through figures such as “hypotyposis” –which makes things appear visible by splitting them into a multitude of constituents or circumstances– belonged in ancient and early modern rhetoric to a group of devices making things appear before the eyes so to speak, and therefore referred somehow to the ability of a text to produce something exterior to itself.742

Peregrini’s description of wit opens the door to, and is critical to, a process of listening and reading in which such measuring standards for the perfection of a speech are no longer valid. Peregrini censures ill-used “acuity of wit” insofar as it makes audiences wonder at connections that are false and fabricated only to kindle the spark of wonder. This, together with the assertion that wit removes any emotional effect, forces Peregrini to conclude that, of the three duties or

741 Wit as a fashion had reached further than poetry and courtly conversation. Contemporary criticism indicates that it had become stylish for preachers to fill sermons with all kinds of witty conceits and paradoxes. There are instances in which the ecclesiastical authorities issued condemnations of this practice, and if the Jesuits had been particularly conspicuous in the process of theorizing wit, they would also prosecute its use with uncommon anxiety. For this aspect see Stinglhamber, “Baltasar Gracián et la Compagnie de Jésus”, passim. Peregrini’s treatise, in fact, presents itself as a sort of antidote summoned to moderate a phenomenon with apparently no limits. See especially the preface to the reader in Peregrini, Delle acutezze, n.p.
742 See, for example, Quintilian, The Orator’s Education, 376-379, §8.3.66-69. Devices aiming at “evidentia” featured prominently also in early modern works such as Erasmus of Rotterdam’s De duplici copia verborum ac rerum.
“officia” of the orator according to Cicero – “docere”, “delectare”, “movere” –, wit serves the purpose of delight alone.743

If Peregrini thinks that wit is less about language producing something than about the audience evaluating and wondering at a speech for the excellence of the wit responsible for it, then it is not the effect of language that matters, but how one judges the way in which the poet or the orator fashions what he says or writes.744 Echoing a remark that Quintilian had advanced with a mixture of contempt and mistrust, Peregrini was aware that the audience appreciates best the acuity of wit of a poet or a speaker when they are required to reconstruct the meaning through some kind of cooperation. This, as a matter of fact, guarantees that s/he who is able to “notice” the author’s “acuity of wit” is somehow ingenious – at least to a degree comparable with the excellence that s/he perceives.

743 Peregrini’s preface describes the ills of wit in the following terms: “The worst part is that all the profit obtained from the art of saying gets wasted in this way. Because the study of wit, except in cases where it is serious and not affected, is utterly contrary to speaking seriously, and as a consequence it removes commotion, persuasion, and any other serious effect. In such a way that if all the learned stick to such a trick, the only thing that will survive of eloquence is a sheer buffoonery” (“il peggio è, che per questa guisa resta impedito tutto il profitto, che dall’arte del dire si aspetta; perché lo studio delle acutezze, tratene fuori le gravi non affettate; è contrariissimo al parlar dadovero, e per conseguente impedisce la commotione, la persuasione, & ogni effetto serioso. In modo che, se tutti gli studiosi piglino questa traccia, non resterà dell’eloquenza altro, che una mera nobile buffoneria”). Peregrini, Delle acutezze, n.p. Peregrini’s conclusion in this point differs from Zabarella’s, for whom the cooperation of the listener served indirectly the end of persuasion precisely because the latter was directly related to pleasure. Peregrini rejects here the notion that “delectare” may be a means to “movere”, even though there are several places across the treatise where he lends the idea some credibility. At any rate, the notion was perhaps more popular in Zabarella’s milieu of sixteenth-century Padua, where Sperone Speroni had made of the link between “delectare” and “movere” a central principle of his Dialogo della retorica (1542).

744 Peregrini shows this in a less flattering light when he refers to the relationship between wit and deceit in Aristotle, Rhetoric, 408-411, §3.11.6, 1412a. Aristotle justified there the pleasure at paradox because we realize that we have learnt every time that our expectations are deceived and therefore we are surprised. Peregrini, in line with his tendency to transfer the explanation from learning to the perception of the author’s wit, explains this as follows: “Aristotle said that a graceful saying drawn from a preceding deceit was charming because we learn much from it. But in truth pleasure is born from a special smartness of wit that shines in it. And in general the ability to deceive is deemed proper of a very smart wit” (“Aristotele disse che’l detto venuto preso dall’inganno precedente havea la sua gratia, a cagione dell’imparar molto. Ma veramente il diletto nasce dall’accortezza speciale d’ingegno, che sfolgoreggia in esso. E comunemente l’attitudine ad ingannare è stimata qualità propria d’ingegno molto accorto”). Peregrini, Delle acutezze, 113.
4. Obscurity and cooperation: the debate about Luis de Góngora’s “new poetry”

Roughly contemporary with the polemic over the laconic style, a debate took place in Spain and, eventually, in the colonies. The conflict started as a reaction to the dissemination in the summer of 1613 of the manuscript of Luis de Góngora’s *Fábula de Polifemo y Galatea* and *Soledad primera*. The novelty of both the language and the genre to which the poems seem to belong, and especially the obscurity of both poems—which contemporary scholars assigned, for the most part, to the use of hyperbaton and to complicated and continuously interwoven conceits—caused a massive amount of theorization about the notion of “obscurity”.

In what follows, I aim only at sketching the continuity between discussions on Quintilian’s and Aristotle’s position on the link between obscurity and cooperation of the reader and the debate over Góngora’s poetry. The conclusions here presented do not aim at exhaustiveness, and are open to being completed in the future.

745 See the introduction to Robert Jammes’ edition of Góngora’s *Soledades*, where he lists 66 documents connected with the debate. Luis de Góngora, *Soledades*, ed. Robert Jammes (Madrid: Castalia, 1994). From the studies of Emilio Orozco Díaz and Dámaso Alonso to recent contributions by scholars such as Jammes himself, María José Osuna Cabezas, Antonio Carreira, or Mercedes Blanco, the panorama of scholarship on the controversy over the so-called “new poetry” is extensive. See, for instance, Melchora Romanos, “Góngora atacado, defendido y comentado: manuscritos e impresos de la polémica gongorina y comentarios a su obra”, in Góngora: la estrella inextinguible: magnitud estética y universo contemporáneo, ed. Joaquín Roses Lozano ([Madrid]: Sociedad Estatal de Acción Cultural, 2012).

746 In Pedro Díaz de Rivas’ *Discursos apologéticos*, written in 1624 and preserved in manuscript form, we find enumerated eleven headings that comprehend the accusations against Góngora’s *Soledades*. The fact that Díaz de Rivas starts with four aspects related to obscurity attests to the importance of the topic. He lists: “1. The many foreign words that [Góngora] incorporates. 2. The abundance of tropes. 3. The number of metaphors. 4. The obscurity of style that results from all the former (“1. Las muchas voces peregrinas que introduce. 2. Los tropos frequentíssimos. 3. Las muchas transposicións. 4. La obscuridad de estyllo que resulta de todo esto”). Pedro Díaz de Rivas, “Discursos apologéticos”, in Documentos gongorinos. Los discursos apologéticos de Pedro Díaz de Rivas. El antídoto de Juan de Jáuregui, ed. Eunice Joiner Gates (México: El colegio de México, 1960), 35-36. It is worth mentioning that, while the debate was addressed—especially in the early stages of it—in Góngora’s *Polífemo* and *Soledades*, it was often directed to other poets who imitated Góngora’s manner rather than to the poet himself.

747 For the place of obscurity in the debate over Góngora’s “nueva poesía”, the work by Roses Lozano is still the reference. See Joaquín Roses Lozano, *Una poética de la oscuridad. La recepción crítica de las Soledades en el siglo XVII* (Madrid, Londres: Támesis, 1994). For a recent survey on the topic of obscurity that touches on some of the authors and works here discussed, see Jorge Ledo, “La estética renacentista de la oscuridad: cuatro momentos”, Boletín Hispánico Helvético 25 (primavera 2015).
Some of the scholars who took Góngora’s side avoided the issue of obscurity by claiming that the poems in question were not obscure. There were those who, like Andrés de Almansa y Mendoza, contended the charge of obscurity brought against them. According to Almansa, there were a number of persons in the court—whom he quoted by name—able to appreciate the poems. If the public in general had trouble with them, it was because it takes a wit gifted with a certain degree of “acuity” to be equal to the task. The argument is reminiscent of Lipsius’ concerning the need for the readers of Tacitus to have “acumen” in order not to find him obscure.

Almansa y Mendoza’s Advertencias para la inteligencia de las Soledades, written between 1613 and 1614, would serve as an aid to make the text clear. Once understood by those who otherwise were unable to do it, so it seems, they would find it enjoyable too.

Cristóbal Suárez de Figueroa was among those whom Almansa y Mendoza included among the appreciators of Luis de Góngora’s “new poetry.” He had mentioned Góngora in Plaza universal de todas las ciencias (1615), at a time when the commotion was still recent.

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748 Almansa y Mendoza, who had built a reputation for himself as a writer of “cartas” and “avisos” containing news of the court, was the person who fulfilled the task of making the manuscript of Góngora’s poems known in Madrid. See Begoña López Bueno, “Las Advertencias de Almansa y Mendoza, el ‘apócrifo correspondiente’ de Góngora”, Criticón, 116 (2012): 5-27; and also María José Osuna Cabezas, “El papel de Andrés de Almansa y Mendoza en la polémica gongorina”, in Edad de Oro Cantabrigense: Actas del VII Congreso de la Asociación Internacional del Siglo de Oro (AISO), ed. Anthony Close (Madrid: Iberoamericana-Vervuert, 2006). For Almansa’s ideas on obscurity, see Roses Lozano, Una poética de la oscuridad, 85-86.


750 Suárez de Figueroa’s repeated attacks against the new comedy championed by Lope de Vega are well known—as in the third ‘alivio’ of his El pasajero (1617). This makes of him a declared enemy of Lope and, therefore, a possibly ally of Góngora’s cause” (“son también conocidos los repetidos ataques de Suárez de Figueroa contra la comedia nueva defendida por Lope de Vega –así en el tercer Alivio de su Pasajero (1617)–, lo cual hace de él un enemigo declarado de Lope y, por lo tanto, un posible aliado de la causa gongorina”). Roland Behar, “Homeromastix, Vergiliomastix… ¿Gongoramastix?”, e-Spania 18 (Juin 2014), accessed August 8, 2015, https://e-spania.revues.org/23769 Moreover, always according to Behar, Suárez was aligned with Torres Rámila and the group who wrote the Spongia against Lope.
Suárez refrained there from offering either approval or rejection, yet he stated clearly his opinion disapproving the obscurity of diction and the obstacles that come with it.\textsuperscript{751}

However, we find a more conclusive opinion in Suárez de Figueroa’s later work \textit{Pusílipo} (1629). Branding Góngora “the phoenix of wit” (“el fénix de las agudezas”), one of the interlocutors of the dialogue concludes that \textit{Soledades} and \textit{Polifemo} had appeared obscure to the public only at first, while they seemed to be something new.\textsuperscript{752} However, they are not actually so, and therefore there is nothing to reprehend in them:

language aspires to distinction, not confusion; brightness, not obscurity. But don Luis [de Góngora] made none of these mistakes in his poetry, and he who judges otherwise is being misled. [Góngora had only] a certain kind of novelty, which, unaccustomed until then, seemed strange in the beginnings, but then all of Spain followed the example, full of admiration.\textsuperscript{753}

Suárez de Figueroa coincides with Almansa y Mendoza, and others like Antonio de las Infantas, in the idea that, in order to “normalize” Góngora’s poetry, one has first to remove from it the aspect of novelty, and consequently the obscurity.

Others would tread a different path. Following Góngora’s own position, many admitted proudly the obscurity of both \textit{Polifemo} and \textit{Soledades}, and made of it a point of departure to defend the style of both poems, and that of imitators.

Through a survey of positions that consider Góngora’s poetry through either praise or criticism of obscurity, it is possible to show that, despite certain similarities with attitudes found

\textsuperscript{751} Cristóbal Suárez de Figueroa, \textit{Plaza universal de todas ciencias, y artes} (En Madrid: por Luis Sánchez, año 1615), 358v.
\textsuperscript{752} Cristóbal Suárez de Figueroa, \textit{Pusílipo, ratos de conversación en los que dura el passeo} (En Nápoles: por Lazaro Scoriggio, 1629), 260.
\textsuperscript{753} “Débese distinguir, no confundir la lengua; ilustrarla, no escurecerla. Nada desto tuvo don Luis en sus poesías, y engañase quien juzga lo contrario. Sino cierta novedad, que como hasta allí poco usada, se estrañó en los principios, siguiéndola, y admirándola después toda España”. Suárez de Figueroa, \textit{Pusílipo}, 261.
in the debates over the laconic style, there are differences of detail that add to the knowledge we can obtain concerning the notions of cooperation and pleasure in relation to “obscuritas”.

Among the critics of Góngora’s obscurity, Jusepe Antonio González de Salas displays a view that appears moderate yet resolute. He discusses the obscurity of Góngora’s imitators in the section devoted to elocution in his exposition of Aristotle’s Poetics, published in 1633 as Nueva idea de la tragedia antigua.754

Salas shows himself fairly knowledgeable in ancient rhetoric, and his arguments against the affectation of obscurity implicitly attack the praise of cooperation as a link between “acuity of wit” and the need for “mental effort” on behalf of the reader. For González de Salas, it is a characteristic of the unlearned to think that for a speech to be easily understandable means that the way language is used is self-evident, and involving neither wit nor work. Only those who “know” come to realize that if something appears easy, it is precisely because the author has succeeded in embodying the conceit in his mind in a language that offers resistance in proportion to the difficulty of the idea.755 This means that obscurity results from want of work, and is explained because the form of the conceit fails to shape entirely the matter of language. Obscurity is the result of a work that is only partial: it asks for cooperation because the author failed to complete the work s/he ought to have done. Asking the audience to cooperate in unfolding the meaning is something that cannot pass for a virtue when considered in the light of Salas’ views:

754 For González de Salas’ Nueva idea within the context of commentaries of the Poetics, see Chapter One, section one. González de Salas’ sympathy was rather with Quevedo. He would posthumously edit his poetry in Francisco de Quevedo, El Parnaso español, monte en dos cumbres dividido, con las nueve musas castellanas. Donde se contienen poesías de don Francisco de Quevedo Villegas... que con adorno, i censura ilustradas i corregidas, salen ahora de la librería de don Ioseph Antonio González de Salas (En Madrid: lo imprimió en su oficina del libro abierto Diego Díaz de la Carrera, MDCXLVIII [1648]).

755 “(Como es la fórmula del vulgo) ‘se estaba ello dicho’”. González de Salas, Nueva idea, 650.
It is a commonly agreed fact that insofar as we are a composite of this heavy matter, the conceit’s subtlety and elegance cannot be easily communicated. Because of this difficulty, it is necessary for someone to make an effort: either he who expresses the meaning, or he who is waiting for it. There is no doubt, therefore, that if the reader labors, it is because the author did not; on the contrary, the author has greatly sweated whenever the reader finds it easy to understand. It is a great shortcut to write in order that no one understands: but I fear that he who does so will pay the time he earned in detriment of his fame.\footnote{Cosa es bien advertida que, en tanto que de esta materia pesada nos componemos, lo sutil y elegante del concepto no puede por medios fáciles prestarse a la comunicación. Aquello, pues, difícil fuerza ha de ser que a alguno de los dos fatigue: o al que exprieme la sentencia, o al que la atiende. Y así no ha de haber duda que, si padece el lector, el autor quedó libre; y que, al contrario, el autor sudó mucho cuando fácil se halló el lector en la inteligencia. Grande es el atajo de los que escriben como para que ninguno los perciba: no sé yo si en la duración sacrificaran también a la posteridad”. González de Salas, \textit{Nueva idea}, 650-651.}

While describing the work of the poet in terms of matter and form, Salas’ explanation does something else: it tacitly subscribes some of Quintilian’s basic tenets. We may read in \textit{Institutio oratoria} 8.3.2 that ornament (“ornatus”) works somewhat differently from other parts of rhetoric such as the invention of arguments or the disposition of these in a speech. As a matter of fact, Quintilian affirms, the profane in the art takes the latter for granted –for things requiring little skill (“modicae doctrinae”) pass unnoticed unless they are faulty. They are, so to speak, taken for granted except for the cases where they fail to show up correctly. When the speaker – and, for that matter, the poet– uses ornament, however, he publicizes his wit and his skill as much as he serves the purpose he speaks for.\footnote{“The rewards of speaking correctly and lucidly are slight; one seems rather to be avoiding faults than to have achieved any important virtue. Invention too is often shared with the untrained, and disposition can be thought a matter of quite modest training […] But with elegance and ornament, the orator is out to recommend himself as well as his cause” (“emendate quidem ac lucide dicentium tenue praemium est, magisque ut vitiis carere quam ut aliquam magnam virtute adeptus esse videarís. Inventio cum imperitis saepe communis, dispositio modicae doctrinae credi potest […] Cultu vero atque ornatu se quoque commendat ipse qui dicit”). Quintilian, \textit{The Orator’s Education}, 340-341, §8.3.2.} There lie both the strength and the danger of elocution, and the possibility therein of clothing speech with devices that appeal to the audience. In fact, following a principle that Cicero had already established, it is eloquence, and ornament as a part of it, that makes the orator eloquent and deserving of the title of the profession, more than any other part of the art; yet, at the same time, it also affords him or her the greatest
temptation partially to lose sight of the end s/he allegedly pursues –persuading others–, and to focus instead on ornament such as might be noticed, and be praised for that. This is what Quintilian, following others, calls the vice of affectation.\footnote{Quintilian calls it “cacozelon” or “mala affectatio”. Quintilian, \textit{The Orator's Education}, 372-373, §8.3.56-58.} Obscurity is for Quintilian –and González de Salas seems to be of the same opinion– the easy but wrong way to make “ornatus” commend itself and appear visible to the reader. To have him or her, so to speak, “cooperate” to decode meaning is to make him or her unduly finish the work that the author ought to complete. Furthermore, to claim that this is done in order to have the audience experience pleasure as they pay attention to the form and the wit responsible for it –as, for instance, Peregrini would say– would seem, in the light of Salas’ view, a case of utter misunderstanding of what language and communication are, even for poetry.\footnote{A similar argument had been used by detractors of Góngora’s poetry like Lope de Vega. The latter wrote in 1621: “Dr. [Francisco de] Garay used to say […] that poetry should cost great effort to the writer, and little to the reader” (“decía el doctor Garay […] que la poesía había de costar grande trabajo al que la escribiese y poco al que la leyese”). Félix Lope de Vega Carpio, “Respuesta a un papel que escribió un señor de estos reinos en razón de la nueva poesía (1621)”, in \textit{La teoría poética en el manierismo y barroco españoles}, ed. Alberto Porqueras Mayo (Barcelona: Puvill Libros, 1989), 77.}

González de Salas seems to have been genuinely interested in solving the question in a way that might allow poets both to judge and to compose poetry without the involvement of principles such as decipherment or cooperation. Sensitive to the nature of the process of decoding, Salas introduces a distinction that contemplates the time available to the mind of the audience to unfold and understand the meaning. This varies depending on whether one is listening to a speaker or reading a poem with the possibility of going back to anything that is not immediately understood. Obscurity means something different in one case and the other: even though it should be avoided in both, the same thing might appear obscure to a listener that, conversely, a reader would digest more easily. However, Salas is inconsistent when he blends the criterion just exposed, which opposes reading and aurality, with considerations that belong rather
to the genre. As a matter of fact, in the following, he places history within the group of texts that need immediate understanding—likened to oratory rather than to poetry, according, perhaps, to criteria of “decorum” rather than empiric conditions of decoding:

The same affliction of obscurity is found in others, who are poets too even if they write in prose […] And—what is worse—also in historians and orators, even though s/he who hears has less time to guess the meaning wrapped in obscure language than s/he who deciphers it by reading.\textsuperscript{760}

Diego de Colmenares had resorted to the same argument to contest Lope de Vega’s attack on the new poetry about a decade earlier. Interestingly enough, his argument presented (apparently) analogous flaws. Colmenares too would make a distinction with genre in mind rather than the opposition between listening and reading that he allegedly introduced as a criterion. Thus he conceded that comedy needs a degree of clarity—inasmuch as it is intended for listening—that would offend the readership of lyric and heroic poets. However, tragedy is likened to genres intended for reading, and severed from the theater. Colmenares seems to imply that the fact that, unlike comedy, tragedy is not addressed to the common people ends up overweighing the considerations of available time, thus demarcating a parallel, no less important distinction between faster and slower listeners:

Comedy, the occupation and the jurisdiction of the common people—for, as you very reasonably said, they are the ones who pay for it—may be as you want it to be, and be happy with your plain style, which is necessary to the listener, not to the reader, who may linger—and it is fair that s/he does so—to ponder what s/he does not understand at first.

\textsuperscript{760} In addition to poets in verse, “la misma pasión de obscuridad padecen otros que también son poetas, aunque fabrican en prosa sus escritos […] También (lo que más es) los historiadores y los oradores, aún permitiéndose tanto menos lugar al que escucha para averiguar la sentencia envuelta en obscuro lenguaje que al que la descifra con la lección”. González de Salas, \textit{Nueva idea}, 643.
But it would be unfair to have the lyric, tragic, and heroic poets be subject to the judgment of the common people.\textsuperscript{761}

The case of González de Salas is interesting because it shows how authors who share a point of departure—Aristotle’s Poetics, which Nueva idea claims to illustrate and simultaneously adapt to the taste of the day—may privilege opposite and even contradictory aspects. This may be seen in the interpretation that Piccolomini and Salas offer of Aristotle’s characterization of smart sayings or “ἀστεῖα” as resulting from “quick” or “easy” learning (“μάθησις ταχεία, τὸ μανθάνειν ῥᾳδίως”) that is obtained through “mental effort” (“ζητεῖν”). In fact, whereas Piccolomini and Peregrini would insist on the latter in order to delimit a pleasure based on a feeling of cooperation, Salas insists on the former: if learning is quick and easy, it cannot ask too much from the audience:

The easy signification of a conceit is the most pleasant artifice for the soul; and, conversely, the roughness and difficulty with which it resists understanding is what offends and angers most […] For Aristotle stated in the Rhetoric (3.12)] that it is natural to feel pleasure at what is perceived and apprehended without effort […] For what other purpose, if not delight and magnificence, would be the request for language to be perspicuous and clear, and splendid rather than humble?\textsuperscript{762}

The role of Francisco Cascales (1564–1642) among the opponents of Góngora’s poetry would be even more important than the one played by Salas. Much like the latter, however,

\textsuperscript{761} “La comedia, empleo del pueblo y de su juridicción, pues él la paga como V. merced cueradamente dijo, siga su intento y acomódense con su llaneza, necesaria al oyente, no al letor, que puede (y es justo) detenerse a considerar lo que no entienda de vuelo. Mas al lírico, al trágico y al heroico, gran desdicha sería sujetarles al juicio del vulgo”. Diego de Colmenares, “Respuesta a la censura antecedente (1621)”, in La teoría poética en el manierismo y barroco españoles, ed. Alberto Porqueras Mayo (Barcelona: Puvill Libros, 1989), 85. The allusion to Lope de Vega’s judgment on comedy points to Arte nuevo. For the exchange between Lope de Vega and Diego de Colmenares, which took place through letters and prologues around the dates of publication of Lope’s La Filomena (1621) and La Circe (1624), see Xavier Tubau, Una polémica literaria: Lope de Vega y Diego de Colmenares (Madrid; Frankfurt am Main: Iberoamericana; Vervuert, 2007).

\textsuperscript{762} “El artificio es que más regala el ánimo la apacible significación del concepto; y, al contrario, lo que más le ofende y indigna es aquella aspereza y dificultad con que no se permite fácil a la comprensión […] For Aristotle said in the Rhetoric (3.12)] ser propio por su naturaleza en todos que reciban deleite de lo que pueden percibir y aprehender sin trabajo […] El pedir que sea perspicua y clara, que no sea humilde, sino espléndida, ¿para qué otro fin puede ser, sino para que en ella se halle el deleite de que necesita, y la magnificencia?”. González de Salas, Nueva idea, 647-648.
Cascales aimed at establishing a limit for the degree of “mental effort” asked from the reader. For that, one may turn to a group of three letters written in the 1620s and published years later as part of *Cartas filológicas* (1634).  

The eighth letter, addressed to Luis Tribaldos de Toledo, admits in a poem a degree of obscurity of the kind that causes the reader to “stop” and “pay attention” (“detenerse”, “reparar”). If this might somehow be reminiscent of the model of attentive reading based on the figure of “emphasis” that has been discussed on occasion of Puteanus’ ideas, Cascales has in mind a rather different ideal of how a text works. In fact, he limits to “now and then” (“de cuando en cuando”) the use of obscurity which, furthermore, he justifies only in cases of learned references or “erudición”. Rather differently, Góngora’s poetry—as he complains—overwhelms readers with “the continuous metaphors, the ones being revealed within the others, and even sometimes being heaped upon each other”.  

Cascales considers dynamically the process of decoding a text: the reader needs to alternatively make “mental effort” and then rest in order to work again. If obscurity becomes the form of speech taken as a whole, the absence of respite makes reading tiresome and at the antipodes of pleasure:

> If such intricate way of writing were used seldom, it might appear acceptable, and our understanding would be less tired—for in that case the mind would have occasions to take a rest, and one thing together with the other would be bearable. But of a continuous mode

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764 “I know well that now and then these serious authors used to touch on things that make the reader stop, and pay attention to the meaning, because the latter is hidden below some learned reference” (“Bien sé que de cuando en cuando suelen estos graves autores tocar algo en que se detenga el lector, y repare en la sentencia, por estar oculta con algún paso de erudición”) [italics added]. Cascales, *Cartas philológicas*, 31v; and also: “There is no excuse for obscurity in Polyphemus, for it is not born from a concealed doctrine, but from the frequency of the circuitous hyperbaton, and the continuous metaphors, the ones hidden within the others” (“la obscuridad del Polifemo no tiene excusa; pues no nace de recóndita doctrina, sino del ambagioso hipérbato tan frecuente y de las metáforas tan continuas, que se descubren unas a otras, y aun a veces están unas sobre otras”). Cascales, *Cartas philológicas*, 34r.
of speaking obscurely, we must say with St. Jerome when he read Persius: “You do not want to be understood, and you will not be”.765

Rather than Aristotle’s idea of clarity (“σαφήνεια”), taken as a middle term between the humility of daily speech (“ταπεινότης”) and the excess of novelty that falls into obscurity—such as we have seen evoked by González de Salas—, Cascales conceives the blend in terms of the coexistence and alternation in time.766

Cascales counters the irrepressible popularity and prestige of Gongorism by proposing a model that allows a space for obscurity, provided that it takes place in the form of islands amidst a space that lends itself to restful, more or less immediate reading.

A paradigm like this is far from new. Considered abstractly, it evokes the kind of punctuation of speech envisaged by Quintilian for the use of maxims or “sententiae”. These, obscure and dense in meaning, should be used sparingly. As a matter of fact, it was because of the violation of Quintilian’s first law concerning sententiae (“let them not be too frequent”) that scholars like Famiano Strada had criticized the laconic style.767 Maxims, Strada complained, heaped without moderation, with the one being born from within the others and almost overloading the listener—not allowing him to breathe—, do not delight him with their novelty—as they were intended to—, but by repeating themselves they make him or her weary with satiety.768

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765 “Quando aquel modo de escribir intricado se usara raras vezes, pudiérase llevar, i se hallara menos cansado nuestro entendimiento; pues tenía causas para descansar, i uno con otro fuera confortable. Mas un perpetuo modo de hablar obscuro, o avemos de dezir con S. Gerónimo lo que dixo leyendo a Persio: Non vis intelligi, neque inteligeris”. Cascales, Cartas philologicas, 32r.
767 “Ne crebrae sint”. Quintilian, The Orator’s Education, 410-411, §8.5.7. For more on Famiano Strada, see Chapter Three, section one.
768 “Congesta haec intemperantius, aliaque subinde ex aliisenascentia dum auditorem pene obruant, atque interspirare non sinunt, adeo illum ea, cuius causa adhibentur, novitate non oblectant, ut frequentata similitudine sui potius satiatefatigent”. Strada, Prolusiones Academicae, 177. For the reference to Quintilian’s injunction about the frequency of “sententiae”, see Strada, Prolusiones Academicae, 178.
Strada’s depiction of maxims as endlessly entangled within each other, or piled up, corresponds exactly with Cascales’ already-mentioned criticism of Góngora’s use of metaphor. This is yet another proof of the fact that both the laconic style and the fever for continuous and bold conceits were perceived by seventeenth century scholars as manifestations of the same phenomenon from the viewpoint of the cooperation of the reader and, therefore, for the consideration of the kind of pleasure afforded by reading.\textsuperscript{769}

To the emphasis on a style that holds a mean between humility and obscurity, Strada (as Cascales would do some years later) substitutes a pattern modeled on the use of maxims – derived from the current criticism against the laconic style–, and increasingly described by contemporaries in terms of “chiaroscuro”. The analogy with painting was almost immediate, given that the terms “obscurity” and “clarity” used to speak about style had always pointed to the field of sight.\textsuperscript{770}

Strada would close his attack against texts composed almost exclusively of maxims with the reference to “chiaroscuro”. Concerning the overabundance of lights and sparks that characterizes laconism, Strada suggests:

\begin{quote}
Let that light and that admiration receive some shadow and some recess, in relation to which the part that is illuminated may stand out more pleasingly.\textsuperscript{771}
\end{quote}

That conservative scholars such as Strada or Cascales resort to the pattern of “chiaroscuro” –made general out of Quintilian’s advice concerning the use of maxims– is

\textsuperscript{769} See Carminati, “Alcune considerazioni”, already mentioned in Chapter Two, section two.
\textsuperscript{770} However, it is important to keep in mind that the opposition between light and darkness would acquire in the model suggested by the use of “sententiae” a meaning that is actually opposite to the one usually applied to the understandability of language. In fact, the part of light in the model of “chiaroscuro” is made of maxims and conceits –sparks of light in a text that is “darker” in order to make them shine–, while these are, conversely, obscure in the sense that they are difficult to understand.
indicative of the need they felt to cope somehow with new, fashionable styles. It might also be a proof that, even though they loathed the idea of a text turned into a mosaic of riddles and ciphers, they nonetheless appreciated to a certain extent the call for wonder embodied in maxims and metaphors. The model of “chiaroscuro” would be useful well beyond 1640 for scholars aiming at models of reading that welcome the spark of wonder and yet appear less demanding in terms of the degree of “mental effort” required to decode meaning.

This is the case in Manuel de Faria e Sousa’s *Discurso*, a theoretical summary on lyric poetry that serves as a preface to Faria’s edition of Luis de Camoens’ *Rimas varias*. The author explains in epigraph 19 that for the conceit that is placed at the conclusion of a sonnet to shine brighter and appear more ingenious, a poet is allowed, and even encouraged, to maintain a low level of interest and demand in the tercet that comes immediately before. It does not matter if the result is weak, since this will make the end appear more impressive, and therefore inspire wonder in a more powerful way. Faria was a fierce detractor of Góngora. As such, he had elicited a response from Juan de Espinosa Medrano, a scholar from Peru, published as late as 1662, long after Faria’s death.

Originally from Portugal, Faria spent most of his life in Madrid, a situation analogous to that of Antonio López de Vega, mentioned above in Chapter Two. Although López published in

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772 Manuel de Faria e Sousa, “Discurso acerca de los versos de que constan los poemas contenidos en los tres tomos primeros de estas rimas…”, in *Rimas varias de Luis de Camoens, príncipe de los poetas heroicos, y lyricos de España…* (Lisboa: en la imprenta de Theotonio Damaso de Mello Impressor de la casa real, año de 1685), n.p. In spite of the posthumous date of publication, Faria claims to have prepared the work between 1619 and the 1640s.

773 The sonnet “is like the race of a good horseman, in which the arrival matters more than the start or the run. It is exactly like a rocket, which flies full of light and noise, and then ends in a greater roar […] It does not matter if the first triplet is weak, because it usually serves to prepare a frame for that which the poet wants to say in the last one” (“Es como carrera de buen hombre de cavallo a donde se mira más al parar que al partir, y correr. Es puntualmente cohete, que bolando luminoso, y ruidoso, para en un estallido mayor […] El primer terceto se puede sufrir menor, porque ordinariamente sirve de hazer la cama a lo mayor que se quiere dezir en el último”). Faria e Sousa, *Rimas varias*, n.p.

1620 a volume of poetry inspired by Góngora, his later work *Heráclito i Demócrito de nuestro siglo* (1641) contains a dialogue “On the poets”, in which the author offers a disenchanted vision of the art, which he says he has not practiced for a while. Moreover, as mentioned above, he complains that the poets and the readers have lost sight of the notion that the poem should be valued as a whole: they look only for sparks of wit, conceits that are, for the most part, unsubstantial. Even in the quest for conceits – and here López engages with the notions that have been commented on in connection with Cascales and Faria –, both writers and audiences fail to understand that this is to be done by following the mentioned pattern of “chiaroscuro”, causing language to appear common in certain places “just to have neighboring clauses shine, and appear more refined, which may have good reason to ask for highlighting”.

What Faria e Sousa and López de Vega have in common is the notion that wonder, taken as the effect of the conceit, needs certain conditions to take place. Poets are accountable for building a context of waiting that enables and somehow prepares the reader for the appreciation of novelty.

The intersection of debates concerning the laconic style with those about Gongorism, insofar as they deal with problems felt as analogous – namely, the role of wonder and the issue of obscurity, with the digestion of novelty as the source shared by both – materializes in the application to the one and the other of patterns like that of alternation or “chiaroscuro”. The latter, moreover, comes to be interpreted in ways that, in spite of differences, are somehow related. If the agitation of the mind brought by conceits needs to be surrounded by calm waters,

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775 Antonio López de Vega, *Lírica poesía*… (En Madrid: por Bernardino de Guzmán, año MDCXX [1620]). As to *Heráclito i Demócrito*, the reference has appeared already in Chapter Two: Antonio López de Vega, *Heráclito i Demócrito de nuestro siglo. Describese su legítimo filósofo. Diálogos morales*… ([Madrid] por Diego Díaz de la Carrera, a costa de Alonso Pérez librero de su magestad, año MDCXLII [1641]).
777 “Por dexar luzir, i subir de punto otras cláusulas vezinas, que por buena razón pidan mayor realce”. López de Vega, *Heráclito i Demócrito*, 181.
this may be—according to Cascales—for the mind to have some respite, without which it would be unable to decode and experience wonder anymore; according to Faria e Sousa, alternation is necessary because, become ubiquitous and without the contrast of daily speech, the novelty of wonder passes unnoticed. Cascales’ model relies on a conception of reading that—except for the interference of criteria of genre mentioned above—is entirely empirical: it is about measuring how long the understanding is able to tackle obscure passages. Faria e Sousa, in contrast, is concerned with the form of the poem alone: some parts need to be downplayed for others to appear more prominent. Faria, unlike Cascales, is not concerned with obscurity, but rather with resorting to conceits so that the process of reading may adapt to a pattern of expectation and wonder, rather instead of the exercise of continuous and intensive attention described for laconism by Puteanus or Malvezzi.

To conclude, it is interesting that Cascales misses a chance to pronounce judgments about the pleasure experienced by those who feel they are co-creators as they overcome difficulty in understanding. In fact, when he quotes the passage of Quintilian’s *Institutio oratoria* 8.2.19 discussed above, he does so from a text containing Raffaele Regio’s *lectio facilior*:

> Quintilian laughs valiantly at this—and who would not? And he himself says what he thinks about it: “I would call vain a speech which the hearer *does not understand* with a mental effort” [italics added].

778 For the importance of considering how learned is the reader in order to dictate whether something is obscure or not, see Cascales, *Cartas philológicas*, 32v.

779 As shown below, it is precisely the latter that will be found in some of the most radical proponents of Góngora’s poetry, such as Francisco Fernández de Córdoba and the anonymous author of *Soledad primera ilustrada y defendida*.

780 “De esto se ríe bravamente Quintiliano; pero ¿quién no? Y él mismo dice lo que siente acerca de esto: At ego otiosum sermonem dixerim, quem auditor suo ingenio *non intelligit*” [italics added]. Cascales, *Cartas philológicas*, 30r-v.
As one might remember, Regio had turned Quintilian’s attack on the pleasure obtained from “mental effort” at deciphering obscure passages into the statement that language, if unintelligible, fails to produce any effect on the mind of the audience. One may only wonder what Cascales would have said about a kind of pleasure that many judged perverse and self-entitled.

Among those who took Góngora’s side—and, unlike Almansa y Mendoza, Suárez de Figueroa and Antonio de las Infantas, did not deny that *Polifemo* and *Soledades* featured obscure language—there were also those who advanced models of reading allocating different responsibilities and tasks for the reader. 781

Góngora himself had claimed—if he is the author of the letter in response to one “from a friend”, which in turn many think to have come from Lope de Vega—that poetry requires learning and “mental effort”. According to Góngora, the obscurity of the poet vivifies the wit of the reader and makes it react faster: this is a good in itself that a poem immediately understandable cannot afford to anyone. 782

It would also be in the middle of a polemic with Lope (mentioned above) that Diego de Colmenares likened those who write poetry looking to be easily understood with the blind men who sing for money in the streets (“ciegos coplistas”). While acknowledging that many ancient Greeks and Romans too wrote in a language understandable to everyone, Colmenares introduces a crucial distinction concerning his own time:

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782 “Tiene utilidad avivar el ingenio, […] eso nació de la oscuridad del poeta”. Quoted in Antonio Carreira, “La controversia en torno a las *Soledades*. Un parecer desconocido, y edición crítica de las primeras cartas”, in Gongoremas (Barcelona: Península, 1998), 239-266 (pp. 256). Góngora’s letter is dated September 30, 1613.
If [the ancient poets] lived in the present, they would either lift their style, or stop writing not to see it, if not despised, at least likened to that of blind singers who make rhymes as if gushing.  

Colmenares seems to imply that a shift in taste has taken place in the present, such as to make easy, natural and plain language (“facilidad y llaneza”) something alien to poetry. As a matter of fact, the conclusion of the argument there advanced points to a curious and telling interpretation of Aristotle’s Poetics: “Not everyone who writes verses is a poet –for Empedocles wrote them, and quite a lot, and even then Aristotle called him not a poet, but a physicist”. The reference to Empedocles failing to qualify as a poet insofar as he, as a philosopher, describes the causes of things as they are in nature rather than imitating actions through a plot had been commonplace since the days of the earliest commentaries on Aristotle’s treatise. What seems striking in the way in which Colmenares refashions the passage is that obscurity has replaced imitation as that which characterizes poetry.

Manuel Ponce’s Sylva a las soledades de Don Luys de Góngora, which is allegedly –with a date of November 1613– the first commentary of Góngora’s Soledades, was also pioneering in its defense of obscurity as a requirement for poetry. The poet’s duty, according to Ponce, is

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783 “Si [los antiguos] vivieran en este siglo, o realzaran el estilo, o no escribieran por no verle, si no desestimados, igualados con un mismo nombre con los ciegos coplistas de consonantes a borbollones”. Colmenares, “Respuesta a la censura antecedente (1621)”, 85. In the preface to Nueva idea, González de Salas would conceptualize the idea that tastes change through time, and that metaphors that once seemed to be obscure and bold look now straightforward, and are not even examples of figurative language. González de Salas, Nueva idea, 576.

784 “No son todos poetas los que hacen versos, que Empédocles los hizo y muchos; y con todo dijo Aristóteles que no era poeta sino físico”. Colmenares, “Respuesta a la censura antecedente (1621)”, 85.

785 Aristotle, “Poetics”, 30-33, §1, 1447b.

786 In the context of the letter of Colmenares, making of obscurity the essence of poetry –as opposed to verses of “ciegos coplistas”— is a direct attack on the ideal of clarity championed by Lope and ridiculed by Góngora in his sonnet “Patos de la aguachirle castellana”.

787 Ponce’s Sylva is available only fragmentarily in Dámaso Alonso, “Manuel Ponce, primer comentarista de Góngora”, in Dámaso Alonso, Obras completas, vol. 6 (Madrid: Gredos, 1982), 501-524. Ponce was somehow connected with Torres Rámila, and was the author of a series of works –many of them now lost– cited in Alonso’s article. See also Antonio Azaustre Galiana and Helena de Carlos Villamarín, “Apología en defensa de Virgilio, un
to cipher [what he writes about] with as much diligence and study as he is capable of, and to protect them from the eyes of ignorance so that too much familiarity may not tarnish them, but rather make them more worthy of memory and awe because of their difficulty.  

Góngora’s intention was to have us study his work “with effort” (“con fatiga”), with poetry serving as a test for the quality of each one’s wit so as to help improve those that are less prepared. He desired that “exerted in this way, the valiant wits would come to light, while the inferior ones would become more refined”.  

In a line that foreshadows the ideas commented upon in connection with Colmenares, Ponce considers that a poem is nobler inasmuch as it is also more difficult. The way he argues why poetry is necessarily obscure reveals a change in paradigm. He writes:

How could it be possible for poetry to be clear, easy and intelligible, when the result of metaphors, plot, imitation and sublime words is necessarily obscurity?  

A learned scholar himself, Ponce must have known by heart the passage of Aristotle’s Poetics 22, 1458a, in which the philosopher explained that metaphor leads to obscurity when abused, and therefore needs to hold a mean term between the banality of common and daily

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788 “Cifarlas con quanta diligencia y estudio pudiere, y encubrirlas a los ojos de la ignorancia, porque la demasiada familiaridad no las deslustre, antes sean por su dificultad más dignas de memoria y reberencia”. Alonso, “Manuel Ponce”, 516. In fact, the title of Ponce’s text accompanying the commentary is DISCURSO en que se trata si en los términos de la poesía es necessaria la obscuridad, y forçosa en las locuciones della. Y en qué modo se puede permitir que el poeta sea obscuro a los ignorantes de los preceptos del arte y facultades que se cifran en los versos. Y si el que a todos es difícil se aya de reprovar, y no estudie. Alonso, “Manuel Ponce”, 515.

789 “Y exercitados en esto, los valientes ingenios se descubriesen, y se acrisolasen los inferiores”. Alonso, “Manuel Ponce”, 516. As shown above, Góngora had already considered the ability of obscure poetry to refine the wit of the reader. See Carreira, “La controversia en torno a las Soledades”, 256.

790 Alonso, “Manuel Ponce”, 517.

791 “Cómo será posible que la poesía sea clara, fácil, y inteligible, pues el efecto de las translaciones, fábula, yimitación y voces supremas es necesariamente la obscuridad?”. Alonso, “Manuel Ponce”, 517.
language and the strangeness of tropes. This is what the philosopher calls clarity (“σαφήνεια”), defined as the ideal that the poet needs to pursue. Ponce ignores the notion that some kind of equilibrium has to be sought in order to subvert the position of Aristotle, and claims that, since metaphors—and everything related to poetics, such as plots and imitation—lead to obscurity, consequently there is nothing to do against it but accept it as something inherent to poetry.

Poetry is obscure, and as a result it involves “mental effort” and a reader who devotes time and study to it. This is so mainly because of the form of poetry itself, but also because of the learning needed to decipher the references there contained, which Ponce tries to clarify for the case of Góngora’s *Soledad primera*—as if he were taking seriously the question that the author of the letter sent to Góngora “from a friend” in 1613 had asked in jest: “Has there ever been a significant poet that did not need a commentary?”\(^792\)

As Cořlmenares would do some years later, Ponce suggests that obscurity and difficulty are related to a shift in taste that characterizes the present.\(^793\) Moreover, he is specific about the fact that, in the case of Góngora, the obstacle is not only what Cascales and others call “erudition”, or the fact that neologisms from Greek and Latin have to become established—as intimated by Suárez de Figueroa, who suggested in 1629 that Góngora became acceptable once that the novelty of his language stopped being such—, but also the knowledge of “rhetoric and poetics”. This poses a problem to some precisely because of “the continuity of metaphors and hyperboles”.\(^794\) For Ponce, Góngora’s writing is thus characteristic of a change that makes the present different from the past. The poets of his day, he thinks, exercise their wits in a way

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\(^792\) “Pero, ¿qué poeta de importancia no necesitó de comento?” Quoted in Carreira, “La controversia en torno a las *Soledades*,” 245.

\(^793\) As was already customary, Ponce concludes his defense of obscurity by tracing a genealogy of poets in Spain starting with Juan de Mena, and following with Fernando de Herrera and Diego Hurtado de Mendoza. This are made somehow responsible for the increase in difficulty that culminates in Góngora’s poems. Alonso, “Manuel Ponce”, 517-518.

\(^794\) “La continuidad de metáforas, hipérboles, etc., no la entienden los que desconocen la retórica y poética”. Quoted in Alonso, “Manuel Ponce”, 507.
unprecedented, and this implies for readers the need to be prepared to be up to the task of understanding them.\textsuperscript{795}

However, even though Ponce and the scholars previously discussed connected obscurity in poetry with the role of the reader and the exercise of his or her wit in the process of decoding, they did not establish explicit links between difficulty and pleasure.

Such would be the task of two works which appear closely connected, insofar as both contest Juan de Jáuregui’s infamous attack on Góngora’s new poetry, or \textit{Antídoto contra la pestilente poesía de las Soledades} (1615). These are Francisco Fernández de Córdoba’s \textit{Examen del antídoto}, and the anonymous \textit{Soledad primera ilustrada y defendida}.\textsuperscript{796} Moreover, they are additionally related by the obvious fact that the latter happens to be written with Córdoba’s work well at hand.

Córdoba’s \textit{Examen del antídoto} is interesting on several fronts. For one thing, it carries out a persuasive defense of Góngora’s \textit{Soledades} as a lyric poem, against Jáuregui’s preconception, shared by some, that it was a failed attempt at writing epic.\textsuperscript{797}

\textsuperscript{795} Compared with the poets of the present, those of the past appear not only lacking in purity of style, but also in “subtlety of conceits” (“subtileza de conceptos”). Quoted in Alonso, “Manuel Ponce”, 517-518. Against this, Lope would claim in 1620 that the ancient poets of Spain excelled in “acuity of wit” and conceits over Góngora’s imitators, who cared only for hyperbaton and the sound of words. See Félix Lope de Vega Carpio, \textit{Justa poética y alabanzas justas que hizo la insigne villa de Madrid al bienaventurado san Isidro en las fiestas de su beatificación, recopiladas por Lope de Vega Carpio} (En Madrid: por la viuda de Alonso Martín, año 1620), 1r.

\textsuperscript{796} Francisco Fernández de Córdoba, “Examen del Antídoto, o Apología por las Soledades de don Luis de Góngora contra el autor del Antídoto”, in Miguel Artigas, \textit{Don Luis de Góngora y Argote. Biografía y estudio crítico} (Madrid: Tipología de la “Revista de Archivos”, 1925), As to \textit{Soledad primera ilustrada y defendida}, María José Osuna Cabezas has provided evidence to confirm the authorship of the text, already suggested by Robert Jammes. The author would be Francisco de Cabrera, from Antequera, who would have started conceiving the work from 1629. María José Osuna Cabezas, \textit{Góngora vindicado: Soledad primera ilustrada y defendida} (Zaragoza: Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza, 2009), 29-30. I quote the work from Osuna Cabezas’ book. For a classic study on the response to Jáuregui’s \textit{Antídoto}, see Robert Jammes, “L’’Antidote’ de Jáuregui annoté par les amis de Góngora”, \textit{Bulletin hispanique} 64, no. 3 (1962).

\textsuperscript{797} This meant for Córdoba to conceive lyric poetry in terms that push the genre beyond the definitions proposed by Minturno or Tasso, the most advanced among those available at his time. Córdoba explains that lyric poetry—as is the case with \textit{Soledad primera}—may contain varied action much as chivalric romances or “romanzi” do. The poem has “a plot not simple, but varied and mixed as in a romance” (“la fábula no simple, sino varia, y mezclada a modo de romance…”). Fernández de Córdoba, “Examen del Antídoto”, 456; see also 426 for Córdoba explicitly asserting that the poem belongs. For Córdoba’s contribution to the theory of genres in general and lyric poetry, in particular in
Córdoba takes for granted that the poem he has undertaken to defend is obscure, yet he removes from the fact the scary features associated with it by Jáuregui. According to Fernández de Córdoba, Góngora’s obscurity results from the desire of the poet to elevate and refine his style and his language in order not to be immediately intelligible to everyone. This, in Córdoba’s description, results in what might be defined as light clouds of rain gliding over the beautiful landscape painting that is the poem.

As a result of novelty, obscurity relates to the immediacy of a speech that is plain and easily understandable: as monsters do to the usual and natural course of things, they add to the beauty of the whole, and attract the attention of the reader or the beholder:

> Taste heeds to variety and novelty, which beget pleasure. This is hardly surprising, considering that nature itself, looking for the new to appear beautiful, produces what is contrary to the intention it pursues, as is the case with monsters.

New and monstrous, Góngora’s style has a component of obscurity that features prominently in Fernández de Córdoba’s appraisal of Góngora’s *Soledades*. This he justifies on account of two different, though not entirely unrelated reasons. Obscurity, he writes, has always been a prerogative of learned people. Córdoba considers that there is a sign of civilization in the

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799 “Nuestro poeta quando por levantar el estilo y realçar la lengua quiera no darse a comer a todos, y por conseguir este fin salga con algunos çelajes obscuros la bellíssima pintura de su poema”. Fernández de Córdoba, “Examen del Antídoto”, 421.

800 “A la variedad y la novedad, que engendran el deleyte, atiende el gusto, pero qué mucho él, pues aun la mesma naturaleza por atender a ella para más abellecerse, produce cosas contrarias a su particular intento, como son los monstros”. Fernández de Córdoba, “Examen del Antídoto”, 426. Francesco Patrizi –discussed in Chapter Two, section two– had alluded to the injunction by the ancient rhetorician Hermogenes of Tarsus to “fabricate in a monster-like fashion” (“τερατεύεσθαι”) in order to delight the audience. Patrizi, “Deca ammirabile”, 299.
development of groups able to encode meaning so as to preserve it from the rest of the population. Hence the origin of the first source for the pleasure of obscurity, namely the veneration reserved to those things that only a few are able to enjoy.

Related to the alleged pleasure of belonging to a group of a happy few, Córdoba advances the second factor that accounts for the delight resulting from obscurity—precisely Quintilian’s reference to the pleasure of co-creatorship in *Institutio oratoria* §8.2.21, with the difference that this is no longer the object of criticism, but a principle on which Góngora’s poetics might aspire to receive universal support and praise:

> There are people who, priding themselves on being smart, like things when they are less clear. Quintilian says this, and gives the reason why it happens: Some audiences also enjoy these things, because they delight in their own cleverness when they understand them, and rejoice as if they had not so much heard them as thought of them for themselves.801

Fernández de Córdoba’s point of arrival is Quintilian’s condemnation of the feeling of cooperation, which he holds accountable—and rightly so—for the increasing popularity that obscure writing has gained among seventeenth-century readers. Much like Malvezzi and Peregrini would do, and Piccolomini well before them, Córdoba is turning Quintilian’s criticism into a legitimation of obscurity as a requirement of poetry in general. Furthermore, he is incorporating the defense of Gongorism within the same theoretical and aesthetical sphere used for the debates about the laconic style. Modern readers, Córdoba writes in reference to those of his own day, ask to be delighted in proportion to “their wit and taste”, and request, therefore, that poets like Góngora introduce a reformation within the art not different from the ones that

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801 “‘Ay hombres, que preciándose de inteligentes gustan de oyr las cosas menos claras, dizelo y da la razón Quintiliano. *Sed auditóribus etiam nonnullis grata sunt haec, quae cum intellegerint acumine suo delectantur, et gaudent, non quasi audiverint sed quasi invenerint*”. Córdoba, *Examen*, 421. I have corrected the quotation with the help of the manuscript *Biblioteca Nacional de España*, Ms. 3726. For “acumine suo”, in fact, Artigas’ edition reads by mistake “a nemine suo”.
Sophocles and Euripides, or Plautus and Terence introduced in tragedy and comedy respectively.  

The presumed author of Soledad primera defendida e ilustrada Francisco de Cabrera echoes Córdoba’s defense of obscurity in connection to the pleasure of cooperation and co-creatorship. Cabrera amuses himself fabricating a situation where a fictional persona of Jáuregui resorts to Quintilian’s censure of the feeling of cooperation experienced by listeners according to Institutio oratoria 8.2.19. The fact that Jáuregui had not referred to Quintilian’s passage – at the time the most authoritative expression against obscurity to be found in the tradition – provided Cabrera with a kind of excuse to ridicule the lack of resources of the detractor of Góngora. Cabrera emphasizes his scorn by encyclopedically displaying a list of arguments from different authors that Jáuregui – even though only apparently – could have brought to support his cause, if only he had known them. Here are some of them, which we may easily recognize after the debates discussed above:

Our Quintilian praises that way of speaking that makes the listener believe that s/he is seeing rather than listening to something: It is a great virtue to make the things we speak about to look as if they were seen rather than enunciated; I would call vain a speech which the hearer understands with a mental effort […] People take it that the unique sign of genius is needing a genius to understand us. Passages like the preceding ones, and others that I have left out, are those that the Antídoto may have brought in order to support his opinion concerning the obscurity that Jáuregui attacks in this work. Because, even though he already adduces a passage from Cicero and another from Quintilian, I wanted to offer also those to him, because they speak about orators, not poets – and there is a wide gap between the one and the other kind [the italics belong to the text].

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802 Góngora has discovered a means that is more efficacious "to delight the wit and taste of the modern. Who ever blamed Euripides and Sophocles? Who Homer and Virgil? Who Plautus and Terence simply because they took a path that differed from the one followed by their rough predecessors in the art?" (“le á hallado como me dio más eficaz para deleytar la agudeza y gusto de los modernos? ¿Quién reprehendió a Eurípides y Sófocles? ¿Quién a Homero y a Virgilio? ¿Quién a Plauto y Terencio, porque tomaron otra derrota de la que habían seguido sus mazorrales predecessores en el arte?”). Fernández de Córdoba, “Examen del Antídoto”, 425-426.
803 See section three above for Agostino Mascardi making up a similar imagined conversation in connection with Quintilian’s opinion about obscurity.
804 “Nuestro Quintiliano alaba el decir de manera que más parezca que se ven las cosas que se oyen: magna virtus est res, de quibus loquimur, clare atque, ut cerni videantur, enuntiare; ego otiosum sermonem dixerim, quem auditor suo intenio si intelligat […] tum demum ingeniosi, si ad intelligendos nos opus sit ingenio […] Estos lugares
Cabrera’s move is typical: he accepts Quintilian’s explanation of a pleasure born out of
difficulty, yet in order to turn the latter into something legitimate rather than the object of
criticism, he adds a distinction between oratory and poetry. Resorting to a remark common since
Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, and commonplace in Cicero and Quintilian, Cabrera retorts to the fictional
persona of Jáuregui that the passages that he could have used for his attack against Góngora are
actually useless, since they are intended for orators. Unlike them, poets have the right to be
obscure and therefore to demand cooperation from the reader and reward it with the pleasure that
results from decoding and unfolding meaning. Whereas such a distinction is important to grant
poetry the kind of exceptionality that justifies practices traditionally criticized, Cabrera’s
accumulation of arguments usually exploited in the battle against obscurity is even more relevant,
insofar as the latter confer authority upon him, depicting him as someone who plays with
privileged knowledge of the rules that apply in the game. Moreover—and this is important for
us—, it shows that the conflict about obscurity has reached a stage of maturity in which the
aesthetical stakes are clear, and what remains is the option to give or refuse allegiance to a
pattern of aesthetic response—which links obscurity, cooperation and pleasure— that seems to be
accepted not only by partisans of obscurity, but also by some detractors.

In any of the forms it may adopt, novelty begets in the mind a feeling of wonder. As stated by
Aristotle, metaphor is among the devices that provide listeners—and readers— with impressions of
that which is strange and unexpected, a feeling that also results from enthymemes. Yet, as few

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...y otros que he dejado, son los que pudiera haber traído el *Antídoto* para apoyar su pensamiento cerca de la
oscuridad que reprehende en esta obra, porque, aunque trae uno de Cicerón y otro de Quintiliano, he querido
dejárselos en encomienda porque van hablando en oradores y no en poetas, entre quienes hay diferencia grande [the
italics belong to the text]. Quoted in Osuna Cabezas, *Soledad primera defendida e ilustrada*, 72-74.
sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scholars failed to recall, the philosopher warned that these also contained in themselves the seed of obscurity.

The issue of obscurity as generated by wonder-inspiring mechanisms puts on the spot the involvement of listeners and readers as they feel marvel. For us, it helps to ask the question as to how wonder happens from the point of view of the receptor: what does s/he contribute, and why does s/he enjoy being a part of the process of making sense of that which is wonderful?

Following the process through which scholars interpreted and appropriated texts of ancient poetics and rhetoric to address the issue of obscurity and wonder in connection with the cooperation of the reader –or the lack thereof–, we have detected two mechanisms that appear evidently to be at work. The first is that of generalization: while a scholar such as Piccolomini drew from Aristotle’s characterization of smart sayings in order to apply what he found there to metaphor as a whole, we see Puteanus turn Quintilian’s notion of “emphasis” from a figure to a condition of the activity of reading taken at large. The second is that of adapting and sometimes even reversing the intention with which a principle was initially theorized. This is exemplified, for instance, in the use of Quintilian’s condemnation of the spurious feeling of co-creation that obscurity occasionally begets. As we have seen, the negative aspect of Quintilian’s exposition was neutralized in Piccolomini’s treatment of the pleasure of metaphors, and reversed both in Malvezzi’s portrayal of the laconic style, and the depiction of obscurity left to us by Fernández de Córdoba and Cabrera.

The fact that tendencies apparently unrelated such as laconism and the so-called new poetry of Góngora and his imitators are indebted to the same authorities when it comes to understanding and debating the features that were more pressing about them may add further evidence to the suggestion from Clizia Carminati that these are only manifestations of a topic
that pervaded much of late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scholarship and poetry –namely the urgency and dizziness provoked by a passion for the new that almost everyone felt to be, for better or for worse, a feature of the time in which they were living.

Regardless of the positions they entertained towards the obscurity of the marvelous and the new, scholars –as I hope to have shown in this chapter– came to share a language for discussion to take place: a code that, while duly transformed and sometimes betrayed, was ultimately the inheritance from antiquity. It made understanding, and even disagreement, a possibility.
CONCLUSIONS

Active readers –of the kind that perceive themselves somehow as cooperators as they unfold the meaning of maxims and metaphors, or make sense of highly entangled plots –require, so it seems in light of the research carried out, active authors, too.

I have attempted to depict the development of the conditions in which a notion of poetics –and even of history– focused on the ability to produce and cope with the new (or what is perceived as such) became something that a community of scholars was able to grasp, discuss, and argue for or against, depending on divergent tastes, positions and allegiances.

Mid-sixteenth-century scholars commenting on the ideas, often enigmatic, contained in Aristotle’s Poetics recast the notion of “imitation” of “μίμησις” in terms sympathetic with the notion, shared by many, that a poet is worth the name only insofar as s/he becomes “admirable”. S/he does so by offering to listeners or readers a world that, resembling the one of daily life, appears nonetheless as though newly created, and therefore marvelous. This is how Castelvetro, and others who followed his lead, came to terms with a notion that they could trace back to antiquity, and specifically to Plato’s Ion –namely that the poet is godlike, and, as suggested by the name of maker or “ποιητής” that s/he is given in Greek, s/he embodies the ability to create. For that, while some of the scholars glossed with variations the fascination with a so-called “divine fury” or “furor” as the drive behind the superiority of the wit of the poet, others were keen to devise technical and methodological alternatives that helped to explain the sense in which novelty takes place in a poem, the work it requires from the poet, and the effect it has upon the audience.
As a result, they entered a controversy with ramifications stretching well into the seventeenth century. As scholars created methods to fabricate the kind of novelty able to inspire wonder, they drew from techniques originating in ancient dialectic and rhetoric, such as the places or topics of argumentation. Despite a shared approach, they often held contradictory ideas on the source of the wonderful. As was the case with other issues, the duplicity of the answer stemmed directly from Aristotle’s *Poetics*. The debate about whether wonder is the result of sound logic cast in terms of paradox, as Castelvetro—and with him Patrizi—maintained, or whether it rather seeks support in errors and misconceptions concerning the world such as are entertained by the unlearned, was central to the discussion. The latter is a conception of the marvelous theorized in depth by Mazzoni, which became extremely successful in the wake of Tasso’s *Discorsi dell’arte poetica*, reaching writers such as Lope de Vega and Cervantes. Through the canon of Toledo that is featured in *Don Quixote* Part One, Cervantes voiced the notion that what is impossible, and therefore inspires wonder in the readers, has to be dissimulated by making it fit within the frame of mind of the readers who, generally speaking, believe in some things that are not true, yet are unusual and therefore awaken marvel. For Tasso, it was the miracles accepted by faith that would play that role, while Mazzoni offered a grammar of delusion at hand for the poets to benefit from the ignorance of the unlearned in the search for the marvelous.

As I have tried to show, we have here an opposition between one method that showcases the wit of the poet by making noticeable for the audience his or her use of argumentation in a way that is simultaneously sound and surprising, and a path that inspires wonder only at the expense of visibility. As a matter of fact, it is only on the condition that the component of the absurd or impossible that inspires wonder passes unnoticed that the latter takes place, according
to the second option. If the process therein involved may be valued, it is only by those who, because they are “learned”, see it from outside, and so grasp the deceit inflicted upon the rest.

Even though the second option may have been enormously influential with respect to the development of genres heavily relying on the supernatural – and to modern notions that, since Romanticism, preach the suspension of regular criteria for belief in the context of literature – it was the first that paved the way for consideration of a link between pleasure and the exercise of argumentation exercised in metaphors, maxims and plots. This is why, when scholars like Sarbiewski and Peregrini in Italy, or Gracián in Spain, started to look for ways to explain theoretically the phenomenon they respectively called “acutum”, “acutezza” or “agudeza”, they would prioritize the process that Castelvetro and Patrizi had suggested as descriptive of the way in which wonder appears in the poem: one that draws the attention of the audience towards the activity that the poet has accomplished using his or her own wit. The process – or, as Talentoni would put it in 1596, the connection of the cause with the effect – is what becomes the object of appreciation.

As the readers become aware of the mechanism that has taken place within the wit of the author, and which they somehow replicate as they read, this would bring the notion of “acutum” or “acuity” to a new stage in relation to the wonder produced by novelty: whereas the latter is finite and stops being wonder once it has been grasped, the focus on the process of the mind – on that which has made something “new” and unexpected come into existence – has a temporality that allows for repetition. In fact, as scholars like Talentoni and Sarbiewski would explain, while novelty vanishes quickly, the ability to beget it and the process through which this is done may be appreciated and valued repeatedly and on each occasion. This would provide theorists of “acuity of wit” with a framework to speak of beauty (a term that was famously used by both
Peregrini and Gracián) and to judge the works of the mind with criteria that were then new and had a basis in technique or art, somehow laying foundations for a discipline of aesthetics yet to be born.

Contingent upon wonder and resulting in beauty of some kind, “acuity” is displayed through argumentation that takes place according to probability and appearance rather than what is necessary or factually true. As Peregrini explains, the deduction that follows from necessary premises (for example, in a theorem of physics) may teach us about the world, but it is not likely to have “acuity”. This is perhaps the reason why Gracián identifies the context for wit to excel in ethical and political matters rather than natural ones: it is there that one always argues according to probability, and the way things happen for the most part. “Acuity” exists, therefore, in the same space of verisimilitude that characterizes rhetoric and poetics. Like them, it is ultimately about operating something in the mind rather than teaching.

Even in a discipline like history, which is dependent on fact, “acuity” ended up infiltrating the space for conjecture that has to do with the intentions of the agents. These belong to what is not verifiable and may therefore be argued according to the criteria of probability and likelihood. “Acuity” became crucial as the historians applied themselves to investigating the inner life and thoughts that princes and kings had been able to dissimulate. Again, whatever they could obtain through argumentation and insight would be valued not in terms of vicinity to the truth, but rather according to whether it was fitting to the way things generally happen, and therefore to disciplines like ethics and politics.

Few principles are more crucial to understanding the interest in “acuity of wit” that pervaded the cultural and literary landscape of the seventeenth century than that of reciprocity. Gracián writes that the historian Tacitus grasped with acuity what the emperor Tiberius had
concealed with prudence. It took the wit of the former to decipher the cunning of the latter. Yet Tacitus did not simply state the intentions that he was able to “penetrate”: rather, he encoded them in a style generally called “laconic”, which required in turn the participation of a reader with a certain degree of acuity. Interestingly, the process of decoding is not done without the reader feeling as though s/he were “penetrating” the language of Tacitus. Reciprocity is not limited to a relationship between the writer and the object s/he writes about, but exists in relation to the audience as well. Literary fashions such as the laconic style or the so-called “new poetry” of the imitators of Luis de Góngora are only two manifestations of a demand for “acuity of wit” to become the mark of reciprocal engagement in the exercise of encoding and decoding meaning.

As emphasized by Sarbiewski and Gracián, “acuity of wit” takes place when something appears suitable against a background of surprise and incongruity. This is what causes the connection advanced by the author to appear new but nonetheless surrounded by a certain degree of difficulty that a reader, transformed into a cooperator, needs to overcome. This unleashes opposing feelings and attitudes on the side of the reader, trapped amidst new responsibilities and pleasures: a competition of wits, as Peregrini would describe, in which the brightness of “ingenium” becomes the criterion of value in any relationship among individuals insofar as it is mediated by the use of language.

While the emphasis on wonder, challenge and participation would be hailed by some as a discovery that revolutionized the understanding of the pleasure obtained from fictions, tropes or arguments, it certainly caused many to be less than happy. Yet the analysis that now comes to a closure has intended to serve as a chronicle of the different transformations that made possible both agreement and disagreement concerning topics like these. For that, it was necessary to
refine a language, developed around a commonality of notions and principles inherited from antiquity, translated and transformed across languages and borders.
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