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‘Nose of Wax’: Early-Modern Philosophy and the Discourse of Conceptual Hybridization

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Aristotle has a nose of wax. *This curious expression appears in many philosophical works of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In this context, the metaphor emphasizes the ambiguity of Aristotle’s philosophy and the possibility for the commentators to make his words just what they want. This paper analyzes the use that different Early-Modern actors made of the image to address issues such as arrogance and ineptitude, fabrication and authenticity in the study of philosophy. The aim is to illuminate a further aspect of the hybridization of Aristotelianism in the Early-Modern period than the very fact of its* change. *Early-Modern actors detected, directed, or hindered this transformation. With what words and concepts did they depict, stimulate and (try to) thwart it?*

The Early-Modern period was one of intense hybridization in philosophy. As Peter Burke suggested, the transformation experienced by Aristotelianism between the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries might be understood in terms of conceptual hybridization. On the one hand, humanists pursued a ‘counter-hybridization’ of Aristotelian philosophy, as they aimed at excavating “the real Aristotle, or what they believe to be the real Aristotle, from what they considered to be the layers of misunderstanding embedded in earlier translation and commentaries, first by the Arabs and then by scholastic philosophers” (Burke

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2016, 156-57). On the other hand, the Early-Modern attempts to refresh Aristotelian philosophy by combining it with alternative views, both ancient and more recent, resulted in several episodes of "re-hybridization" of the former (Burke 2016, 157-58).

Burke's remarks rely on the image of Aristotelianism that historians of Early-Modern thought have been assembling over the past fifty years. Several studies have shown how humanists' activity as editors, translators and educational reformers shook the scholastic Aristotelianism that had shaped university teaching since the middle of the thirteenth century[1]. In the same way, scholars have sounded the modifications that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Aristotelianism underwent as it interacted with alternative approaches to philosophical knowledge that were (re)emerging in the same period[2]. These changes, however, represent only one aspect—the most visible one—of the hybridization of Aristotelianism in the Early-Modern period. Indeed, Burke's words hint at another crucial and almost unexplored aspect of this process. Hybridization in the history of thought does not only consist of *changes*—be the latter, as Burke puts it, interpretive, reactive or adaptive[3]. It also embraces how historical actors perceived and praised (or denigrated) certain practices and values in knowledge. How did sixteenth-century humanists depict the "misunderstanding" of Aristotle by past and contemporary scholastics? How did innovators and defenders of Aristotle's philosophy justify their attitudes (and denigrate those of the opponents) toward Aristotle's texts?

These questions open up an intriguing dimension of the Early-Modern philosophical discourse—and one that emerges especially when considering the trans-

[1] On the impact of humanists' pedagogical thought on higher instruction in sixteenth-century Europe, see Lechner 1962; Reinhard 1984. On humanists' activity as editors, translators and lecturers in Latin and Greek in universities, see Grafton 1988; Jensen 1996; Botley 2010; Lazarus 2015. On the modifications that humanists brought to scholastic instruction in logic, moral and natural philosophy, see Riedel 1973; Jardine 1988; Blair 1992.

[2] See Mercer 1993; Kusukawa 1995; Leijenhorst and Leijenhorst 2002. More recently, Omodeo and Wels (2019, 4) noted: "In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Aristotelianism was not a fossilized relic of the past (…). Rather, it was a movable philosophy capable of interacting and merging with—and reacting to—impulses coming from many directions, for instance Paracelsism in medicine, Cartesianism in physics and physiology, and Ramism in methodology".

[3] As those operated on Aristotle's philosophy by scholastics, humanists and Early-Modern *novatores*.

formation of Aristotelianism under the lens of cultural hybridization. I will address them by following the history of a widespread metaphor in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Aristotelian literature, namely that of the 'nose of wax'. This image was most commonly associated with Aristotle himself, but it also related to other authors and concepts, such as Bacon and his notion of 'spirit'[1]. The metaphor was generally meant to emphasize the ambiguity of its objective and, by reflex, the possibility of adapting it to any intellectual purpose. As the following sections will show, the different uses of this metaphor reflect how Early-Modern actors addressed issues such as fabrication and authenticity, arrogance and honesty, ineptitude and boldness in knowledge change. In other words, these uses of the metaphor illuminate the words and concepts through which Early-Modern actors described the manipulation of the Aristotelian tradition in their times—or, as seen from our standpoint, they shed light on the Early-Modern discourse of conceptual hybridization.

The first two sections provide a general background on the meaning and the usage of the metaphor outside the domain of philosophy. The third section focuses on philosophical sources.

1. A metaphor for any thing very mutable

The image of a 'nose of wax' has obscure origins[2]. However, the figurative expression 'having a nose of wax' (or, that is same, 'being like a nose of wax')

[1] See section 3.2 below.

[2] Harbsmeier (1900, 117, TLL 9.1.117.70) mentions an occurrence of the image of a nose made of wax in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* (2, 30, 15-20; Apuleius 1897, 45). The first documented instance of the use of the image in the metaphorical meaning here analyzed is found in Alain of Lille: "Sed quia auctoritas cereum habet nasum, id est in diversum potest flecti sensum, rationibus roborandum est" (*Contra haereticos libri quatuor*, 1, 30; Alain of Lille 1855, 334). On the use of the metaphor by Alain of Lille, see Ocker 2022, 198.

was common between the twelfth and the eighteenth centuries[1]. The metaphor emphasizes (often wryly) the features of ambiguity and pliability of its target. In his *Glossary* (1822), Robert Nares made this point crystal clear, as he wrote:

NOSE OF WAX. A proverbial phrase for any thing very mutable and accommodating; chiefly applied to flexibility of faith (Nares 1822, 348)[2]

Most importantly, Nares perfectly captured the heterogeneous use that Early-Modern actors made of the *dictum*. On the one hand, Scripture and faith were frequently referred to as 'noses of wax' between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries. The phrase occurs in polemical writings, both Protestant and Catholic, as well as in poems of the time[3]. On the other hand, the metaphor knew a variety of applications, for it surfaces in Early-Modern texts dealing with law, history and philosophy. Although Johann Heinrich Alsted wrote in his *Encyclopaedia* (1630, 4:1412) that "leges (…) ne sint plumbea regula et nasus cereus", many of his contemporaries held (or, at least, discussed) the opposite view[4]. In the second volume of his *Del Mercurio, Overo Historia De' correnti tempi* (1647), the historian Vittorio Siri reports an excerpt of an epistolary exchange

[1] To my knowledge, Singer (1999, 414-15) provides the most comprehensive and accurate historical survey of the use of this phrase in the Middle Ages and the Early-Modern period. See also Bensley 1916. The metaphor is attested in some dictionaries from the seventeenth century: see Howell 1660, Entry: 'Nose'; Coles 1679, Section: 'NON-NOT'). There is another variant of the *dictum* that is found especially in French dictionaries from the eighteenth century: "Nos péres ont dit, un *nez de cire*, pour exprimer un nez bien formé" (Richelet 1732, 1:337). See also Le Roux 1735, 138.

[2] On Nares' biography and activity as a lexicographer, see Wroth 1894.

[3] On the expression 'nose of wax' in Early-Modern religious controversies, see section 2 below. I analyze more extensively some passages from religious polemical literature in paragraph 2. In his *Epigrammatum* (Owen 1609, bk. 1, ep. no. 258), John Owen included a short poem entitled "Nasus Cereus": "Promittit nobis aliquid sacra pagina? nostrum | Protinus hoc certa credimus esse fide. | Exigit à nobis aliquid sacra littera? Durus | Sub nostram Sermo non cadit iste fidem". In a translation of 1677: "A Nose of Wax. Do sacred Scripture promise good unt'us? | Our faith believes it, soon is credulous. | Do they require our duty? Then, o then | 'Tis *durus sermo*, difficult for men" (Owen 1677). On Owen's activity and reputation as an epigrammatist, see Martyn 1979; Harries 2004; Manuwald 2020.

[4] It is interesting to note that this view was also reported by Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo in his *Trattato dell'arte de la pittura* (Lomazzo 1584, 132): "Ma i moderni, più argutamente, la figurano co'l naso di cera, perciò che si trahe facilmente in qual parte più si vuole, et da lei non nascono più opera ferme, et sode, ma storte inchinate, et accommodate a gl'affetti, et voglie altrui" . On the metaphor as applied to law, see also Mukherji 2006, 236.

dated December 1642 between two northern Italian monks. Here, the Princes of Savoy are said not to have 'the nose like wax' (*il naso di cera*), meaning that Spain could not deceive the House of Savoy in the complex diplomatic scenario that was opening up at the end of Savoyard civil war[1].

Early-Modern philosophy had its 'noses of wax' as well. The metaphor appears in many philosophical essays of the time, as well as in orations and treatises on education that dealt with philosophy as an institutionalized subject. In each of these texts the image retains the same figurative meaning seen in Nares' definition of 1822 and in other Early-Modern examples. To argue that a philosophical theory has 'a nose of wax' is to say that it can be (or it has been) read in multiple ways and, thus, advanced in favor of any philosophical argument or position. In this sense, the metaphor was employed in many sixteenth- and seventeenth-century works that, in one way or another, dealt with Aristotelian philosophy and its teaching, translating or reshaping.

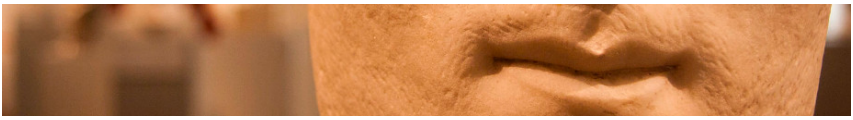
The metaphor has different nuances and varied functions in each of these instances. This last aspect, I argue, is crucial to appreciate in what sense the metaphor of the 'nose of wax' was used by Early-Modern actors to identify and variously describe knowledge change in philosophy. It is essential to focus on the following points to fully grasp in which way this expression was part of the Early-Modern lexicon of conceptual hybridity. On what basis have certain philosophical 'authorities' and theories been labeled as 'noses of wax'? By whom? And with what purpose in mind?

I will develop these points in the next section. Drawing on insights from sixteenth-century religious disputes, I will show that the same 'wax nose' metaphor was 'very mutable', as it could serve different denominational ideologies. I will suggest that this was also the case of philosophy. Here the image was adapted to attack some approaches to philosophical knowledge as specious, spurious and harmful, and, in contrast with the latter, to legitimate other attitudes that were instead more virtuous, rigorous and fruitful. In other words, the proverb was not simply used to emphasize that certain philosophers were 'very

[1] "Che dite Padre mio, può esser più chiaro, che Spagnuoli cercano ogni via per fuggire la restitution mentre danno ad interndere di volerla fare; et vogliono nutrir la Guerra mentre dicono di bramar la pace? (…) credendosi, che i Principi di Savoia (…) habbino il naso di cera, ma s'ingannano" (Siri 1647, 1431). On the context of this passage and the relationship between the House of Savoy and Spain, see Ferretti 2014.

mutable and accommodating'. Indeed, it was often meant to suggest that certain actors (e.g., individual philosophers or schools) had exploited this ambiguity to their (despicable) ends. This polemical remark was then intertwined with the other that such an instrumentalization of philosophy had to be contrasted in a definite way—and by specific means.

These observations will open up the underpinning perspective of the paper, which I will explore in the third section based on the analysis of the sources.



2. A metaphor of wax

As I noted in the preceding section, the expression 'nose of wax' was especially common in religious polemical literature between the sixteenth and the seventeenth century. The metaphor appeared in many works of this kind, both Protestant and Catholic. For each side, defining the biblical text a 'nose of wax' was strategic to denounce the opponent's instrumentalization of it[1].

Attacking the "covetousness" and the "darkness of the pope's doctrine", William Tyndale wrote around 1532 that Catholic interpreters "need not to regard the scripture, but to do and say as their Holy Ghost moveth them; and if the scripture be contrary, then make it a nose of wax, and wrest it this way and that way, till it agree" (Tyndale 1849, 103). The Dutch Catholic Albert Pighius used the same image in his *Hierarchiae ecclesiasticae assertio* (Pighius 1538, fol. LXXXr), where he observed that "sunt enim ille [i.e., scripturas] (ut non minus vere quam festive dixit quida[m]) velut nasus cereus, qui se horsum, illorsum, et

[1] As Porter (1964, 155-56) noted "from the 1530's the 'nose of wax' was a favourite image for all sides [i.e., the Protestant and the Roman Catholic one]". For a detailed analysis of this topic in the context of English polemical literature, see Ferguson 2012.

in quam volueris parte[m], trahi, retrahi, fingi[que] facile permittit"[1]. The context of this passage is, however, diametrically opposed than that from Tyndale. Indeed, Pighius moved from the idea that no place in the Scripture is so plain that it does not lend itself to heretical readings. Comparing Scripture to a nose of wax (*nasus cereus*) was for him the necessary premise to affirm the necessity of the Roman Church as the authority to rely on in interpretation and controversies[2].

These examples show that the same metaphor was used according to divergent ideological stances. In other words, it was 'a nose of wax' itself. It is important to notice this aspect because, I argue, it holds for philosophical occurrences of the phrase as well. Different polemical strategies lurk in Early-Modern claims that a philosopher or some philosophical theories have 'a nose of wax'. These claims are intended to denigrate some approaches to philosophy and, in turn, to value a specific set of knowledge resources (e.g., the mastery of ancient languages or a new conception of logic) and ideals (e.g., the reform of the university curriculum or the superiority of traditional Peripatetic thought over new trends) that would 'rectify' the practice of philosophy.

In this sense, it is not a case that the metaphor appears in determined kinds of works. Firstly, there are texts with a marked programmatic character, written by authors who were variously engaged in Early-Modern projects for the reform of the study of philosophy. In the first part of following section, I will analyze the role that the expression *nasus cereus* plays in some passages devoted to Aristotle in the first book (*De causis corruptarum artium*) of Juan Luis Vives' (1492-1540) *De disciplinis* (1531) and in an oration on the notion of 'method' in Aristotle by Johannes Thomas Freig. Vives and Freig were relevant figures in the sixteenth-century European humanistic movement. They both shared the humanistic goal of a reform of the teaching of philosophy in universities and schools. However, they pursued this common objective with different means. A former student

[1] "As some man both truly and merrily said, the scripture is like a nose of wax, that easily suffereth itself to be drawn backward and forward, and to be moulded and fashioned this way and that way, and howsoever ye list" (Jewel 1850, 759). See Porter 1964, 155-56; Ferguson 2012, 993.

[2] "Sed quoniam nullus scripturae locus ita planus est aut apertus, qui ab haereticorum scripturas adulterantiu[m], torquentium, et ad suum sensum deprava[n]tium, vi et iniuria se prorsus vindicet.. (…) Suam illis amussim adhibere oportet (…) illam columna[m], illud firmamentum veritatis, catholicae inq[uam] ecclesie[m] communem sensum et sententiam" (Pighius 1538, fol. LXXXr).

at the University of Paris between 1509 and 1512, Vives became a harsh critic of the scholastic approach to philosophical instruction based on the syllogistic analysis of sentences and the practice of disputation[1]. In his works, he stressed the importance of solid philological training for the study of philosophy, a position in which his acquaintance with many leading humanists of his time (most notably Erasmus), as well as his experience as an editor of classical texts and a lecturer in Greek at the University of Oxford were certainly reflected[2]. On his part, Freig was one of the most enthusiastic advocates of the pedagogical conceptions and methodological tools devised by Petrus Ramus. Freig taught dialectics, moral philosophy and logic at the University of Freiburg between 1570 and 1575; he also directed the gymnasium of Altdorf from 1576[3]. A prolific writer, Freig (1543-1583) authored several textbooks in philosophy and the arts. Ramus' influence on him is clearly visible in these works. Freig presented the subject matter of each philosophical and liberal discipline from its most general to its most particular principles and made copious use of dichotomic tables—both defining features of Ramus' approach. As I will show next, Vives and Freig used the metaphor in exactly the same way, but embedded it in a very different argumentative strategy and ideological context.

The second type of texts is represented by treatises whose authors were either involved in the staunch defense of traditional philosophical knowledge against the advance of alternative viewpoints that challenged its most established assumptions or in the popularization of precisely those views. In this respect, I will focus on the occurrences of the 'nose of wax' image in two works of natural philosophy from the mid-seventeenth century. These are Johannes Phocylides Holwarda's (1618-1651) *Philosophia naturalis, seu Physica vetus-nova* (1651) and Alexander Ross' (1590-1654) *Arcana Microcosmi* (1652). The comparison between ancient and recent views in natural philosophy and medicine is a leitmotiv of both the texts[4]. However, Holwarda and Ross had opposite attitudes in this regard. A fierce opponent of 'new philosophies', Ross aimed at

[1] For a detailed picture of the University of Paris during those years, see Villoslada 1938, 72-92.

[2] Most notably, Vives edited Augustine of Hippo's *De civitate Dei*, behind invitation by Erasmus and within the project of edition of the Father's works by Froben (Deutscher 2003, 411).

[3] On the influence of Ramus on Freig and Freig's academic career, see Stintzing 1878, 341. On Freig's activity as writer of textbooks in philosophical subjects, see Schmitt 1988, 800-801.

[4] On Ross' biography, see Aitken 1897.

'vindicating' the opinions of the ancients in medicine and physiology and, in particular those of Aristotle's and Galen's. Holwarda, who taught philosophy at the University of Franeker between 1639 and 1651 and was a actively engaged in the astronomical debates of his time[1], pursued a quite different task. The *Philosophia naturalis, seu Physica vetus-nova* condensed his attempt to integrate an atomistic view of matter with a Christian framework for natural philosophy, which also retained conceptual elements of Aristotelian derivation. Which function did the metaphor of the 'nose of wax' serve in such dissimilar—but related—contexts? I will explore this question in the second part of the next section.

3. A metaphor for hybridization?

3.1. Purity, corruption, reform

As noted by Deutscher (2003, 412), Vives' *De disciplinis* was "an encyclopaedic survey of the world of learning as it was in [Vives'] own days and a program for its renewal". Indeed, the work opens with a book entitled *De causis corruptarum artium*. Here Vives develops a diagnosis of what he considered the causes determining the corrupted state of liberal instruction in the sixteenth century.

Scholars have suggested that Vives' experience as a student at the University of Paris (*Collège de Montaigu*) at the beginning of the sixteenth-century provides an essential background for understanding the *De disciplinis*. In Paris,

[1] On Holwarda's biography and professorship at Franeker, see (Dijkstra 2011, 81-84). The name of Holwarda is particularly linked to the history of the observation of the star *Mira Ceti*. On his contribution to the astronomical sciences in the seventeenth-century, see Dijkstra 2011; Vermij 2011; Schuster 2012, 568-71.

Vives encountered an approach to philosophy that left him dissatisfied[1], for it mostly relied on terminist logic. This discontent found a first, harsh, expression in the invective *Adversus pseudodialecticos* (1520), but Vives' criticisms took a more articulated and mature embodiment in the *De disciplinis*.

Among the causes of the corruption of philosophical education, Vives assigns a prominent role to the lack of philological skills and historical mindset (*imperitia*) shown by university masters of his time in reading and interpreting ancient philosophical sources:

Age vero, quomodo authores ipsos vel intelligu[n]t vel enarra[n]t. Primu[m] nihil pensi habent, q[ui]s sit author, cuius instituti, q[uo] fuerit te[m]pore, qua usus scribe[n]di ratio[n]e. Epicureum, Stoicu[m], Academicu[m] torque[n]t ad placita peripatetici, o[mn]ia deniq[ue] ad ea, qu[a]e sola noru[nt]. (Vives 1531, fol. 20v)[2]

This lack of interest in the linguistic and historical features of ancient texts, Vives comments, fueled distorted interpretations of these sources. As the passage quoted above suggests, scholars were used to twist (*torquent*) Epicurean, Stoic and Academic philosophers into sounding like a Peripatetic one. But textual manipulation proliferated especially over Aristotle's text. Comparing Aristotle to the Scripture, Vives notes:

Sed in sacris literis et in Aristotele pluirma sunt detorta hac de causa q[uo]d sententiolam aliq[ui]s decerptam ad disputatione[m] adfert, qua[m] alter ex tempore interpretetur, nec prioribus nec posterioribus expensis, qu[a]e nec recordaretur, ac ne vidisset q[uid]e[m] unq[uam]. (Vives 1531, fol. 20r)[3]

[1] Vives' professors at the *Collège de Montaigu* were Gaspar Lax (logic and mathematics) and Juan Dullaert (physics). On their teaching methods and influences, see González y González 1987, 143-59. On Vives' polemic against scholastic instruction in philosophy, especially in the *De disciplinis*, see Del Nero 1991, 44-45; 100-101.

[2] "Let us see how they [i.e., the scholastics] understand and explain these authors. For one thing, they have no concern for who the author is, his philosophical school, the period he lived in, or the quality of his writing style. They twist the Epicurean, the Stoic, the Academic philosopher to the views of a peripatetic—at least to the few ones they know".

[3] "Yet there are many distortions in Aristotle and the Scriptures for the reason that, in a disputation, someone brings in a small extracted sentence, which someone else interprets impromptu, without considering what comes before and after in the text, what they would not be able to recall nor, most probably, have ever seen".

This passage introduces a further element of criticism toward scholastic instruction in philosophy. *Imperitia*—and, thus, misinterpretation—thrived in academic disputations. Interpretive distortions (*plurima detorta*) were generated, accumulated, and stratified in disputations, for disputants typically extracted individual sentences (*sententiolae*) from Aristotle's works and discussed them without regard (and even knowledge) of their textual surroundings.

This last remark is fundamental, for it confers a moral tinge to Vives' analysis and unfolds a political vein in his discourse. In this sense, Vives claims that the lack of philological expertise by university professors of philosophy was not as pernicious in itself as combined with the hubris (*arrogantia*) and the impudence (*impudentia*) that they showed in advancing interpretations:

Sed fortassis no[n] adeo nocuisset imperitia, ni fuisset cu[m] arrogantia ex impude[n]tia co[n]iucta, na[m] cessisent indocti melioribus, aut verecu[n]de uti[que] tradidissent, q[uae] sentieba[n]t. At vero arroga[n]tia audacia[m] et impudentia[m] co[n]firmavit. (Vives 1531, fol. 2or)[1]

Vives recognizes that Aristotle was 'obscure' (*obscurus*), that is, a difficult author to read and properly understand[2]. Nonetheless, Aristotle's obscurity had not damaged liberal instruction as much as the conceit of his interpreters. The ignorance and vanity of the scholastics—such as those Vives met as a student in Paris—were the determining factors in the decline of philosophical education:

Sed ut Aristotelis obscuritas multu[m] nocuit artibus, sic horum in Aristotelem interpretations artes o[mn]es perverterunt. No[n] potueru[n]t recte Aristo[telem] exponere,

[1] "However, ignorance perhaps would not have damaged [the arts] so much if it had not been combined with the arrogance stemming from impudence; then the unlearned scholars would have given their way to those more prepared or would at least have expressed their thoughts more cautiously. In fact, arrogance reinforced boldness and impudence".

[2] According to Vives, Aristotle's 'obscurity' stemmed in part from the difficulty of Greek language and of Aristotle's own style, but it had also been heightened by fortuitous circumstances related to the transmission and manipulation of his texts: "Dixi quanta est eius et ex sententiis, ex verbis, ex tota diction[n]e in gr[a]eca quoq[ue] lingua obscuritas, cui alia accessit fortuitaq[ue]" (Vives 1531, fol. 21v). See also Vives 1531, fols 8r, 9. The concept of 'obscurity' has a long tradition in rhetoric and philology. The history of this notion is intertwined with debates on 'styles' in rhetoric and with the emergence of several philological, exegetical and pedagogical practices. On the origins of this notion and its uses, especially in ancient philology, see Sluiter 2016; Gasti 2018. On Early-Modern humanistic diagnoses of 'obscurity in Aristotle's texts, see Roelli 2021, 294-95.

et h[a]ec ipsa difficultas temeritate[m] atq[ue] impude[n]tia[m] exacuebat, ut ta[n]to magis auderet q[ui]sq[ue] pro int[er]p[re]tame[n]to adferre, q[ui]cq[ui]d in me[n]te[m] venisset, q[uo] minus refelli ac co[n]futari posset int[er] tantas tenebras. (Vives 1531, fol. 2or)[1]

In a way, Vives remarks, the difficulty (*difficultas*) of explaining Aristotle correctly (*recte exponere*) was a sort of advantage for the scholastics. In the shadow of so much obscurity (*inter tantas tenebras*), they could easily advance whatever interpretation they could think of (*quicquid in mentem venisset*), with no real concern about being disproved. In other words, scholastics exploited Aristotle's obscurity to their ends. The latter point becomes predominant in the following passage, where the image of Aristotle's 'nose of wax' also appears:

Quid potera[n]t in his dicere homines omnium ignari, praeterq[uam] eorum quae ipsi sibi finxerunt. Necesse erat eos, quod in alijs fecerant, hic quoq[ue] comminisci aliquid et fingere. Et tamen hac difficultate ipsi abusi sunt ad suum commodum, ut minus deprehendi possent, quae prave contorsissent, unde magnus accessit unicuiq[ue] scholae ac sectae favor tanq[uam] ab se Aristoteles staret, tractus ab expositore, quo nunq[uam] se Arisoteles ve[n]turum potuit suspicari. Ut etiam vulgo inter eos no[n] omnino, ut solent, inscite Aristoteles dicatur habere nasum cereum, quem quilibet quo velit, flectat pro libito (Vives 1531, fol. 21v).[2]

Here Vives' attack on scholastic manipulation of Aristotelian texts reaches its peak of clarity and gravity. Criticism on the lack of philological erudition

[1] "But just as Aristotle's obscurity caused much damage to the arts, those men's interpretations of Aristotle have completely perverted them. They were not able to expound Aristotle correctly, and this same difficulty excited their rashness and impudence, so that anybody dared the more to advance whatever he had in mind through interpretation, the less he could have been disproven or refuted within so much darkness". On this passage see also Roelli 2021, 292-93.

[2] "What could such ignorant men say about these passages [i.e., those in which Aristotle quotes poets, orators, historians, proverbs and common sayings] except what they fabricated by themselves? It was inevitable that they imagined and fabricated here something that they made up somewhere else. And yet they exploited this difficulty for their own advantage, so that what they had distorted might be less noticed, whereby the favor of each school and sect grew as much as if Aristotle belonged to it, drawn as he was by the commentator, where he [i.e., Aristotle] himself could never have imagined to end up. So much so that it was common among them to say—and this not at all in an ignorant way, as they usually do—that 'Aristotle has a nose of wax', which anyone molds as he pleases". On this passage, see Margolin 1976.

and the format of academic disputation have now given way to a harsh moral judgment of the scholastics' conduct as interpreters. Scholastics are more than unlearned (*omnium ignari*). They exploit (*abusi sunt*) Aristotle's obscurity to hide their vicious interpretations (*prave contorsissent*) and, by affirming the consonance between their theses and Aristotle's, to attract new followers and students.[1]

It is important to note that this image of the scholastics as unscrupulous interpreters is opposed to that of Aristotle as a philosopher yet difficult, but still possessing an authentic sense to be grasped through a learned and honest exegetical effort. The linguistic choices in this passage are a clear indication of this aspect, as Vives uses words that indicate fabrication, distortion and manipulation (i.e., *comminiscere*, *fingere*, *contorquere*, *commodum*, *trahere*).[2] The claim that scholastic interpreters attributed to Aristotle theses that he could never have even imagined (*tractus quo nunquam venturum potuit suspicare*) is also significant in this respect. Vives is distinguishing between a 'pure' and a 'corrupted' Aristotle or, at least, he is pointing at a degenerate approach to philosophy as opposed to a virtous one. If Parisian scholars embodied of the former, ancient editors and commentators of Aristotle as well as sixteenth-century humanists represented the latter.[3]

[1] In his *Philosophia libera* Isaac Cardoso also links Aristotle's difficult style and the image of the 'nose of wax'. Unlike Vives, Cardoso does not emphasize interpretive distortions as much as the numbing and alienating quality of Aristotle's philosophy. On this point Cardoso follows a view expressed by Simplicius in his commentary to Aristotle's *Categories* (see note no. 34): "Res etenim gravissimas tractavit obscurissime Hipocratica brevitate, et Heracliti obscuritate, conciso stilo, presso, et ambiguo scripsit, ut tanquam nasus cereus in quancumque partem verti possit: cumque illi non satis constaret veritatis cognitio (…) et provido ingenio sententiam suam verborum perplexitate data opera involvebant, unde illum comparant sepiae pisci, quae effuse atramento seu humore nigrificante ne capiatur, piscatores illudit, et obtenebrat. Et quemadmodum alij sapientes hyeroglificis, alij parabolis sapientiam velabant, ne philosophiae misteria vulgo, et imperitia multitudini in contemptum venirent, cum hoc institutum Aristoteli non displicuisset, alia via, verborum nempe obscuritate, et ambiguo sensu propria caligine offundit" (Cardoso 1673, fol. a6v) .

[2] As in preceding passages he had employed formulas that emphasized the necessity of a correct explanation of Aristotle's text (e.g., *recte exponere*).

[3] "Tyranno grammaticus et Andronicus Livius q[ui] libros illius, ut dixi, distinxerunt, et evulgarunt, tum Alexander primus Aristotelis interpres, Themistius, Boethius, Ioa[n]nes gra[m]maticus et alij multa se in Aristotele no[n] assequi verecunde sunt, p[ro]fessi, homines graeci et gr[a]ece peritissimi diutissime in illius philosophi libris cum magna diligentia atq[ue] studio versati. Isti vero

The metaphor of 'Aristotle's nose of wax' suited this linguistic and rhetorical strategy. Insisting on a lexicon that emphasized hermeneutical flexibility, Vives turns scholastic idiom against scholastics themselves. The very fact that the saying 'Aristotle has a nose of wax' was common among scholastics and that they intended it ironically (*non omnino inscite*), namely with full awareness of their manipulations of Aristotle's text, provides evidence of their unscrupulousness as scholars. As Vives put it, unscrupulous teachers attracted unscrupulous students (or no students at all). It was by grounding instruction on historical and linguistic expertise (*peritia*) that the most brilliant minds, who only seek *peritia*, could be brought back to the study of liberal disciplines.[1]

It is now intriguing to note that this same passage on Aristotle's 'nose of wax' by Vives appears—with almost no substantial variations—in an oration by Freig. The oration, entitled *Prooemium Ethicum*, was possibly delivered by Freig as an introduction to his lectures on moral philosophy at the University of Freiburg around 1571[2]. It is divided in two parts: the first focuses on the structure of Aristotle's corpus and its historical transmission, the second deals with "Aristotle's

nec latini nec gr[a]eci primo Aristotelis intuitu fortiter asserverant eu[m] esse illius sensum, qui illis primus in mente[m] venerit, imo vero in buccam". Note the irony by which Vives describes scholastics as interpreters: they do not affirm the first *sensum* that comes to their mind, but to their mouth (*imo vero in buccam*). The expression appears in the edition of 1508 of Erasmus' *Adagia* (see Erasmus 1508, fol. 60r, *Chilias prima*, CCCCLXX: *Quicquid in Buccam venerit*). Among Aristotle's editors, Vives mentions Andronicus of Rhodes (fl. first century CE) and Tyrannion of Amisus (fl. first century CE). Although this passage says "Andronicus Livius", Vives does not refer to the poet Lucius Livius Andronicus (fl. third century CE), but to Andronicus of Rhodes. This is also confirmed by a preceding passage in the text (which Vives refers to with *ut dixi*): "de Appellico[n]e dictator Sylla emit, et Tira[n]nionem adhibuit gra[m]maticu[m], qui voluminal redigeret. (…) Andronicus Rhodius evulgavit libros" (Vives 1531, fol. 9v). Here Vives follows an account of the history of Aristotle's books provided by Strabo (see Grayeff 1956).

[1] "(…) et earum possessionem cesserunt ingenijs cu[m] artibus congruentibus, ut similes habent labra lactucas". "Similes haberent labra lactucas" is another expression that appears in the *Adagia*, (Erasmus 1508, fol. 108v, *Chilias prima*, XMLXI: *Similes habent labra lactucas*).

[2] The oration is found in a collection of letters and oration of Julius Caesar Scaliger, edited by the Franciscus Dousa. In the frontispiece, Freig's oration are mentioned as "Friburgi Brisgoiae habitae, nonquam antea editae". Freig obtained the chair of moral philosophy at Freiburg in 1571: "Im Herbste 1570 war F. nach Freiburg zurückgekehrt, zunächst als außerordentlicher Professor der niedern Dialectik und Politik, 1571 hatte er die Professur der Ethik, 1573 auch die des Organon erhalten" (Stintzing 1878, 341). The oration concludes as follows: "Atque hac ingenuitate ad Ethicos eius [i.e., Aristotelis] libros cognoscendos et retexendos accedeamus" (Freig 1603, 505).

obscurity and method" (*eius obscuritate et Methodo*)[1]. The concept of 'method' was central to Freig and decisively shaped his attitude towards Aristotle. In his textbook on ethics, the *Quaestiones Logicae et Ethicae* (1574), Freig set forth the core principles of Aristotelian ethics according to the Ramist method of a chain of propositions ordered from the most to less general one[2]. In this sense, the *Prooemium Ethicum* provides a background—and, most importantly, a *rationale*—for such a reshaping. Like Vives, Freig returns on the topic of Aristotle's obscurity:

> Sed demus Aristotelem esse obscurum, hoc enim ipsum nonego, ob hanc tamen causam, ut ignaros et rudes à se reiiceret[3], obscurum esse nego. Quid enim ille dici voluit apertius, quam quae ad universoru[m] utilitatem praeciperet, tum de Natura, tum de moribus? Quae igitur obscuritatis eius causa est? Non minima in ipsis interpretibus est, qui *cu[m] non possent recte Aristotelem exponere, haec ipsa difficultas temeritatem atque impudentiam exacuit, ut tanto magis ausus sit quisque, pro Interpretatione adferre quicquid in mentem venisset, quo minus refelli ac confutari posset inter tantas tenebras.* (Freig 1603, 494-95)[4]

Again, a not insignificant (*non minima*) cause of Aristotle's obscurity is to be found in his interpreters. In arguing in favor of this view, Freig reports almost literally the text of Vives' invective against scholastics in *De causis corruptarum artium*[5]. The reproduction of Vives' text is quite extensive and includes also the passage on Aristotle's 'nose of wax'. In this respect, Freig adds only a German translation of the *dictum* to Vives original words:

[1] "Quod ergo ad parte[m] attinet, duo nobzois proposita erunt: Unu[m] de Aristotelis Libris et eoru[m] censura: alteru[m] de eius obscuritate et Methodo" (Freig 1603, 484).

[2] See Freig 1574. For Freig's activity within the context of the spread of Ramism in German reformed academies in the late sixteenth century, see Hotson 2007, 101-26.

[3] Here Freig refers to a view expressed by Simplicius of Cilicia in his commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*. See Simplicius 1907, 6, 24-32; transl. in 1990, 13.

[4] My emphasis. "But let us also say that Aristotle is obscure. Indeed, I do not deny this, but that he was obscure to keep the unlearned and rude away from himself. In fact, what did he demand to be expressed more clearly than the things of the utmost and most general importance concerning nature and human behavior? What is, then, the cause of his obscurity? A not insignificant one is to be found in his interpreters". On the remaining part of the passage, see note no. 26.

[5] The whole section between "No[n] potueru[n]t recte Aristo[telem] exponere" and "ad detortissimas ac depravatiss[imas] traduci artes ac disciplinas" (Vives 1531, fols 20r–21v).

(…) ut iam etium vulgo inter eos non omnino inscite Aristoteles dicatur habere *Nasum cereum: Ein wechsen Nasen*: quem si quilibet, quo velit, flectat pro libito. (Freig 1603, 495-96)[1]

Freig's attack on scholastics and their misinterpretation of Aristotle ultimately takes a different turn from Vives'. As Vives' words again give way to Freig's own voice, he observes that Aristotle's obscurity also has a more prominent cause (*praecipua causa*) than the hubris and lack of erudition by the interpreters. The principal source of obscurity in Aristotle is scholastics' ignorance of what Freig defines the "Aristotelian Method" (*ignoratione Aristotelicae Methodi*):

Sed et si non minima caussa, ut dixi, huius obscuritatis à nobis in interpretes collata est, et in malam conversionem, ignorantiamq[ue] reru[m]; praecipua tamen causa obscuritatis in ignoratione Aristotelicae Methodi: Enimvero miserabile dictu et auditu est, quam imperita Methodorum multitudine hactenus Scholae omnes referta fuerint. Hic error interpretum Aristotelis, Graecorum Latinorumque perpetuus fuit, et eorum deinde hominum, qui tales Interpretes sunt secuti, ut scilicet tres Methodos artium statuerent, Definitionem, Synthesin et Analysin. (Freig 1603, 497-98)[2]

In this passage Freig's polemical objective assumes a more defined outline. He is polemicizing against approaches to 'method' that were alternative to the Ramist one, such as those devised by Jakob Schegk and Giacomo Zabarella[3]. As Freig claims immediately after, there is only one "legitimate and true method" (*unicam legitimam veramque Methodum*), namely that of "descending from general to particular [principles]" (*à Generalibus ad specialia descendimus*)[4]. That this "Methodus universalis" is the one used and prescribed by Aristotle himself,

[1] See above.

[2] "But although, as I said earlier, we ascribe to interpreters a not insignificant cause of his [i.e., Aristotle's] obscurity, as to poor translations and ignorance on the subject; we attribute, however, a more prominent cause to the ignorance of the Aristotelian method. Indeed, it is a miserable thing to say or hear, that all the schools so far have accumulated such a clumsy variety of methods. This error was perpetuated by Greek and Latin interpreters of Aristotle, and, later, by those who came after, as they devised three methods for the arts: Definition, Synthesis and Analysis".

[3] See Gilbert 1963, 145-79; Vasoli 2011.

[4] "At illam unicam Methodum, qua in docendo à Generalibus ad specialia descendimus, legitimam veramque Methodum dicimus" (Freig 1603, 498).

Freig adds, is manifest from many places in his major works[1]. This evidence is fundamental. On the one hand, it proves Freig's rivals unquestionably wrong. On the other hand, it provides the ground for Freig's (Ramist, but now also genuinely Aristotelian) reform of 'method'. In this sense, Freig concludes his oration with a series of admonitions and exhortations to the audience which clearly reflect this two levels in his discourse:

Tollamus ergo Scholastica tot inanium Methodorum somniata et inexplorata commenta, quae è Scholasticis Commentariis et dictatis deducta sunt, è veris et excellentibus exemplis non observata sunt. (…) Philosophicam naturam fabulis Scholasticis invictam retineamus, credamusque collocandarum artium, cum partes earum omnes inventae et iudicatae fuerint, à generalibus ad specialibus unicam Methodum esse, easque à fallacium mendaciumque Interpretum ignorantia calumniaque vindicemus. Aristotelis Interpretes, varias et diversas Methodos nugatoriis somniis confinxerunt. Aristotelis igitur veram doctrinam à Scholastica fallacium mendaciumque interpretum inertia vindicemus. Unicam Denique et Aristoteleam ab universalibus et generalibus, ad singularia specialiaq[ue] Methodum (…) teneamus. (Freig 1603, 503-4)[2]

Here Freig draws a clear opposition between "the various and dissimilar methods" (*varias et diversas Methodos*) that the scholastics "fabricated" (*confinxerunt*) in their elucubrations (*nugatoriis somniis*) and the "true doctrine of Aristotle" (*Aristotelis veram doctrinam*). The former should be dismissed (*tollamus*). Genuine philosophy, instead, (*philosophicam naturam*) should be defended (*invicta retineamus*) from such fabrication and eventually restored (*vindicamus*).

[1] "Ergo universalis Methodi testimonia Aristotelea nobis adhuc fuerunt è Logica, Ethica, Physica" (Freig 1603, 500; see also pp. 499).

[2] "So let us get rid of the many scholastic dreamy and unexplored inventions of useless methods, which can be extracted from scholastic commentaries and lectures, [but] are not found in [those] genuine and excellent examples. Let us preserve genuine philosophy from Scholastic fantasies and hold that the method according to which the arts must be expounded is only one, namely from general to specific [principles], and let us liberate the arts from the ignorance and the subterfuges of such fraudulent and mendacious interpreters. Aristotle's interpreters have imagined various and dissimilar methods in their frivolous dreams. Let us liberate, then, the true doctrine of Aristotle from the ignorance of such fraudulent and mendacious interpreters [and] retain the only and Aristotelian method from general to individual and specific principles".

As in the case of Vives, Freig's discourse revolves around three central elements: an allegedly 'pure' or 'genuine' sense of Aristotle's philosophy, the issue of its manipulation and distortion by scholastic interpreters and the attempt to restore that purity by means of an educational reform. In this triangulation, therefore, we see some aspects of how Early-Modern actors described, identified, and conceptualized dynamics of hybridization in Early-Modern Aristotelianism.

3.2. Tradition and new trends

Early-Modern discussions relevant to the perspective of conceptual hybridization can also be found in the clash between traditional knowledge and new (or renewed) philosophical frameworks. These attitudes are clearly displayed in Holwarda's *Philosophia naturalis, seu Physica vetus-nova* (1651) and Ross' *Arcana microcosmi* (1652), two texts that exhibit different attitudes toward Aristotelianism and its relationship with emerging perspectives in seventeenth-century natural philosophy.

As I anticipated earlier, the *Philosophia naturalis, seu Physica vetus-nova* embodies Holwarda's attempt to integrate a particularistic view of matter into a conceptual framework that maintained both Aristotelian elements, such as essential forms, and a firm theological orientation. This complex objective leads Holwarda to variously engage with Aristotle's natural philosophy and its historical interpretations to set forth and articulate his own views. One example of this attitude can be found in the seventh chapter of the second part of the work, dealing with sublunar physics (*Physica mundana*). In this chapter Holwarda addresses the issue of the duration of the cosmos (*Mundi duratio*). The aim is to exclude any possibility of harmonization (or hybridization) between Aristotle's

principle of the eternity of the world and a creationist perspective. This objective is crucial to later show the compatibility between an atomistic conception of matter and a Christian perspective on the origin and the end of the created world. Holwarda introduces Aristotle's view as follows:

illam Mundo tribuerunt multi veteres Philosophi, quorum tamen omnium in impia hac sententia corypheus et antesignanus fuit Aristoteles, qui cum passim per totam Philosophiam et plerasque ipsius partes diffidenter satis suas promit opiniones, et tam saepe obscure, ut nescias, an hoc, vel alterum isti contrarium, asserere voluerit, (unde quoque fit, ut toties cereum induere nasum cogatur, nec ulla sit notabilis in scriptis ipsius quaestio, quae non ab interpretibus, ex ipso pro et contra fere ventilari soleat:) Solam hanc de Mundi aeternitate sententiam tam constanter et mordicus amplexus est, et probare contendit. (Holwarda 1651, 97-98)[1]

Eternal duration, Holwarda observes, was a shared view among ancient philosophers. For his part, Aristotle was undoubtedly the most prominent and leading proponent (*corypheus et antesignanus*) of this impious thesis (*impia sententia*). He defended this view repeatedly and tenaciously. Yet as they saying goes, Holwarda adds, Aristotle is often forced by his interpreters to wear 'a nose of wax' (*cereum induere nasum cogatur*). He expressed his views in such an hesitant way (*diffidenter satis*) that it is often difficult to understand the real intention behind his words. This ambiguity led interpreters to take different and opposing positions on nearly any question emerging within Aristotle's writings, including those issues in which Aristotle pronounces himself the most clearly, as the question whether the cosmos is eternal or not. In this sense, Holwarda observes that some commentators tried to disguise (*palliare nituntur*) Aristotle's impiety through subtle interpretations of his theses on the eternity of the world rather than rejecting (*detergere*) the latter:

[1] "many ancient philosophers attributed that [i.e., the eternal duration] to the world, but the leading figure among them to hold this thesis was Aristotle. Aristotle expressed his views in philosophy as a whole and in many parts of the latter in such an hesitant way, and often so much obscurely that one cannot figure out whether he wanted to assert that [what he actually says] or its contrary (whence it also derives the fact that he is often forced to wear a nose of wax, that is, there is no question in his major works, which interpreters do not usually bring up against either against him or in his favor). Nonetheless, he defended and sought to prove the only thesis of the eternity of the world with so much perseverance and tenacity".

An vero sequacibus ipsius, qui cum facile isthaec in Aristotele vitia detergere possent, ab ejus tamen ore aut scriptis toti pendere malunt, inque ejus jurare verba (…). Quin, quod et majus est, hanc (…) aeternitatis Mundi sententiam palliare nituntur, et eum rei veritate conciliare, atque ut nonnullus istorum inquit (…) jam facile pervident, Aristotelem hoc velle, non quod Mundus simpliciter et absolute sit aeternus, sed tantum secundum quid, quatenus nempe non habuit principium generationis, sed est ἀγένητος, ut rectissime, si Diis placet, ab Aristotele dicitur, ex Materia nempe praexistente nulla generatus. (Holwarda 1651, 98-99)[1]

These passages are particularly interesting as far as they show how Holwarda gives a different nuance and function to the metaphor of Aristotle's *nasus cereus* than Vives or Freig. Aristotle's ambiguity is here emphasized to criticize the ineptitude of certain interpreters, or, better said, their disposition to force Aristotle's text instead of rejecting it when the latter is *clearly* incompatible with a Christian perspective in natural philosophy. As the following chapters in *Philosophia naturalis, seu Physica vetus-nova*, dealing with the final dissolution of the world, make clear, the rejection of the Aristotelian thesis of the eternity of the world (and, thus, of Aristotle's conception of matter and its generation) was not only consistent with Christian faith. It was also functional to the mixture of the latter and the atomistic framework devised by Holwarda in the first section of the book.

As Parker (2016, 695) noted, the twofold project of the *Arcana Microcosmi* is clearly set forth by Ross in the very title of the work. The treatise stages "an Anatomical Duel between Aristotle and Galen", that is, a comparison between Aristotelian and Galenic frameworks in the explanation of anatomical facts. However, it also contains "a Refutation of Doctor *Brown*'s Vulgar Errors, The Lord Bacon's Natural History and Doctor *Harvy*'s Book De Generatione, *Comenius*, and Others". This formulation clarifies Ross' polemical targets and encapsulates the intellectual stance that permeates the work. Ross aims at de-

[1] "Indeed, everyone among his [i.e., Aristotle's] followers, although they could have easily rejected those flawed views in his works, preferred to hang on his every word and writings, and to swear by what he had said. (…) they tried to disguise this thesis of the eternity of the world, and to make it adhere to the truth, and many of them even maintained that it is easily understood that Aristotle did not intend that the world is simply and absolutely eternal, but that it is so only insofar as it does not have a principle of generation and it is ἀγένητος, as Aristotle himself (if it pleases God) correctly said, that the world is not generated from pre-existing matter".

fending the validity of traditional philosophy as a means for the advancement of knowledge against 'new philosophies'. This attitude is most clearly seen in *The Epistle Dedicatory* to Edward Watson the second Baron of Rockingham:

> Likewise you may see how much the Dictates and Opinions of the ancient Champions of Learning, are slighted and misconstrued by some modern Innovators; whereas we are but children in understanding, and ought to be directed by those Fathers of Knowledge (…). I deny not but we may and ought to strive for further knowledge, which we shall hardly reach without their supportation, I dissuade no men from inventing new; but I would not have him therefore to forget the old, not to lose the substance whilst he catches the shadow. (Ross 1652, fol. A3v)

The last admonition of "not to lose the substance" hints at one of the reasons Ross argues for the superiority of the 'old' natural philosophy over the 'new' one. According to him, the former has a more stable method and greater terminological precision and poignancy than the latter. This motive emerges especially in Ross' evaluation of Bacon's *Sylva Sylvarum*[1]. Bacon's new philosophy, Ross observes ironically, "it is indeed [a *Wood*], for here a young Scholar may quickly lose himselfe" (Ross 1652, 263). In Ross's view, this confusion characterizes all of the emerging approaches to natural knowledge and arises from the hubris shown by Bacon and his peers.

On the one hand, the 'new Philosophers' abandoned the method established by Aristotle for the study of nature. In this sense, Ross attacks them for having dismissed the categorial structure of Aristotelian science:

> These new Philosophers, as if they were wiser than all the world besides, have like fantastick travellers, left the old beaten and known path, to find out wayes unknown, crooked and unpassable, and have reduced his [i.e., Aristotle's] comely order into the old Chaos, jumbling the Predicaments so together, that their Scholars can never find out the true genus of things. (Ross 1652, 264)

[1] It may be worthy to note that the dedicatory letter and this section on Bacon are also connected by the occurrence of the same similitude that compares philosophy to wine. The passage from *The Epistle Dedicatory* quoted above continues as follows: "Women and Children love new wine, because pleasant to the palat; but wise men chuse the old, because wholsomer for the stomach" (Ross 1652, fol. A3v). In the passage against Bacon, we read: "I find that Phylosophy is like Wine, the older the better to the taste; new Wine is pleasant, and so are new conscripts to the mind: but to the intelligent man oldest is wholsomest and lesse flatulent" (Ross 1652, 263).

On the other hand, the 'Innovators' reshaped (for the worse) the traditional terminology and conceptual equipment of natural philosophy, transforming (*metamorphosed*) Aristotelian distinctions into new-fangled, vapid, and vague notions, such as that of 'spirit':

> They have found out new terms, which are neither so proper nor significant as the former. They have metamorphosed the elementary qualities both first and second, into spirits, so that now this word, like a nose of wax, serves them for all shapes. (Ross 1652, 263-64)[1]

Interestingly, Ross applies here the metaphor of the 'nose of wax' not to Aristotle, but to the (Baconian) concept of 'spirit'[2]. Within this perspective, ambiguity and pliability are not intrinsic features of Aristotle's philosophy, but of the products of the metamorphosis that Aristotelianism experienced in the hands of the 'new Philosophers'. Likewise, the figure of the unskilled and malicious (or inept) interpreter, so present in the authors mentioned so far, has left its place to the image of the philosopher who believes himself to be "wiser than all the world besides".

4. Conclusion

In this study, I have tried to illuminate some specific features of the Early-Modern discourse on the transformation of Aristotelianism. Understanding which practices and epistemic attitudes Early-Modern actors identified as vicious and which as virtuous in the time in which this process was unfolding

[1] As Ross continues: "For example, they tell us, that the qualities, to wit, of heat, cold, etc., are spirits, consequently substances; so somtimes again they will have these to be qualities, and sometimetimes to be motions and actions" (Ross 1652, 264).

[2] On the concept of 'spirit', in Bacon's *Sylva sylvarum*, see Anderson 2016; Jalobeanu 2018.

is essential, I argue, to fully appreciate and qualify such knowledge transformations as episodes of 'hybridization'. Burke often stressed the 'unconscious' nature of cultural hybridization. According to this view, "mixtures were not always conscious" (Burke 2016, 162), for historical actors unconsciously absorbed cultural elements which they later integrated in their conceptual syntheses[1]. It is important, however, to reconcile this view with a study of how, so to speak, 'mixtures were (sometimes) detected'. Hybridization in the history of thought is a process that has a relevant sociological component. As in the case of Early-Modern Aristotelianism, it involves authoritative texts and strong interests in the development of learning institutions (as for Vives and Freig).

The image of the 'nose of wax' surfaces in more Early-Modern works dealing with Aristotle's philosophy than those I have analyzed here[2]. Besides, this metaphor is itself only a dowel within this discourse. On the other hand, the passages examined in the preceding pages have brought to light the existence of an intriguing lexicon, mostly made of figurative terms indicating ambiguity, fabrication, and innovation, which undoubtedly deserves a more extensive treatment. Indeed, these linguistic and rhetorical features seem crucial to understand some dynamics of change in Early-Modern knowledge as dynamics of hybridization.

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[1] As Burke argues, this was also the case of humanists: "had often been trained in medieval philosophy, now known as "scholasticism", and that whether they were aware of this or not, this training shaped their 'reception' of ancient thought. [Humanists] could use words, formulations, doctrines from scholastic authors without realizing it" (Burke 2016, 162-63). As I showed in section 2 though, there were also cases in which humanists turned scholastic idioms against the scholastics themselves.

[2] See, for example, Gassendi 1649, 9; Guarini 1665, fol. eij.v.

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