FOR 2305
Diskursivierungen von Neuem

Freie Universität Berlin

Working Paper No. 17

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Episteme and Public Interest. Latin Didactic Poetry through the Middle Ages to Early Modernity

Diskursivierungen von Neuem
Tradition und Novation in Texten des Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit

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Working Papers der DFG-Forschungsgruppe 2305: Diskursivierungen von Neuem. Tradition und Novation in Texten des Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit

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Zitationsangabe für diesen Beitrag:

Markevičiūtė, Ramunė: *Episteme* and Public Interest. Latin Didactic Poetry through the Middle Ages to Early Modernity, Working Papers der FOR 2305 *Diskursivierungen von Neuem*, No. 17/2023, Freie Universität Berlin.

DOI http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/refubium-39894
ISBN 978-3-96110-466-6
Working Paper (FOR 2305 Diskursivierungen von Neuem) ISSN 2510-0777

Diese Publikation wurde gefördert von der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG).

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Episteme and Public Interest.
Latin Didactic Poetry through the Middle Ages to Early Modernity

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> Once as I slept, old Orpheus saw me trying to press out a tune on the garrulous lyre without having a specific song in mind. Unwillingly he left his cattle in the fields and beat and dragged me into Orcus. Cerberus came at a dreadful pace, keen to devour my poor soul with his threefold maw. His throat came closer when suddenly Scotus approached and beat down all the Furies, horrible by their names alone – Tisiphone, Alecto, and Megara. Through the shadows we saw them howling like hounds (that is what they were) and then he took my timid self to the shiny realms at the foot of high Parnassus where the Muses come running.[1]

These are the first lines of the Scotist didactic poem *Musarum Parnassi Plausus ad mentem subtilis Ioanni Duns Scoti* written in 1689 by a Franciscan in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. After this rather unusual encounter between mythological creatures of antiquity and the fourteenth-century scholastic philosopher John Duns Scotus, the Muses sing the Scotist doctrine in over 500 Latin hexameters. Hitherto almost unknown to scholars of Latin literature written in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the poem lay for centuries in the archives of the Wroblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences. It of course brings with it some puzzling questions. Why should anyone write or even read Latin hexameters about scholastic philosophy in the wake of the Scientific Revolution? Was not this the era of Boyle, Newton, Leibnitz and Spinoza, when scholastic philosophy had long been declared retrograde by humanists, when heliocentric worldviews, the vacuum pump and the laws of universal gravitation were seriously threatening the Aristotelian hold over the sciences? Another key question remains unanswered: why did this work remain unknown for almost 350 years?

This peculiar text of the seventeenth century can only be understood properly in the light of the European tradition of Latin didactic poetry that stretched from antiquity to the early modern period. However, the degree of awareness of the continuity of such a tradition often varies within different fields of national literary studies. Conceptual ambiguities in different philological traditions have led to different understandings of the didactic poetry tradition for each epoch and linguistic area. In this study, I will make the argument that Latin didactic poetry existed as a transhistorical family of texts possessing a continuous tradition, one that stretched from antiquity to the early modern period. However, my analysis will primarily focus on the oft-neglected continuum between the Middle Ages and early modernity[2] and the specific communicative function that is a unifying aspect of the selected texts.

Besides the eternal question concerning the relationship between form and content, didactic poetry often puzzles the reader with its multi-layered meanings. Through the discussion of a particular subject, a great number of didactic poems transmit specific worldviews of political or institutional significance. Lucretius's *De rerum natura* and Virgil's *Georgics* are not only poems about atomistic

[1] "Orpheus in somnis quondam pressere vetustus / Me miserum voluisse Lyrae sine carmine ductum / Cernens, concentu me, garrula plectra, canoro / Exornare, feris (renuens) belluaeq[ue] rapaci / Pabula concredens, pellens me traxit ad Orcum. / Cerberus hinc animi tripliciq[ue] vorare gementis / Ora flagrans Spirtum, adventans devenit hiatus / Praecipiti, gressu tetro cum Scotica dextra / Arripuit, subito furiis cognomina diris / Victis, Trisiphone, Alecto, sociante Magaera. / Utq[ue] canes (etenim tales) ululare per umbras / Vidimus, et laete campos perduxit amoenos: / Me timidum sociasse puto radicibus, alti / Parnassi, Musis subito accurrentibus ipsis." VIEŽCHNICKIS, *Musarum plausus* p. 1.

[2] The view that there is no significant caesura between medieval and early modern didactic poetry is voiced most prominently in HAYE 1997: esp. 166-167.

philosophy or agriculture but also expressions of two antagonistic worldviews: of a cosmos haphazardly constituted by atoms or a cosmos as divine order. Bernd Effe has identified didactic poetry that uses the discussion of a primary subject to address a different topic as being 'transparent' since another message shines through the supposed actual subject matter.[3] The didactic poem thus can become a multidimensional text worthy of an analysis that goes beyond its declared content. It integrates scientific objects into a network of knowledge and politics in order to render a worldview that reflects specific interests of certain institutions.[4] In what follows, Effe's concept of transparency will serve as the starting point for explorations into medieval and early modern didactic poetry. The selected texts will thus be analysed in their academic and/or social context. Rather than the mere transmission of knowledge, it is the combination of literature, science and politics in a single text that renders this genre peculiar and, consequently, hard to grasp for modern readers.[5] Our aim is to examine more closely how didactic poetry was a response to the establishment or rejection of contemporary scientific, religious or philosophical worldviews and its place in discussions concerning those paradigms and shifts within them. Since didactic poetry was a pan-European phenomenon, the Lithuanian text, the author's choice of genre, and his subject matter will, in turn, become less puzzling. The socio-political context and the situation of Franciscans in seventeenth-century Vilnius will illuminate not only the motivations of writing such a text but also furnish the reasons why the *Musarum plausus* was subsequently forgotten.

Understanding the Cosmos. Latin Didactic Poetry and the Change of Paradigms

The Roman tradition of didactic poetry particularly favoured agriculture as a subject matter (such as Virgil or Palladius in the late fourth century), literary criticism (as dealt with by the republican poet Lucius Accius or the late imperial poet Terentianus Maurus), medicine (the imperial poet Quintus Serenus, author of the *Liber medicinalis*) and hunting (Grattius, first century AD, Nemesianus, third century AD). During late antiquity and the Middle Ages, the Christian worldview opened new fields of investigation and added to the tradition. Surprisingly, Christian didactic poetry has occasionally been excluded from studies that engage with antique examples of the genre of didactic poetry more broadly.[6] However, a change of paradigms should not determine the integrity of a generic tradition. When the fifth-century Christian author Orientius wrote his *Commonitorium*, he introduced ethics, a previously unknown subject matter, into Roman didactic poetry.[7] The author does so in the style of classical Latinity,[8] and is well aware of the instructional purpose of his *carmen* as he directly approaches the reader in elegiac distichs: "Ergo, age, da pronas aures sensumque vacantem: / vita docenda mihi est, vita petenda tibi." (*Commonitorium* 1, 15-16). The classical authors were known also to Commodianus. His *Instructiones*, probably written in the third century, constitute a work designed to reject the erroneous beliefs of heathens and Jews, both deniers of Christ's divinity. Although Commodianus does not make explicit reference to his models, his intention to instruct is expressed in the first lines of his work and links him directly to the tradition of didactic poetry.[9] A more obvious recourse to models from antiquity can be seen in the works of the Carolingian poets Wandalbert of Prüm and Walafrid Strabo. These authors both return to the botanical and the agricultural as subject matters. Wandalbert's *De mensium duodecim nominibus* is a calendar poem directly inspired by

[3] EFFE 1977: 32-33.
[4] MEIER 1994: 12-15 and 20.
[5] For this aspect in early modern Latin didactic poetry see MARKEVIČIŪTĖ 2021: esp. 2-3.
[6] HAYE 1997: 359.
[7] SCHINDLER 2005: 198-200.
[8] RAPISARDA 1970: 11.
[9] "Ob ea perdoctus ignaros instruo verum" (I, 1, 9), quoted after HAYE 1997: 360, n. 4.

Virgil's *Georgica* and Ovid's *Fasti*. The author omits any reference to Christianity and turns to the description of the twelve months of the year. The poem is entirely devoted – in the Virgilian and Ovidian spirit – to the changing seasons, flora, fauna and activities such as fishing, hunting and agricultural work. Nevertheless, the author adds authentic agricultural practices and landscapes from his floruit and region to this antique imagery.[10] Each description of a given month follows the same pattern. They begin with the etymology of the month's name and the zodiacal constellation that the sun enters at its beginning. Next, the author turns to processes in nature and human routine. Nothing can subvert the stable monotony that characterises Wandalbert's peaceful bucolic world where even war is perceived as a delightful occupation: "Alis saepe etiam bellum stimulisque lacessunt / In pulchramque ruunt animoso pectore mortem" (*De mensium duodecim nominibus* 134-135). Beyond the purpose of communicating knowledge of special *artes*, such as botany and agriculture, the Carolingian poems convey a particular worldview, one that comprises and reproduces the cosmos in its entirety. At the same time, the poets follow the educational agenda of the time, demonstrating that pagan literary forms were suitable for transmitting Christian content. The recovery of a proper Latin style through the reading of antique texts were political goals personally articulated by Charlemagne.[11] However, the superiority of the Christian worldview had not to be questioned at any point. In the *Hortulus*, or *De cultura hortorum*, Walafrid teaches the art of gardening and systematically enumerates the herbs, plants and flowers that should not be missed in a model garden. Each plant is described in terms of its characteristics and its possible medical properties. At the same time, Roman gods, muses, landscapes and winds populate Walafrid's verses, in a manner reminiscent of Virgil and Ovid. Parallels to the *Georgics* exist not only at a thematic and lexical level but also metaphorically in the representation of the cosmos as the deliberate planned creation of God. The idea of a perfectly organised garden is a reflection of the world and its beautifully arranged parts. The divine gardener has laid this microcosmos and provided it with useful properties for the good of the community. The classical style and form, however, are outshone by Christian symbolism. The rose, a flower associated with the Virgin Mary, is both the most precious plant in the garden, the *flos florum* (*De cultura hortorum* 401), and the protagonist of the splendid *finale* of Walafrid's botanical *carmen*. The author picks it out and places it together with the lily, a flower that symbolises Mary's virginity and purity, in order to crown his poem with a hymn to the *virgo* and her sprout Jesus. Walafrid demonstrates that the Christian world in the hands of its divine gardener is stable and cannot be subverted by pagan elements. On the contrary, they can only assist in increasing its splendour.[12]

Certainly, one has to bear in mind that a great number of didactic poems written in the Middle Ages served only a technical purpose. Often Carolingian poetic practice merely versified a large quantity of prose texts for widespread usage in schooling; the poets condensed the contents to the absolute essential,[13] and into an easily rememberable metrical form. The mnemotechnical aspect of didactic poetry was especially useful in the field of medical teaching, where poems tend to resemble an "agglomeration of verses"[14]. Other topics of great importance in daily school practice were grammar, rhetoric and poetics; these were frequent subjects of versification.[15] Alcuin's *De laude metricae artis* are 26 practical lines that assisted students in memorising long and short syllables in Latin words for the metrically correct composition of poems. A poem about the Latin perfect tense,

[10] RIEGL 1889: 35-36.

[11] ANGENENDT 1995: 310-312.

[12] For the *Hortulus* sharing the feature of transparency of the *Georgics* see EFFE 1975: 148-151.

[13] *Brevitas* is a characteristic usually aspired in medieval literature and especially in didactic poetry see HAYE 1997: 137.

[14] Ibid. 143. However, there are several examples of medical poetry that display a greater level of poeticism, such as the works of Aegidius of Corbeil, Johannes Aquila's *De phlebotomia* or the *Macer floridus.*

[15] Ibid. 140.

Adsunt quattuor, ascribed to Paulus Diaconus, enumerates possible grammatical forms of the past tense in 23 stanzas, each of which begins with a letter following alphabetical order. The innumerable pragmatic poems that date from the twelfth century onwards – when production of didactic poetry as well as the variety of their subjects generally increased – bears witness to the special position that the genre held in the education system. In fact, most of the authors of didactic poems were or had been teachers themselves.[16] However, beside this practical purpose, didactic poetry was still used as a medium for systematic reflection on contemporary philosophical issues of institutional and political gravity.

From the end of the tenth until the beginning of the twelfth century, debates about free will, its compatibility with predestination and divine omniscience became increasingly heated. Discussions on this subject fell into two camps. First, Arabic sources that were new to Europe shed new light on astrological calculations and the planets' psychophysical impact on the human condition.[17] These new findings triggered questions concerning astrology and the influence of the heavenly bodies on the sublunary realm. However, controversies surrounding the compatibility of Christian morality and astral determination had existed since the beginnings of Christianity, particularly in the works of Augustine and Chalcidius.[18] Secondly, in his *De casu diaboli* written at the end of the eleventh century, Anselm of Canterbury dealt with the question of will as it pertained to those angels who, despite their perfect knowledge, had chosen to disobey their Creator. He was the first to engage with this subject since Augustine. For him, the conclusions concerning acts of will, as they were drawn from theoretical discussions of the angelic fall, were transferable to the human condition.[19] Even if Anselm did not mention astrology by name and astrological predestination did not concern angelic nature, the debates revolved around the same key terms, such as *liberum arbitrium*, *voluntas* and *fatum*. The subject also appeared in the sixth chapter of the *Liber decem capitulorum*, a collection of didactic poems written by Marbod, Bishop of Rennes, at the beginning of the twelfth century.[20] The general belief in the power of horoscopes, the drawing of astral maps by *mathematici* for their clients, and the impact of celestial bodies in generating fate all threatened the notion of responsibility for one's own deeds. In combination with the theory of humourism and its astrological implications, Christian core values were in an unsure position and it was felt they ought to be stabilised.[21] Whereas Christian theologians of the Platonic school were generally prone to reconciling astral determination and free will,[22] Marbod chose to steer a more radical course. He begins his poem by explaining the concept of astral agency and predestination without concealing his own overt scepticism. He claims it is only the *opinio vulgi* that believes everything is ruled by fate (*Liber decem capit*. VI, 1) and that people who favour the idea that human life is already determined at the moment of birth are referred to as *aliqui doctorum nomen habentes*, that is, some people who merely have the name of scholars (*Liber decem capit*. VI, 4). One of them is mentioned explicitly: Firmicus Maternus, the author of the longest astrological treaty from antiquity. Marbod, in regarding Firmicus Maternus's teachings as false, advances several arguments against astral determination and points out the dangers of this belief. He considers that knowledge of the inevitability of certain human actions removed the fear of sinning, making the notion of reward and punishment, and thus of hell and paradise, obsolete: "Spes perit atque metus, perit et paradisus et orcus / Libertas perit arbitrii, vis cuncta coartat" (*Liber decem capit*. VI, 72-73). That is, in the case of astral determination there would be no need for a judge to decide on human actions (*Liber decem*

[16] Ibid. 109.
[17] CUNNINGHAM/FRENCH 1996: 81-82.
[18] ROLING 2017: 63-67.
[19] VISSER/WILLIAMS 2008: 182.
[20] LEOTTA 1984: 11, n. 1.
[21] ROLING 2017: 59.
[22] Ibid. 67-68.

capit., VI, 58), but God himself would be blamed for evil, since astral guilt is traceable to him (*Liber decem capit*. VI, 82). To Marbod it is clear that this cannot be the case. The reason why men behave differently lies not in astral influence but in the choices they have made: "Ergo voluntatis, non Sideris esse probatur / In bivio positum laevam dextramve tenere." (*Liber decem capit*. VI, 110-111). At the end of his poem, however, Marbod is quick to clarify that the world order lies not in the hands of men, but, naturally, in those of God. In his final remarks he elegantly avoids saying that divine omnipotence may presuppose any kind of predetermination:

> *Ne tamen omnino fatum genesimque repellam,*
> *Esse meum fatum summi Patris assero verbum,*
> *A quo cuncta regi debent quicumque fateri,*
> *Ingenitamque mihi dico genesi rationem*
> *Et libertatem, qua volo tendere possum,*
> *Sponte bonum vel sponte malum sine sidere patrans*. (*Liber decem capit*. VI, 153-158)

In denying the stars any effect on human decision making, Marbod opposes, among others, William of Conches's argument that the human body's functions and the characteristics of its mind were directly linked to the revolution of the stars.[23] Even when Marbod turns to the last instance of fate, the *verbum Patris*, he accentuates his own agency, namely his affirmation of God's word. In the end, he accepts only one a priori configuration of the human condition, that is, its innate rationality and freedom.

Bernardus Silvestris, another poet of the twelfth century who dealt with the human condition, the limits of necessity and contingence, as well as the ontological constitution of the *creatio* in general, held a more Platonic position.[24] In his *Cosmographia*, a prosimetrum in the Boethian style,[25] he tries to comprehend the intersection of divine providence and the contingent imperfection of creation by presenting a cosmological narration.[26] The principal characters involved in the creation of the world are introduced as theophanic figures who act and speak, thus bringing about the cosmogony. At the start of the *Cosmographia* there is chaos. The unformed, numbing fallowness of the material substrate called Silva/Hyle demands substantiality. The desire for form is voiced by Natura who addresses her mother Noys/Providentia, asking her for help and guidance in the shaping of the universe, the firmament and, finally, the realms of earth. Bernard narrates this shaping of the world in two different sections of his text. The *Megacosmos* comprises the council of the goddesses and the conception of the world, whereas the *Microcosmos* is devoted to the creation of humans. On the divine, rational level everything proceeds as intended. Noys is aware of the will of God and his plans, as everything is generated first in his mind and is manifested after. Thus, Natura appears just at the moment when it was designed for her to appear, since a higher will determined the moment at which the complex bonds of necessity were leading (*Cosmographia* I, 2, 1, 14-21). The *series temporum*, inevitable events set in time, are inscribed in the stars, which themselves move according to the great plan (*Cosmographia* I, 3, 33-34). Silva on the other hand, is bound by the functioning of blind fortune; she is unpredictable and lawless without form. Her intrinsic malignity causes minor imperfections in the sublunary sphere, where her concentration is greatest. Indeed, the descriptions of nature in the style

[23] Ibid. 68.

[24] Another work in which Bernard engages with the dilemma of collision between universal world order, sublunary causality and individual freedom is the verse drama *Matematicus*. For a discussion of this work in the context of the philosophical debates on *providentia* and *fatum* in the twelfth century see ROLING 2017.

[25] For the affiliation of prosimetron and didactic poetry see HAYE 1997: 73-74. For sources and influence of the *Cosmographia* see WETHERBEE 1973: 29-45, 55-62.

[26] Christine Ratkowitsch has read the *Cosmographia* as a theodicy in which Bernard absolves God from all responsibility for the imperfection of the world and mankind see RATKOWITSCH 1995: 15-17.

of the *Georgics* contain small expressions that demonstrate its potential spontaneity and randomness: *dispare sorte* (*Cosmographia* I, 3, 162), *fortuito semine* (*Cosmographia* I, 3, 286) and *fortuitis locis* (*Cosmographia* I, 3, 338).[27] Although there is a connection between God, Noys, the firmament and the stars down to the sublunary sphere, it can occasionally be corrupted by Silva's malignity and necessity up to the point where disruptions in the order are tolerated by the world spirit:

> *Mundus enim quiddam continuum, et in ea cathena nichil dissipabile vel abruptum. Unde illum rutunditas, forma perfectior, circumscribit. Si se igitur influentis Silve plerumque necessitas vel turbidius vel inpensius importabit, qui multiplex inest mundo vel sensus vel spiritus malitiam non patitur ultra lineas excursare.* (*Cosmographia* I, 4, 9, 5-10)

Necessity on the one hand and *fortuitas* on the other are attributes of Silva/Hyle and those things that are made of her. Natural phenomena thus have something of randomness to them but obey certain laws as well. Entities that dwell closer to the outer spheres, such as Noys, Urania or Natura, are defined by incorruptibility, rationality and free will, as they associate more closely with the mind of God. Humans are hybrid creatures that dwell on earth with their bodies, while their minds reside in the heavens (*Cosmographia* II, 10, 15-16). They are contaminated with the passive necessity of matter, but their *mentes* are connected to the divine *logos*, while *anamnesis* allows them to draw knowledge of their condition. Since the stars and the sky talk to the human *mens* in revealing the plans of Lachesis (*Cosmographia* II, 10, 33-34), men are able to liberate themselves from their material confinement through observation and scientific inquiry. The source of free will is *ratio*. Somewhat differently from Marbod, Bernard regards the new astrological teachings not as a threat but as a solution to determinism that lies in the material constitution of the world. While Marbod rejects the possibility of a psycho-physiological astral impact, Bernard remains faithful to Chalcidian philosophy and extracts the decisive human factor of *ratio* and free choice from the interwoven determinants of bodily causality and astral influence. In the end, both Bernard and Marbod aim at the same *demonstratio*, that is, the conclusion that despite all determination the final decision-making impulse lies in the *ratio* of every human being; each individual remains free and fully responsible for his own fate. Both poets thus engage in the preservation of a crucial Christian value, namely freedom of human will and agency.

Bernard's text must be seen not only as a response to the debates on the *liberum arbitrium*, but also as a voice in the more practical issue of the place of the natural sciences in the education system. His contemporaries William of Conches, Adelard of Bath and Thierry of Chartres (the last of whom was the dedicatee of the *Cosmographia*) were the first scholars to show wider engagement with natural philosophy, a field which did not at that time sit easily within the curriculum of the seven *artes liberales*.[28] New medical and astrological knowledge from Arabian sources required a re-examination of physics, which could not be no longer subsumed within mathematics.[29] In these circumstances, Bernard's text can be read as a manifesto of natural philosophy that should be considered as an *ars* in its own right. Given the reaction of certain representatives of the Christian community to the new theological exegesis that employed Aristotelian dialectics and physical approaches, and the fact that scholars such as Abelard, William of Conches and Gilbert of Poitiers had been accused of heretical teaching, this was no uncontroversial position. However, if the study of nature could restore men to their original dignity, as Bernard argued, then there had to be a place for it among the traditional subjects of the *quadrivium*. The poetical form of Bernard's programmatic vision provided not just an elegant platform for the illustrative merging of liberal arts and natural sciences on an allegorical level. It also supplied a medium suitable for solemn and public recitation. A unique opportunity for wider promotion arose when Pope Eugene III visited France in 1147/48. According to a gloss in a manuscript

[27] On the poetic form as an opportunity for addressing the difficult concept of contingency see SELENT 2016.
[28] KAUNTZE 2014: 50-53.
[29] Ibid. 88.

of the *Cosmographia*, the poem was indeed recited before the pope, to whom Bernard had elegantly referred in the context of the *series temporum*:

> *In causas rerum sentit Plato, pugnat Achilles,*
> *Et prelarga Tyti dextera spargit opes;*
> *Exemplar speciemque dei virguncula Christum*
> *Parturit, et verum secula numina habent;*
> *Munificens deitas Eugenium comodat orbi,*
> *Donat et in solo munere cuncta semel.* (*Cosmographia* I, 3, 51-56)

Eugene III is woven into the motion of the stars and thus into a divine plan. In this way, Bernard once again adopts a strong position on astrology and on the controversial issue of whether celestial movements prefigured events. In doing so, he integrates the highest Church authority into his poetical outline.[30] At the same time, poetic licence allows the author to immediately question his implied determinative world order. The depiction of the forces involved in the Creation as *dramatis personae* adds a moment of voluntariness and contingency to an otherwise well-calibrated universal clockwork.[31] By using a poetic form Bernard is able to express uncertainties about a determinative conception of the cosmos and to give space to interpretations. If one thing is certain to Bernard, it is that the key to the liberation of men from the bounds of necessity lies in the study of the world, the stars, nature and the human body. In this sense, the *Cosmographia* bears both a universal and practical statement, one that is related to contemporary debates on predetermination and freedom of will as well as to the question of the place of new Arabic teachings in Christian doctrine and schools.[32] The genre of didactic poetry once again appears to combine poetics with science and to announce a fundamental system-orientated position.

Only a generation later, the English scholar Alexander Neckam, born in 1157 in St. Albans, was to face fresh challenges in the field of theological and philosophical teaching. His *De laudibus divinae sapientiae*, usually referred to as an encyclopaedic poem and often demoted by scholars to being a mere versification of the treatise *De naturis rerum*,[33] bears the same functions of didactic poetry that have been observed in the previous writers. It is deeply relevant to the great institutional debates of the time. After the wide dissemination of commentaries and translations of Aristotle's *libri naturales* from the south of Spain and Italy to the northern parts of Europe, Christian philosophical system was confronted with a more physical approach to the world. Aristotle's teachings were too thought-provoking and intriguing to be ignored by theologians and scholars; they consequently tried to integrate his ideas into Christian dogma. In England, it was Alfred of Sareshel and the group of scholars around him, comprising Roger of Hereford, John Blund and Alexander Neckam, who first received and adopted Aristotelean texts.[34] More so than it had done in the middle of the twelfth century, the concept of nature emerged as an indeterminately autonomous principle; it separated the world from God's effective range and generated sublunary processes by means of *necessitas*.[35] However, the reckless separation of evil *materia* and pure intelligence could well have had fatal implications in the crisis that afflicted the Christian Church during the Manichean Cathars' uprising. Gaining more followers in Provence and spreading to the north of Europe, the Cathar movement, despite its various forms, bore at its core a belief in the strict dualism of essentially good and essentially evil principles. It

[30] Ibid. 119-128.
[31] The figures of Noys/Providentia and Natura first have to negotiate a consensus before the act of creation can be initiated, SELENT 2016: 39-43.
[32] KAUNTZE 2014: 78.
[33] Cf. WRIGHT 1863: lxxiv.
[34] BURNETT 1996: 31.
[35] CUNNINGHAM/FRENCH 1996: 73-74.

presented a very serious threat to the Church, which eventually decided to eliminate the problem through bloody crusade.[36] This conflict was of such a scale that it involved all manner of texts. It has often been forgotten in modern historical research that Alexander Neckam's *De laudibus divinae sapientiae*, quite aside from its being an encyclopaedic work, was also a polemic against the Manicheans. This is made clear right at the beginning of the work, when Alexander stresses God's *simplicitas* despite the three *personae* of Father, Son and Holy Spirit (*De laudibus* 1, 1-2; 35-36). The *primum principium* thus, cannot consist of many willing entities, but only of one: "Auctoris summi bona, pura, benigna voluntas, / Principium rerum, causaque prima manet" (*De laudibus* 1, 55-56). This natural order of things is revealed through the *ratio* and nature itself:

Principium motus ratio docet esse quietem,
Atque monas numeris contulit esse suum.
Ad requiem velut ad centrum, si consulis ipsam
Naturam, tendunt singula jure mero. (*De laudibus* 1, 103-106)

In order to show that the Manicheans have ignored this natural order, Alexander addresses a straw man whom he names Faustus after the Manichean Bishop in Augustine's *Confessions*. The figure of Faustus is evoked every time Alexander conveys and ridicules a putative Manichean position.

Mundana multo majus si dixero mole
Centrum, ridebis, perfide Fauste, tace.
[...]
Auctores rerum geminos fingis, miser, esse
Das vitiis, vitio cuilibet esse suum (*De laudibus* 1, 109-110; 115-116)

The main argument that Alexander puts forward on Manichean beliefs is that they contradict both *ratio* and *fides*. In the *De laudibus divinae sapientiae* all created things and elements are believed to obey and serve men. Consequently, any investigation of the cosmos should, Alexander claims, ultimately lead to the love of God whose plan it was to create this order. This rational order of things can also be observed and understood by human reason and this leads him to conclude that there can be only one Creator and one principle of being. This conclusion is corroborated by faith: *Quod ratio dictat, astruit ipsa fides* (*De laudibus* 1, 118). The rational conclusion and the belief in this single principle was meant to eliminate the Manichean misconception of a second material principle of evil.

Alexander had studied the arts, theology, law and medicine in Paris and Oxford, where he had been a teacher of arts as well as theology. He subsequently entered the Augustinian monastery in Cirencester around 1200 and wrote most of his theological works there.[37] Despite dedicating the *De laudibus divinae sapientiae* to a modest circle of recipients (including fellows in the abbeys of Gloucester and St. Albans), his connections to the king and the reverence shown to him by contemporary scholars reveal the scope of his social and academic network.[38] Alexander wrote at a time when the system of the seven arts was changing. Due to increased Aristotelean knowledge of natural philosophy and sciences, the focus that had lied on the *trivium* and on dialectics up to the middle of the thirteenth century began to shift towards the *quadrivium*, as well as towards the disciplines of mathematics and astronomy.[39] At a time of disjunction between natural sciences and humanities, Alexander offered the *De laudibus divinae sapientiae* as a point of reference that favoured a middle position for educational teaching. On the one hand, he had no doubt about the utility of the old school

[36] Ibid. 100-104.
[37] HUNT 1984: 1-18.
[38] ZAHORA 2014: 21 and HUNT 1984: 12-13.
[39] WRIGHT 1863: lxiii.

of scholasticism that was oriented toward grammar studies and exegesis.[40] Alexander himself had composed several grammatical works as well as elementary books for Latin classes; he understood grammar not only as an *ars recte scribendi* but also as an *ars intelligendi*.[41] On the other hand, he was among the first to combine the older and more recently rediscovered Aristotelian corpuses and admired the philosopher greatly.[42] The description of the seven arts in the last of the ten books of the *De laudibus divinae sapientiae* does not distinguish between the disciplines of the *trivium* or *quadrivium* (*De laudibus* 10, 37-166). For Alexander, however, it is the useful and noble art of medicine that best illustrates the capacity of the human ratio devoted to the study of the Creator's gifts (*De laudibus* 10, 1-36). In fact, his teaching of the four predominant elements follows the treatise *De commixtionibus elementorum* written by Urso, one of the great medical authors of the Salerno school where Aristotle's physical teachings were first adapted.[43] Alexander's overt Aristotelianism may have seemed shocking to his more conservative contemporaries, especially considering that some of the newer Aristotelean texts were banned at the University of Paris from 1210 to 1255. The Lateran council of 1215 extended the prohibition to the *Metaphysics*.[44] Alexander, who had been present at the council, began to write the *Suppletio defectuum* to supplement the *De laudibus divinae sapientiae*, adjusting his teachings to the new canon. The work was still unfinished by Alexander's death in 1217. However, the mere fact that Alexander considered it necessary to write a supplement proves the importance the author attributed to his didactic poem and the impact he thought it could have on its readers. After the hard line that Church representatives took on Aristotelian teachings, Alexander added further moral explanations to the scientific parts of the poem in order to reinforce the connection between science, ethics and faith, as he had already done in his treatise *De naturis rerum*, which had been written around 1200.[45] The study of nature had no end in itself. *De laudibus divinae sapientiae* was to demonstrate that only science, when combined with faith, could refute heretical doctrines and help in finding guidance when studying the world. Alexander's middle position between exegesis and natural science led some scholars to discard his weak argument for fresh studies of nature and to fashion him as a medieval humanist rather than a scientific author.[46] However, in the end, his attempt at reconciliation can be compared to the poems Bernardus Silvestris or Alain de Lille wrote in reaction to the doctrinal disturbances of the time.[47]

The establishment of Aristotelianism in English schools was furthered in the thirteenth century by such figures as Roger of Hereford, Daniel of Morley and Alfred of Sareshell. Ultimately, Aristotle's teachings found their way into daily use at Oxford thanks to the works of St. Edmund of Abingdon, John Blund and especially Robert Grosseteste.[48] The strike at the University of Paris in 1229 drove many young scholars to Oxford, which consequently experienced a scientific boost and became a major centre of study. At a stage when the Aristotelean system was still being disseminated, gaps in its understanding naturally had to be filled in and synthesized with extant knowledge that has been provided by neo-Platonising authors as Proclus, Pseudo-Dionysius and Augustine. This tendency led Van Steenberghen to devise the term 'eclectic Aristotelianism' for it,[49] a bent which was prominent in a great number of philosophical and theological works in the thirteenth century. At Oxford, the

[40] Ibid. x-xii.
[41] HUNT 1984: 32-42.
[42] Ibid. 67.
[43] Ibid. 71.
[44] VAN STEENBERGHEN 1970: 66-77.
[45] HUNT 1984: 82.
[46] ZAHORA 2014: 38-39.
[47] CUNNINGHAM/FRENCH 1996: 104-105.
[48] VAN STEENBERGHEN 1977: 166.
[49] Ibid. 126-130.

Franciscans in general and, more prominently, Grosseteste promoted a combination of Aristotelianism, Augustine's teachings and Neo-Platonism. However, within only one generation, philosophical discussion became aware of the incompatibility of Aristotle and Plato; this was exemplified by the *Summa Philosophiae*, a text that is usually attributed to the Oxfordian environment of the second half of the thirteenth century. It is in this context that we must place the anonymous *Carmen de mundo et partibus*,[50] a didactic poem about the theory of elements, the composition of the macrocosm and meteorological phenomena. These topics are discussed in a verse dialogue in which a quick-tempered interlocutor S, who is passionate about philosophy and apparently a scholar himself, asks the wise and diplomatic philosopher R for a lecture on the composition of the universe. R agrees to do so and so holds forth on the *principia* of the *mundus corporeus*, that is the elements, triggering a debate on their divisibility. While R considers the elements, or *athomi*, to be of definite size in line with the Platonic notion, S, on the contrary, follows the Aristotelian notion that simple elements cannot constitute additive space.[51] The dispute cannot be resolved as R refuses to discuss positions he does not support. The literary form, however, provides an opportunity for expounding on conflicting ideas in a clear and unpretentious way. It becomes evident that the author is greatly concerned about comprehensiveness and clarity, since S compliments R's comprehensible and pleasant style (*Carmen de mundo et part.* 1031-1036). Thereafter, R makes a 29-line digression in which he explains how a rhetorician should act (*Carmen de mundo et part.* 1037-1066) to make his subject accessible. In an implicit echo of the Lucretian topos of bitter medicine made more pleasant by honey, it seems that the poetic form was not seen as an obstacle. Rather it was an opportunity to render complex scientific issues more simply and to help others in understanding the cosmos.

Didactic poetry can be seen as a genre that perpetuates questions of rational order, of contingence, chaos and autonomous matter. The line can be traced from Lucretius to the medieval scholastics. The genre uses knowledge and science to reveal the constitution of the world and to explain how the perfection of a creator-God may be compatible with the Creation's deficiencies, as well as the consequences of superior logos on human free will. Both within the Virgilian-Lucretian and Christian theological debates, those problems for which answers were sought had the potential to disrupt existing scientific paradigms and theological dogma. Thus, their outcomes were extremely interesting for those institutions involved. Under papal supervision the stakes were particularly high as an unorthodox position on a text could lead to the accusation of heresy. Yet, not all didactic poetry was dangerous. When the solemnity produced by the poetic style was employed to celebrate the prevailing order and to please the powerful, a text could be used to harmlessly draw attention to certain topics or to transmit a message indirectly. Subject matter and politics found themselves in symbiotic union as the subject discussed in a didactic poem became poetically more dignified, while all kinds of political or institutional promotion could be simultaneously snuck in.

Dignifying the Subject Matter and taking position in Latin Verse

In the aftermath of the paradigmatic changes that took place in the educational system after the arrival of Aristotelian and Arabic texts, academia largely divided itself into two camps. More conservative members of the Faculty of Theology attempted to reconcile Aristotelian philosophy with the *sacra doctrina*, defending the notion *philosophia ancilla theologiae* and forming a counterpart to certain scholars from the Arts Faculty that adhered to a heterodox Aristotelianism as determined by Siger of

[50] Whether the poem can be attributed to Robert Grosseteste (as has been suggested by editor Axel Bergmann), or not, remains an open question. The only hint to a possible provenience is given by a speaker of the dialogue who states that "Anglia me genuit" (*Carmen de mundo et part.* 0915).
[51] Cf. BERGMANN 1991: 45-50.

Brabant.[52] Mendicant orders who arrived at the University of Paris between 1217 and 1219 and who took up administrative offices began soon after to stress the importance of pastoral ministry. It was their response to the pastoral reforms of the Fourth Lateran council,[53] and an attempt to counter the profanation within theological studies that had been caused by the study of secular pagan philosophers.[54] In the years after 1250 it became common for theologians to write commentaries on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, an essential text that systematised theological knowledge.[55] In fact, Dominicans and Franciscans, such as Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure, produced the most frequently used commentaries on the *Sentences*. It is as part of this wave of refashioning theological teaching that we must place Conrad of Mure and his didactic poem *De sacramentis*. After the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 decreed that every clergyman should mandatorily hear confession at least once a year, it was the Dominicans above all who took the initiative in the implementation of this decree.[56] The order specifically committed itself to daily pastoral care and to putting especial emphasis on the proper theological preparation of *fratres communes* as well as lectors and *doctores*.[57] New books and manuals on confessional practice as well as learned theologians were needed to prepare priests and clerks for the *cura animarum*.[58] However, as the doctrine of the sacraments was part of the fourth and final book of the *Sentences*, it could have easily become a neglected topic of study, since much time and energy were used up in the teaching of the doctrines of the Trinity, Creation and Incarnation found earlier in the work. Conrad seems to have reacted to this desideratum with a didactic poem that he completed around 1260,[59] at a time when he was schoolmaster and, from 1259, cantor at the Großmünsterstift in Zurich.[60] Though the work as a whole remains unedited to this day, several published fragments indicate that Conrad addresses Cardinal Hugh of St. Cher, the first Dominican to obtain such a high rank in the Church and the author of the first concordance of the Bible:[61]

> *Hugo, flor cleri, vox recti, regula veri,*
> *Lucifer ecclesiae, decor ordinis, archa sophie,*
> *[…]*
> *Tu dicis, quod nihilominus possim sine vino*
> *Istud mysterium complere […].*[62]

Whether Conrad had met Hugh during his supposed study in Paris or during the time he held office at the Roman Curia remains unclear.[63] Nonetheless, the Cardinal was an suitable point of reference for a work on the sacraments, as he was one of the more conservative theologians at the University of Paris, one of the first commentators of the *Sentences* and confidant of both Pope Gregory IX and Innocent IV.[64] At the time Hugh of St. Cher was serving Innocent IV, Conrad held the office of canon in the city of Zurich that had taken the side of Frederick II in the conflicts between emperor and pope. The latter consequently imposed several interdicts on the city.[65] Although Conrad never spoke a hostile

[52] Cf. VAN STEENBERGHEN 1977: 390-391, 482-487.
[53] BOYLE 1981: 249-257.
[54] VAN STEENBERGHEN 1977: 99-103.
[55] FRIEDMAN 2002: 42.
[56] BOYLE 1981: 249-250.
[57] Ibid. VI, 253-255.
[58] Ibid. VI, 252-253.
[59] FIALA 1879: 206-207.
[60] BENDEL 1909: 56-57.
[61] Cf. BENDEL 1909: 68-69; FIALA 1879.
[62] Quoted after FIALA 1879: 206.
[63] BENDEL 1909: 53-55.
[64] VAN STEENBERGHEN 1977: 152, 156.
[65] BENDEL 1909: 56.

word publicly against the emperor, he was a supporter of the papal policy.[66] These political circumstances must have encouraged Conrad to take a stand for the Christian Church and its efforts in its respiritualisation of theology and its revaluation of pastoral service. In his poem, he discusses the sacraments as they pertained to dogma, church law, liturgy and pastoral care in reference to contemporary controversial matters.[67] By doing so, he reassembles and reconfigures sacramental teaching into a subject matter that could have scientific and polemical potential. Conrad's purpose in composing *De sacramentis* must therefore have been twofold. On the one hand, he was concerned about the poor state of spiritual education. A compelling schoolbook in form of a didactic poem was thus sure to increase common interest in the matter. In fact, Conrad seems to have attempted an approach that integrated contemporary issues into the teaching of the sacraments. On the other hand, he wanted to communicate his position in Zurich's political controversy to the highest prelates within the Church in the most diplomatic way. His advocacy for the study of theology and stand for the concerns of the Church was designed to demonstrate that the entire city had not in fact been lost to the papal rival and that its future clergy has been educated in loyalty to the Holy Father.

The combination of commentaries on the *Sentences* followed by an obligation to compose such a commentary in order to obtain the title of *magister theologiae* interestingly resulted in a development that ran contrary to spiritualisation and to the promotion of study of the *sacra scriptura*. Instead, it aroused a greater interest in philosophical matters.[68] The fashioning of theology as a science and the formation of a scientific method through the reception of Aristotle's works raised the question as to whether theological topics could generally be discussed in a scientific manner. That is, how could theology be considered a science if its principles do not rely on rational thought but on revelation? Is it possible to gain knowledge through the divine *res* and *signa*?[69] In the attempt to clarify notions like 'truth' and 'knowledge', philosophy of language encroached on theological issues in the fourteenth century and contributed to the negative picture of the scholastic method and of medieval philosophy more generally. This image lasted right up to the twenty-first century.[70] It was inter alia the exhaustive accumulation of differentiation and hair splitting that led early Italian humanism to turn against what could have been subsumed under the umbrella of scholasticism. In an anti-scholastic fervour, humanists aspired to break free from the restrictions of canonical Latin education and embrace the vernacular, especially in artistic production.[71] In fact, Latin literature experienced something of a downturn in the fourteenth century, but the still vital Latin liturgical poetry of Christian of Lilienfeld and Conrad of Hainburg bears witness to the spiritualising trend present in the Church.[72]

The desire to maintain a clear theological standpoint and protect the institutional integrity of the Church from 'new' methodologies, formal approaches or distortions of established traditions imported from the secular realm, manifested itself in a further contemporary debate. New developments in the *ars musica*, such as polyphony and elaborate mensural notation, as well as new forms of singing practice, including the hocket and the motet, led to the establishment of the *ars nova*. The coinage of the term *ars nova* is traditionally attributed to one of its most fervent advocates, the humanist, music theorist and composer, Philippe de Vitry.[73] His friend, the scholar Jean de Murs supported de Vitry's argument for this new school of thought and sought to furnish it with a scientific basis; he wrote several monumental treatises on musical theory and mathematics. In the opening lines of his

[66] Ibid. 60.
[67] Fiala 1879: 207, 209.
[68] Perler 1990: 39-50.
[69] Ibid. 43.
[70] Ibid. 1-2.
[71] Cecchini 2002: 373.
[72] Ibid. 380.
[73] Anheim 2000: 223.

mathematical didactic poem *Quadripartitum numerorum*, which was dedicated to Philippe de Vitry, Jean de Murs reveals, in the spirit of early humanism, his critical attitude towards authority: "Major pars hominum vult rem satis esse probatam / Auctoritate viri famosi, sic requiescunt. / Sed mihi nulla fides nisi que volo sponte tenere" (*Quadripartitum num.* 11-13). As the new musical practices were making their way into liturgy, a controversy arose between advocates of the new school and adherents of traditional practice. Among the traditionalists was Jacques de Liège who introduced the term *ars antiqua* in his *Speculum musicae* of 1324 in response to the arrival of the *ars nova*. This then led to a quarrel of sorts between the two factions in the field of church music. In defence of one of its most ancient prerogatives, the singing of the word of the Lord, the Church chose the conservative position. In 1325, Pope John XXII published the *Docta sanctorum patrum*, a degree that banned polyphony, motets or new liturgical scores, and which alluded to the harmful influence of *ars nova* on church music in general.[74] With this ban the pope sought to preserve the integrity of the sacred word and the divine harmony transmitted through the unison chant. Short notes and polyphonic compositions that doubled and tripled a Latin verse were deemed to render the text incomprehensible. It consequently became unacceptable if vernacular verses were added to the chant in style of a motet or if vulgar language penetrated the sacred Latin text.[75] It could be said that the problem went deeper still if one agreed with Augustine that symbols, including musical symbols, were essentially related to what they convey and thus represented the divine harmony of the cosmos. The inclusion of superfluous notes and the subsequent possibility of God-offending dissonance could not be justified in any way. The controversy set universalists against nominalists and Augustine against Aristotle when Jean de Murs argued in the *Notitia artis musicae* that musical symbols be made to fit convention,[76] and that music serve not only the consolidation of faith but also intellectual *delectatio*.[77] The status of music and the autonomy of the *artes liberales* in respect to theology in general was at stake.

In the midst of this debate Hugh Spechtshart, chaplain at Reutlingen and author of several didactic poems, wrote the *Flores musici omnis cantus Gregoriani*. The work was completed between 1332 and 1342 under extraordinary circumstances. During the conflict between Pope John XXII and Ludwig the Bavarian, the city of Reutlingen took the side of the emperor and was placed under interdict by the pope in 1324. Furthermore, a subsequent *interdictum* forbade the clergy to celebrate mass and administer sacraments except for baptism and the last rites. After twelve years of Reutlingen's clergy staying faithful to the papal order, the city's mayor declared that anyone housing a priest who "refuses to sing" should be fined.[78] Forced to act against the *interdictum* and to sing mass, Hugh was immediately excommunicated by Pope John XXII until a papal delegate absolved him in 1348 after the sudden death of Ludwig the Bavarian.[79] As a consequence, a work concerned with liturgical music and singing written in an era when singing mass was at the centre of political feud could not have been devoid of political meaning. In the opening lines of the *Flores musicae*, Hugh rebukes the poor musical instruction of novices who had not mastered the proper art of singing (*Flores musici* 7-11). One can only imagine how during the long period of the *interdictum* these skills would have deteriorated all the more, so doubtlessly Hugh hoped to preserve the art as much as he hoped to see an end to the papal ban. The writing of the *Flores musicae* thus served a practical purpose, but it also carried an important message. In the case of the city of Reutlingen both clergy and the people suffered due to the *interdictum*. According to Hugh, the *ars vera* lies in a *cantus concors* which alone can be dear to the Lord (*Flores musici* 9-11). In the quest for harmony music is able to reconcile different voices for a

[74] HUCKE 1984: 127-131.
[75] ANHEIM 2000: 230-231.
[76] Ibid. 241.
[77] Ibid. 237-238.
[78] GÜMPEL 1958: 11.
[79] Ibid. 12.

higher purpose, the praise of God. As God is more pleased by harmony than discord, the art of music has to be seen as a model for politics where disputes have to be settled in order to guarantee the harmonious functioning of the community. It is interesting that Hugh frequently refers to conflicting positions between *veteres* and *moderni* in his poem. When discussing the Gradual, Hugh notes that the older school wished to end it *d-sol-re*, whereas modern singers finish with *a-la-mi-re* (*Flores musici* 124-126). In his chapter on modes Hugh mentions a mode that the old masters had spurned. However, he notices that there is no bull not allowing its use: "Haec ratio nulla papali nec data bulla" (*Flores musici* 389). His non-polemical way to refer to old and new musical techniques in the middle of a dispute around the *ars nova* and his cautious treatment of potentially controversial subjects are a paramount example of diplomacy was lacking in the conflicts between papacy and secular powers of his time.

The 'Old' in the Age of the 'New'

The advance of the 'new' and the rejection of the 'old' was to become the central idea in the Renaissance. First of all, it was necessary to purge the Latin language of the medieval barbarisms that were present even in the texts of a scholar as Petrarch. Even though texts that followed the 'scholastic' tradition did not entirely disappear from everyday schooling, the humanist approach to learning Latin favoured new methods, in particular the study of classical authors.[80] With the influx of Byzantine scholars following the fall of Constantinople, manuscripts that were lost in Western Europe re-emerged. This consequently led to a rise in interest and imitation of new classical authors.[81] The establishers of literary taste and of scholarly trends increasingly moved their field of action from the ecclesiastical to lay responsibilities in chancelleries of state, in courts of noble families or in service of Church representatives. The formation of political centres in Italy such as the Duchy of Milan, the Republic of Venice, the Florentine Republic, the Papal States and the Kingdom of Naples attracted specialists and scholars; with time, therefore, the position of court poet grew in politico-cultural significance. Panegyric was clearly a major duty for poets, but they were also able to demonstrate their mastery of poetry by working on subjects that simply had caught the interest of their lords and patrons. In this way, the fifteenth century nurtured a flowering of astrological poems, each of which took a different approach to *renovatio* as an ideal of the Renaissance.

Astrology and politics were heavily entwined in fifteenth-century Italy. As power accumulated in individual courts and political relationships became more dynamic, anything that could possibly facilitate the process of decision making was deemed highly relevant.[82] In her monograph on the subject, Monica Azzolini has highlighted the significance of astrology in everyday diplomatic practice by evaluating archival material from the fifteenth-century Sforza court in Milan.[83] Just as in the twelfth century, astrology based on Galenic humoral theory and on the theory of celestial influence was of particular importance to medicine and politics. Astrological predictions concerning the illness or death of an adversary or the best time for alliance making could determine political decisions. The practice, however, was not limited to the Sforza court alone. One nobleman who employed astrologers' services was Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta,[84] Lord of Rimini. Malatesta's interest in astrology and his knowledge of astrological matters is attested in the opening lines of his Basinio da Parma's didactic poem *Astronomicon* and may have been the basis for the composition of this astrological work.[85]

[80] MARTINELLI 2002: 442-443.
[81] Ibid. 431-432.
[82] AZZOLINI 2013: 10.
[83] Cf. AZZOLINI 2013.
[84] Ibid. 68.
[85] SOLDATI 1906: 83.

Basinio's known sympathy for Greek language and literature explains his choice of Aratus's *Phaenomena* as a source for his own text. Moreover, a manuscript containing the *Phaenomena* had been recently discovered. But Basinio does not seem to have fully embraced his lord's astrological inclinations as his poem is almost devoid of any actual interest in astrological matters or references to theories of astrological influence, fate or even divine providence. Instead, it is focused more on mythology and astronomy. [86] In his work comprising approximately 1200 lines he refers only once to the potential impact of celestial bodies on men's actions, specifically when he discusses planets:

Haec sunt illa eadem, quae corpora nostra tuentur,
Lumina magna: venit sensusque vigorque, ministris
His hominum vitis: agimus tamen omne, quod ipsi
Non minus errantes, ad quinque referre solemus:
Verum alias veniens numerus compellit ad ipsa
Lumina: luminibus melius quoque jungere quasdam
Dicitur, ut numerus numeratus tempus agit res. (*Astronomicon* 2, 107-113)

Basinio continues describing the positive junction of Jupiter and Venus with the Sun and the Moon, as well as their junctions with the planets Saturn and Mars that have negative effects on human life (*Astronomicon* 2, 114-125). Whether these 22 lines were incorporated into the text to please Sigismondo or whether their inclusion proves that Basinio did not entirely dismiss astrology remains an open question. [87] However, it is clear that his approach to astrology is based on a pursuit of scientific precision. He underlines the importance of education and knowledge, stating that it is necessary to know how to read celestial phenomena in order to avoid the fear and superstition that ancient people experienced during eclipses of the Sun and Moon (*Astronomicon* 2, 140). Such a sentiment has the ring of Lucretius even if there seems to be no textual reference to *De rerum natura* itself. Additionally, it is also reminiscent of the scepticism towards astrology and the *opinio vulgi* held by Marbod of Rennes even though Basinio lacks the genuinely Christian narrative of the defence of free will. Important models for the descriptions of the constellations are Hyginus and Macrobius, authors who were read throughout the Middle Ages.[88] The *Astronomicon* thus cannot be considered entirely 'new' as it is based to a great degree on the same source material as other medieval writings and does not formulate an entirely novel position on astrology. The 'novelty' is rather found externally to the text, such as in the appearance of newly rediscovered forgotten manuscripts and in the changing social status of court poets who wrote such poems.

Basinio's *Astronomicon* did not gain attention outside Malatesta's court.[89] However, it is hard to imagine that the two poets of Alfonso V's Aragonese court at Naples, close friends and both authors of astrological poems, Lorenzo Bonincontri and Giovanni Pontano, would have known nothing of Basinio's literary production at the court of their lord's political enemy.[90] The 'responses' from Naples

[86] Ibid. 93-94, 101.

[87] Soldati argues that Basinio is defending a sceptical position towards astrology, since he apparently interprets the phrase "agimus tamen omne, quod ipsi / Non minus errantes, ad quinque referre solemus" (*Astronomicon* 2, 109-110) as meaning that man's error consists in attributing his deeds to the influence of the stars, cf. SOLDATI 1906: 91-92. In my opinion the participle *errantes* here is intended as a word play likening the movement of the planets to the not less errant actions of men.

[88] SOLDATI 1906: 94. Anna Chisena recently showed Basinio's dependence on Macrobius' commentary on the *Somnium Scipionis* and discovered the work of Greek astronomer Cleomedes to be one of the primary sources for the *Astronomicon*, CHISENA 2018: 157-159, 176-179.

[89] SOLDATI 1906: 103-104.

[90] Basinio's panegyric epic *Hesperis* was dedicated to the description of Malatesta's war against Alfonso V of Aragon 1448-1453. For Bonincontri's life, ties to the Aragonese court and the Pontanian Academy see SOLDATI 1906: 118-126.

seem to be the radical opposite of Basinio's work. Lorenzo Bonincontri, a Tuscan military officer, astrologist and poet, wrote two poems with the title *De rebus naturalibus et divinis* in the years between 1469 and 1475.[91] The first dealt with the sublunary realm and was dedicated to Lorenzo de' Medici, whom the poet was hoping to win over and so spare him from possible exile. The second poem, where Bonincontri treated the heavens and astrology, was dedicated to Ferdinand of Aragon, the son of Bonincontri's great protector at the Aragonese court, Alfonso V.[92] Unlike Basinio, Bonincontri makes use both of Manilius's *Astronomica* and shows signs of having read *De rerum natura*.[93] In addition, he gives his work a genuinely Christian flavour by weaving in a narrative of apostasy and epistrophé. The first of the three books begins with the divine Creator and the dogma of Trinity before proceeding to the battle between Lucifer's demons and the faithful angels, culminating in the Fall. Struck to the earth, the author undertakes a slow ascent through the spheres, explaining the motions of the planets and their impact on human lives, concluding with a discussion of meteorological signs and possibilities for predicting future events. As with Bernardus Silvestris's conception, the study of the stars is seen as an instrument of revaluation of the human soul and a divine gift: *vim dedit his animamque bonam petere alta deorum / regna poli dominumque suae cognoscere vitae* (*De rebus naturalibus ad Ferdinandum* 1, 217-218).[94] Bonincontri's narrative sequence of fall followed by ascension through knowledge and wisdom is common to other theological works such as commentaries on the *Sentences*, theological *summae* and *breviloquia* including the one composed by Bonaventure. Bonincontri reprises theologically important doctrines, such as the emphasis on the *liberum arbitrium* and the unconditional omnipotence of God. Though the Neapolitan astrological poems are regarded as products of the Renaissance,[95] they are indebted to their medieval predecessors in both structure and content. Giovanni Pontano shapes the crucial episode of the council of the Gods in his *Urania* according to the 'creational council' of the *dii deorum* in the Calcidian *Timaeus*.[96] This allegoric narrative reminds us of Bernardus Silvestris's depiction of the allegoric figures Silva, Physis and Urania, which was itself inspired by the same episode in *Calcidius*. Pontano's astrological sources for the poem shared much in common with those used since the twelfth century. Among Pontano's favoured authors is Firmicus Maternus, as are astrological works by Aristotle, Ptolemy, al-Quabisi and al-Farghani.[97] However, the *Urania* bears more salient signs of Lucretian influence than Bonincontri's text. As Pontano played a part in a controversy initiated by Pico della Mirandola who had voiced scepticism towards astrology and regarded it as superstition[98] he tried to defend astrology as a science in several works, including the *Urania*. A specific passage in the poem reveals how the author merged the Lucretian topos of fear of the gods with the enlightening effect of astrological knowledge in order to ward off the charge of superstition and to connect astrology to true faith. After describing the general benevolence of Jupiter *omnipotens*, the *rerum sator*, *pater divum* and *hominum rex* (*Urania* 1, 631-632), Pontano then reminds the reader that Jupiter is also the ruler of the heavens (*Urania* 1, 647). Suddenly the placid sky rises to a violent storm and gentle Jupiter becomes

[91] SOLDATI 1906: 158-161.

[92] For the close ties between these two works see HEILEN 1999: 10-13.

[93] SOLDATI 1906: 183-185 on the reception of Manilius and 168 on that of Lucretius. For Bonincontri's reception of Manilius see also HEILEN 2011.

[94] Cf. HEILEN 1999: 12.

[95] For discussions of the *Urania* in the context of humanistic poetry see GERMANO 2015 and GERMANO 2018. For a discussion of Renaissance Latin didactic poetry on astronomy/astrology see HASKELL 1998.

[96] SOLDATI 1906: 272.

[97] Ibid. 244. However, Weh points to humanistic ideals in Pontano's astrological works where he seeks to replace Arabic or Medieval Latin words by proper terms in Greek and Classical Latin, cf. WEH 2017: 61-62.

[98] Soldati gives a detailed account of Pontano's debate with Pico della Mirandola, cf. SOLDATI 1906: 199-253.

a source of anxiety and the addressee of supplication, empty rituals and religious fear (*Urania* 1, 684-694). At this point Pontano attempts to keep divine will and meteorological phenomena separate:

Quid vexare deos frustra iuvat? Ordine certo
Fert natura vices, labuntur et ordine certo
Sidera, tam varios rerum parientia casus.
[…]
Sic omnis ab alto
Natura est, sequitur leges, quas scripserit aether.
Ipse deus laeto spectat mortalia vultu. (*Urania* 1, 697-699; 702-704)

According to Pontano, superstition arises when terrifying natural phenomena are interpreted as manifestations of a divinity thought only to be placatable through certain ritual actions. In contrast, as he sees it, true faith should rely on the idea of a loving god, not a wrathful one. Meteorological phenomena, on the other hand, should be seen as belonging to the sphere of science; they can be measured and predicted. Keeping to the Lucretian theme, Pontano subtly keeps astrology separate from the domain of superstition, which he believes to be closely linked to religious rituals.[99]

In sum, writing didactic poetry in the Renaissance entailed above all the emulation of newly discovered antique texts. Transforming social structures shifted the centres of knowledge from universities and church schools to the courts.[100] The ideal of a Renaissance nobleman, as described by Castiglione in his *Libro del Cortegiano*, was fixed on matters of education and demanded that he be abreast of current political, literary, and scientific issues. The maintenance of both scholars and humanists, and specifically the representation of an 'appropriate' worldview through their work thus played an important role in determining a ruler's self-image. In these new circumstances, the function of didactic poetry and its content remained, however, largely unchanged. The theory of celestial *influx*, widely used in the Middle Ages as means for determining medical conditions, did not lose any of its value in the Renaissance scientific environment.

The emergence and spreading of *morbus gallicus*, later known as syphilis, became a hugely relevant topic in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and generated an entire branch of syphilitic literature, including several didactic poems. The most famous one of them is Girolamo Fracastoro's *Syphilis*, which gave the name to the disease that was still incurable at the time. The unfortunate junction of Saturn, Mars and Jupiter under the sign of Cancer was held responsible for the emergence of the plague not just in Fracastoro's own work. Instead, the fatal constellation was a *locus communis* in all literature on syphilis including the two very first didactic poems on the topic both dating back to 1496. The German humanist Sebastian Brant, famous for his satire *Das Narrenschiff*, dedicated a short pamphlet on the disease written in Latin distiches to Johann Reuchlin. Dirk van Ulsen, a Frisian humanist and physician, wrote a poem of 100 hexameters and 10 distichs prophesying that a cure for the disease would be found in the city of Nuremberg where Ulsen was a *Stadtphysikus*, an official town doctor. Both Ulsen and Fracastoro employ the poetic image of a divine council, modelled on the scene in the first book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The gathering of gods, each representing a planet, was used to convey the idea of a pernicious constellation that had sent down evil influence giving rise to the disease. In Ulsen's *Vaticinium in epidemicam scabiem*, Saturn attempts to poison Jupiter's ambrosian cocktail out of a long-held anger grounded in his son's infamous coup against him. This conspiracy triggers the suppressed fury of Mars who is suffering under the peaceful regime of his father and cannot hold back his bellicose fervour any longer; the pestilence is released and spreads all over the world (*Vaticinium* 25-62).

[99] Goddard interprets the very same passage concentrating on the critique of religion, cf. GODDARD 1991: 257-262.
[100] William Eamon goes so far as to assert that this shift changed the methodological foundation of sciences in general and contributed to the scientific revolution, EAMON 1991: esp. 27-29.

Similarly, Fracastoro stages a gathering of three planets. In this meeting of Saturn, Mars and Jupiter, Jupiter discloses upcoming events as wars, deaths and a new sort of disease (*Syphilis* 1, 219-246). In contrast to Ulsen, Fracastoro's poem plunges deeper into the theoretical possibilities of *generatio spontanea*, which is induced by celestial influence. However, some subjects within the narration, such as Saturn's unfavourable attitude towards Jupiter, are reprised by both Ulsen and Fracastoro. This suggests that medical and literary discourses on the disease were interwoven at that time and also known to humanists.[101] In fact, Ulsen, who was both a physician and a poet, took his writing seriously. He did not want his reader to believe that writing poetry was inferior to his work as a healer because both arts were sacred to their patron Apollo. The God could heal both with medicine and song (*Vaticinium* 24). In the distiches at the end of the poem he declares:

Si mihi turpe putas medico componere versus
Et Musis operam carminibusque dare,
Nullaque Pegasei tanquam sit Gloria fontis
Metraque sint studiis inferior meis,
Falleris: ille, meas primus qui tradidit artes
Quique salutiferam condidit auctor opem,
Inter Pierides cithara crepitante sorores
Phoebus divino police ducit ebur. (*Vaticinium* 101-108)

Ulsen also pursued a promotional agenda. As mentioned, a prophecy in his poem relates that a man from Nuremberg will find a cure for the disease. This daring statement could have been intended as a means to gain wider attention for Nuremberg and its group of physicians who were, after all, struggling to convince the city council to open a poetry school in the same year as the *Vaticinium*'s composition, 1496.[102]

The entwining of highly topical subjects, important addressees and a form suitable for public celebration has to be seen as means to generate influence and promote ideas and institutions. Didactic poetry is a genre extremely suitable for this intertwining, as the number of subjects it can potentially concern itself with is near infinite.[103] When, in the seventeenth century, Cartesian mechanics clashed with Aristotelean hylomorphism and sparked a general scientific debate on whether animals had souls or were instinct-driven automata, didactic poems served as platforms for discussion. They were also able to provide material proving that animals were creatures capable of rationality. From Virgil's *Georgics* to the far-ranging tradition of hunting poetry, texts bore witness to animals' ability to feel, to reason and to trick their human predators. As kings and dignitaries had the prerogative to hunt, they formed the target group for hunting literature. Thus, didactic poetry, celebrating the hunt as a royal activity, could reach the right addressees and influence the shaping of desirable worldviews; a creature so clever as to escape a king's flighted arrow must, therefore, be gifted with reason.[104] The strategy of transmitting philosophical and political statements through poetry that celebrated aristocratic activities was an all-European phenomenon. In 1523, Nicolaus Hussovianus, a poet and humanist active in the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania,[105] published the *Carmen de statura feritate ac venatione bisontis* in Kraków. This work was meant to be sent to Pope Leo X

[101] On Ulsen's poems about the *morbus gallicus* and the relationship between humanism and medicine see SANTING 1995.
[102] Cf. LASSNIG 2008: 57-58; BAUCH 1901.
[103] This is a thought expressed by François Oudin, editor of the *Poemata didascalica*, in his notes to Girolamo Vida's *Poeticorum libri tres*, cf. *Annotationes in Vidae libros tres poeticorum* p. 232.
[104] For a discussion of the role of didactic poetry in the debate concerning animals' souls see ROLING/MARKEVIČIŪTĖ 2019.
[105] Hussovianus's provenance and nationality are a matter of debate, cf. VETEIKIS 2007: 218-220.

together with a stuffed Wisent. Leo X was known to be a passionate hunter and generous patron of the arts. The gift from the Polish Crown and the Lithuanian Grand Duchy should have pleased both of his interests. Unfortunately, Leo X died before the poem could be finished, so its author changed the addressee and dedicated the *carmen* to the Queen of Poland and Grand Duchess of Lithuania Bona Sforza, who had been a close friend of the deceased pope.[106] Hussovianus seized the opportunity to capture his readers' attention by describing an exotic animal essentially unknown to Italian humanists. This he combined with a presentation of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and its political situation. The *Carmen de bisonte* thus comprises two storylines: the description of the wisent's appearance and the art of hunting it on the one hand, and an idealised depiction of the rule and personality of the former Grand Duke of Lithuania, Vytautas on the other.[107]

It was the feature of transparency that made didactic poetry especially interesting to the Jesuit order, which had cultivated the genre in early modern Europe in the first place.[108] In the seventeenth century, French Jesuits wrote didactic poems on fishponds, aviculture and gun powder, which were all topics of interest to the aristocracy of the day. The poems, additionally, more often than not included political messages designed to strengthen the rule of Louis XIV.[109] For members of an order that was highly involved in public affairs and had an elaborate system for educating and encouraging individuals to aim for positions of influence, writing didactic poetry entailed combining spheres in which they excelled, namely poetic training, scientific education and political intuition.

In the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the arrival of the Jesuits marked a turning point in the country's cultural development. In 1570, Jesuits founded a college in Vilnius that was granted the right to operate as an academy in 1579. The University of Vilnius followed a humanitarian educational curriculum that lasted five years and included the study of the Latin language, poetics and rhetoric. Students who aspired to an academic career had the possibility of continuing their studies in the faculties of philosophy and theology.[110] As Jesuits paid great attention to the mastery of language and the acquisition of an impeccable style in prose and verse, students had to spend their time writing odes, epitaphs, threnoi, epithalamia which they dedicated to nobleman and high officials. As a consequence, almost all of the occasional Latin poetry written in Lithuania at the time was composed by students and professors at the University.[111] Since Jesuits in Vilnius did not pay as much attention to the natural sciences as they did to classical languages,[112] a large proportion of the publications printed at the university press consisted of occasional literature. Among these, there is no extant Jesuit didactic poem.[113]

Franciscans were the first order to settle in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania while it was still pagan in the first half of the fourteenth century. From the very beginning of its existence, the Franciscan

[106] Ibid. 234-235.
[107] Ibid. 251-253.
[108] For an overview of Jesuit poetry in early modern Europe see HASKELL 2003.
[109] MARKEVIČIŪTĖ 2020.
[110] ULČINAITĖ 2007: 96.
[111] VAŠKELIENĖ 2014: 92.
[112] VAŠKELIENĖ 2018: 296.
[113] Besides the *Carmen de bisonte* two more texts within the cultural environment of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania are faintly reminiscent of the text type of a didactic poem. The first is Adam Schröter's poem on how the Neman river was cleared and made suitable for navigation, *De fluvio Memela Lithuaniae*, Cracoviae 1553. However, the text mentions little to no technical detail about how the work was done. Rather it is a bucolic ode to the aristocracy of the Duchy and to the project's supervisor. The second poem is the *Chiliastichon* written by the Spanish humanist Petrus Royzius. Curiously named by scholars a *carmen didascalicum* (TAMOŠIŪNIENĖ 2008: 25), it actually is a salutation written on the occasion of the visit of apostolic *nuncius* Luigi Lippomano to Poland and Lithuania. As the *nuncius* was sent to fight Protestantism in Lithuania, the poem consists of a list of loyal Lithuanian Catholics Luigi Lippomano could trust.

convent in Vilnius had one or even several lectors who were responsible for the instruction of novices. It was also their task to teach philosophy and theology courses to friars who were to be ordained as priests.[114] Prior to the establishment of the University of Vilnius, Franciscan lectors had studied in Polish or Bohemian universities. After 1467 they were able to study in France, Austria and even Italy.[115] When the University of Vilnius opened its doors in 1579, many Franciscans chose to complete their studies there, as the curriculum for both Jesuits and Franciscans was the same.[116] Hence, it can be concluded that the Franciscans knew the humanistic educational system very well. Moreover, they were witnesses to the Jesuits' strategy of exerting influence on the upper classes through the employment of their most elaborate rhetorical and poetical skills. It was to be in a moment of deep crisis and fundamental change that the Franciscans of Vilnius adapted the Jesuit strategy for their own purposes.

Scotus in the Underworld: Franciscans Writing Didactic Poetry in Seventeenth-century Vilnius

The seventeenth century were busy years for the Franciscan Conventuals in Vilnius. The reformations that occurred in the Ruthenian and Lithuanian provinces in the first half of that century sought the revival and the revitalising of monastic communities, and the Franciscans in Vilnius began to engage in the strengthening of their congregations and evangelistic missions.[117] However, reformatory ambitions had to be put on hold due to repeated military conflicts between the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Russian Tsardom which had persisted since the start of the Livonian War of 1558. The hostilities were accompanied by other turbulences such at the Khmelnytsky Uprising of 1648 or the Swedish invasion of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in 1655, also known as the Swedish Deluge. All these events brought destruction, murder and pillage to every part of the country. Nor were the Franciscan convent or church in Vilnius spared; they had to be raised almost entirely from the ashes after the war. Treasures that were stored in the Ruthenian convents for the period when Vilnius was occupied by the Moscovites in 1655 remained for the most part in the hands of the Russian brethren even after repeated inquiries to restore them.[118] After the truce between the Tsardom of Russia and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1667 brought some respite from the turbulences of war, Franciscans in Vilnius started a campaign for an independent province of Lithuania, which, up to that point, had been part of the Ruthenian Franciscan province. In the same year, the guardian of Vilnius, Jokūbas Dluskis, ordered the establishment of a Franciscan press, which was soon after transferred from the convent in Zamość to Vilnius. It started to publish texts promoting the argument for the necessity and importance of an independent Lithuanian province.[119] Its efforts were successful. In 1686, the final formalities were agreed, and the Lithuanian Franciscans took charge of the convents in their territory.

But the work did not finish there. As convents and churches as well as Franciscan studies had to be maintained, the order itself – ever important to the Grand Duchy – had to be promoted. The Conventuals, like any other religious institution, sought to uphold ties with local aristocracy, to search for possible sponsors and to represent their order in official celebrations. Latin texts printed by the Franciscan press provide evidence to this. For the inauguration of Vladislavas Silnickis, the Suffragan Bishop of Vilnius from 1683 to 1692, the "students of Scotism of the Franciscan convent in Vilnius", as they named themselves, published a collection of epideictic texts, the *Candor religiosae submissionis*.

[114] GIDŽIŪNAS 1950: 55.
[115] Ibid. 54-55.
[116] GIDŽIŪNAS 1968: 240-241.
[117] BARONAS 2010: 162-164.
[118] Ibid. 172.
[119] One of these texts is the *Antiquitas minorum conventualium in Magno Ducato Lituaniae* written by the aforementioned Jokūbas Dluskis, cf. BARONAS 2010: 173.

In the following years the guardian of Vilnius and Doctor of Theology, Stanislovas Chochlovskis, seems to have put special effort into publishing his own works and those of his students. The texts were dedicated to specific nobleman or were meant to mark notable occasions. For the wedding of Aleksandras Oginskis, the elder of Mstibogow and son of the former Voivode of Polotsk, Jonas Jackus Oginskis,[120] and Elena Bialozoraitė, offspring of a noble family in the Grand Duchy, Chochlovskis published an epithalamium in February 1690.[121] It addressed Aleksandras Oginskis explicitly as *Maecenas amplissimus*, most generous patron. Just a few months earlier, in October 1689, Chochlovskis's student of philosophy at the convent *in arenis*,[122] Tomas Viežchnickis, had published the *Musarum plausus ad mentem Subtilis Doctoris Ioannis Duns Scoti*, an artful didactic poem on the philosophical doctrine of Duns Scotus.[123] It was dedicated to Aleksandras Oginskis himself, who was named a *benefactor amplissimus* on the title page and most probably had funded the publication of the work.[124] After his study of philosophy, the same Viežchnickis published, with Chochlovskis as supervisor, the *Theologicus Olympus de mente Subtilis Doctoris Ioannis Duns Scoti*, a collection of forty distichs on Scotist theology. The text was the fruit of Viežchnickis's theological study and was dedicated to another prominent figure in the Grand Duchy, Steponas Tyzenhauzas. In 1690, another Franciscan student of theology, Florijonas Franckevičius, published two Scotist works for the commemoration of the Franciscan chapter in the Lithuanian province in that same year, the *Theoremata theologica* and the *Parastases theologicae*. This focus on John Duns Scotus is of no surprise in a Franciscan context, especially as there was a certain revival of Scotism in the seventeenth century all over Europe.[125] In 1633, the General Chapter of the Franciscans in Toledo had finally decided to include compulsory studies of Duns Scotus in the Franciscan curriculum. Consequently, the editing of works written by Duns Scotus, the *Doctor subtilis*, increased significantly in the following years.[126] In Lithuania, most educated Franciscans had been acquainted with Scotism from the fourteenth century on, but serious engagement with the doctrine began in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with the flourishing of the convents.[127] The establishment of an independent Lithuanian Franciscan province and the general popularity of Scotism throughout Europe were two events that temporally coincided. It seems, therefore, that Chochlovskis embraced the opportunity to promote his order through a 'product' that represented Franciscans better than any other. However, the production of occasional literature was at its peak at the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries.[128] In order to stand out from the torrent of Jesuit occasional literature,

[120] Jonas Jackus became voivode of Polock in 1682 and Field Hetman of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in 1683, just one year before his death, cf. VILIMAS 2010: 25.

[121] *Aspectus illustrissimae Oginsciorum portae in coniunctione cum illustrissimae domus Bialozorowianae Bisontis Capite sub tempus nuptialis pompae illustrissimorum neo-sposorum Alexandri Oginski […] et Helenae Bialozorowna […], 1690*.

[122] The Franciscan convent and church in Vilnius were said to have been built *in arenis*, that is, 'on sandy land'.

[123] Though not explicitly indicated, this work was most probably published by the Franciscan press.

[124] The title page bears a curious emendation. The dedicational address runs as follows: 'ALEXANDRI OGINSKI PALATINIDAE …LOCENSIS'. One can see that '…LOCENSIS' was written on an additional piece of paper and glued over the original word whose initial letters, 'MS', are still visible under the paper scrap. The missing initials of the word that has been inserted can be restored to 'POLOCENSIS', as Alexandras was son of the voivode of Polock, *palatinida Polocensis*. Alexandras's father, Jonas Jackus Oginskis, however, became voivode of Polock in 1682, after he had held office as voivode of Mstislaw (cf. VILIMAS 2010: 25), to which the first letters of the emended word most probably refer. The Franciscans must have had forgotten that the father of their dedicatee had been promoted to a higher position seven years before.

[125] SCHMUTZ 2002: 51-62.

[126] Ibid. 58.

[127] GIDŽIŪNAS 1968: 241. The convent in Vilnius was even furnished with a small library, cf. GIDŽIŪNAS 1950: 56.

[128] PETRAUSKIENĖ 1976: 110.

Franciscans had to offer their audience works that would distinguish them from the most popular genres of Jesuit production – panegyrics, *gratulationes*, epigrams and odes.[129] We have seen that didactic poetry had a long tradition in the transfer and dissemination of knowledge and often related to the interests of a given institution. It thus seems natural that the Vilnian Franciscans chose this genre in order to mobilise the Franciscan *episteme* for the order's own public interests.

Viežchnickis expresses this intention quite clearly in his letter to Alexandras Oginskis that prefaced the work. The Franciscan friar explicitly states what he expects from the dedication:

> *Quot hic ductas contueris assertionum litteras, tot genuinos rerum colores cernere Te putaveris, veros quidem illos et pulcherrimos, quia pulcherrimae veritatis manuductos sed publica luce destitutos. Atqui exanime cadaver est color, et imago sine Luce. Adde Lucem, vitam illi addideris. Idem a tuo ILLUSTRISSIMO quia OGINSCIANO NOMINE istae veritates, seu umbrae seu colores expectant: Quod et Domus tuae splendoribus, et Meridiana Illustrium factorum Tuorum qua in Toga, qua in Sago, Luce, per totum Polonum Lithuaniumque Orbem semper vibrat radios.*

That is to say, though the Franciscans were in possession of the *veritas* in form of the Scotist doctrine, his claim is that its beauty has no value if it lacks the light of the public. For Viežchnickis, Aleksandras is able to shed this light on these beautiful truths through his name, since divulgation of knowledge needs political patrons. The Oginskiai left a mark in the cultural history of Lithuania. They fostered the publication of books, were authors themselves, had large libraries, and many literary works were dedicated to them.[130] The Vilnius University press alone published thirteen works dedicated to members of the Oginskiai family in the seventeenth century. By the eighteenth century, this number had risen to 100.[131] The *Musarum plausus ad mentem Subtilis Doctoris* shares its overall structure with occasional texts of the time. This can be seen from its use of the keyword 'plausus' in the title and the outline of the work; it begins with a heraldic epigram that is then followed by a letter of dedication and the main text.[132]

As the opening verses of the poem quoted at the beginning of this paper show, the text is conceived as a dream revelation.[133] The poet, unable to put words into song, tells of a dream in which he is carried off by Orpheus to Tartarus. His life is threatened by the underworld's monstrous creatures, but Scotus himself saves his poor soul and guides him to the realm of the Muses. There, he is taught to sing the Scotist doctrine by the charming experts themselves. The poem is 519 lines long in total and is divided into six chapters corresponding to the disciplines of philosophy. The author gives the chapters artful titles composed of the respective discipline's name and rhetorical figures or text types. Thus, the text starts with the *Hypotyposis logices*, the discipline of logic, sung by Melpomene herself. With each new chapter comes a new discipline and each Muse passes her song on to one of her sisters. Melpomene is followed by Erato, who introduces the chapter *Topographia phisices*:

> *Parnassi cignos citharis hoc concinit ipsa*
> *Melpomene flanti concentu Musa suavi:*
> *Et licet ista suos diffuso Lumine cantus*
> *Emittat; surgens Erato dissultat amore:*
> *Et nos laetanter Phisicos conducit in hortos.* (*Musarum plausus*, p. 5)

The Muses alternate with one another through the remaining chapters: the *Coeli et mundi chronographia* is sung by Urania, the *Ortus et interitus Antithesis* by Thalia and the *Prosographia*

[129] For occasional literature of the eighteenth century in Lithuania see VAŠKELIENĖ 2014.
[130] NARBUTIENĖ 2010: 77.
[131] VAŠKELIENĖ 2015: 289.
[132] Ibid. 288-292.
[133] Other early modern didactic poems that use the dream as a frame for their narration and the transmission of knowledge are Dirk van Ulsen's *Vaticinium* and Pierre le Coedic's *Mundus Cartesii*.

animae by Terpsichore. The final chapter, the *Apotheosis methaphisices*, deals with the noblest discipline of philosophy that is not attributed to any Muse. In a final remark at the end of the text, Viežchnickis describes his verses as *carmineas theses*, perhaps best understood as 'sung theses'. Indeed, verses in the individual chapters bear consecutive numeration at certain intervals. This enumeration is missing only in a few pages probably due to technical errors in the printing procedure. The presentation and defence of theses was a common practice in academic disputations of the time. It can therefore be concluded that Viežchnickis, as a student of philosophy, bound his final paper into poetical form. This was no easy task as the author had to struggle both with scholastic syllogisms that lack any graphic narrative and a complicated technical vocabulary. The author tried to do his best by rhetorically enhancing the text. The personification of a *materia* boasting about her predomination on Earth provides a comic relief in the complex field of physics:

Principia in fieri tria, gaudet in esse duobus
Materia et forma: privatio iungitur illis.
Omnia quae fiunt ex istis esse putamus.
En sua materies vehit imperiosa trophea
Pergit et elate subiecti nomine primi
Cum cunctis iactans se demigrare per orbem
Postremum poscit si quid corrumpitur esse. (*Musarum plausus*, p. 6)

Viežchnickis also faced serious metrical challenges as some words crucial for scholastic philosophy, such as *syllogismus*, *universale*, *qualitas*, could not be fitted to hexameter. The elegance of the author's solution may be questioned; however, he manages to integrate these terms into the metre through the poetical device of *tmesis*, that is separating these words into two parts, with another word between them: *syllo – quidem – gismum*, *uni – dari – versale*, *quali – dari – tatem*. It is easier to follow the text of the *Musarum plausus* if one is already acquainted with Scotus's philosophy, as the syntax of the verses often is not very clear. However, some typical elements of Scotist philosophy such as the *distinctio formalis* can be easily identified:

Sic datur in rebus certe distinctio triplex.
Prima realis adest, sequitur mea Scotica dicta,
Quae Formalis adhuc fertur. Rationis habetur
Tertia [...] (*Musarum plausus*, p. 16)

In terms of natural sciences, the *Musarum plausus* represents a conservative scholastic Aristotelianism with a Scotist note. In the cosmological chapter of the poem, God is said to have created both one world as well as the best of all possible worlds. Two verses testify that the author knew about the Scotist notion of synchrony of reality and contingency in the act of creation (*Musarum plausus*, p. 10). Furthermore, Viežchnickis repeats common tenors of scholastic cosmology: the distribution of the elements, the order of the spheres and their motion caused by angels (*Musarum plausus*, p. 11).[134] This should come as no surprise, as Aristotelianism was still commonly taught in universities at the end of the eighteenth century in Europe. At the end of the *Musarum plausus*, the author announces that his theses will be defended publicly in the church of Saint Mary in Vilnius in December 1689. This was most probably intended to be an invitation for the dedicatee and his family. However, Aleksandras Oginskis, Viežchnickis's teacher Stanislovas Chochlovskis and the *Musarum plausus* shared a similar and unfortunate fate. Aleksandras Oginskis died in 1690, the year of his wedding to Elena

[134] The German theologian Wissingh published another Scotist didactic poem on Mariology in 1695. It is 800 pages in length and shows few literary aspirations, as it seems to be a versified treatise in the first place. In comparison with the *Musarum plausus* it is obvious that Viežchnickis's text was conceived for public presentation instead.

Bialozoraitė.[135] Chochlovskis became involved into a serious argument with the Bishop of Vilnius, Konstantinas Bžostovskis.[136] He left Vilnius and his convent for Riga at some point between the end of 1694 and the beginning of 1695. Once there, he converted to Protestantism and died just a year later, in 1696.[137] This must have caused a tremendous outcry and no doubt cast a shadow on all writings that were published under Chochlowskis's supervision. In a bound collection containing, among other philosophical and scientific texts, Viežchnickis's *Theologiae Olympus*, a hand dated to 1701 marked the text as *aegra poesis Apostatae Chochlowski*. The works of Chochlovskis's students must have remained associated with their teacher's name and his conversion certainly had an impact on their reception. In fact, the *Musarum plausus* received no further academic attention, probably due to both the fate of its dedicatee and the unfortunate turn in Chochlovskis's career. At an unknown time, Tomas Viežchnickis became guardian of Vilnius and died of the plague in Kaunas in 1710.[138] Up to the present day, the *Musarum plausus ad mentem Subtilis Doctoris* has sat in the Wroblewsky Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences.[139]

In the highly competitive environment of literary production in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Franciscans had no choice but to strive for the attention of possible patrons and sponsors. In order to position themselves as players in the political field of the Grand Duchy they had to articulate and promote their specific expertise. The revival of Scotism in the seventeenth century proved a good opportunity for framing the doctrine as a trademark of the Franciscan order in Vilnius. The promotional strategy they followed, envisaged an appealing form of literature that was suitable for public celebration and dedication. As we have seen, the didactic poem proved to be the perfect medium for bringing together the fields of science, philosophy and politics. Its form allowed for integrating and placing objects into a universal system that comprised all spheres of human and non-human interaction, guaranteeing its overwhelming success in literary history right up to the nineteenth century.

[135] VILIMAS 2010: 25-26.

[136] The details of this argument have not yet been studied. Chochlovskis published a collection of his own letters and those of other individuals concerning this case: *Epistolae Stanislai Chochłowski, quondam Ordinis Franciscanorum in Conventu Vilnensi Guardiani, De Episcopo litigioso et seditionum in Ecclesia Dei, et in Republica concitatore, Constantino Brzostowski, Episcopo Vilnensi 1695.*

[137] Chochlovskis's date of death is mentioned in the *Memorial of the Friars Minor Conventual of Vilnius, Vilniaus Mažesniųjų brolių konventualų Memorialas*, p. 94, § 516. I want to express my special thanks to Darius Baronas, who advised me on the history of the Franciscans in Vilnius.

[138] The dates regarding life and death of Tomas Viežchnickis are taken from the *Memorial of the Friars Minor Conventual of Vilnius, Vilniaus Mažesniųjų brolių konventualų Memorialas*, p. 110, § 829.

[139] I am very grateful to Daiva Narbutienė and the staff of the Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences who procured me a scan of the text. Another exemplar of the print should lie in the National Library of Russia in Saint Petersburg, cf. *Index librorum latinorum Lituaniae saeculi septimi decimi*, 1188. However, I had no opportunity to get access to this exemplar.

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Working Paper (FOR 2305 Diskursivierungen von Neuem) ISSN 2510-0777
Herausgeber: Prof. Dr. Bernhard Huss
Editorische Betreuung: Sabine Greiner

Diese Publikation wurde gefördert von der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG).

FOR 2305 Diskursivierungen von Neuem
Geschäftsstelle
Freie Universität Berlin
Habelschwerdter Allee 45
D-14195 Berlin