

REVALUATING PHILOSOPHY: CAMPANELLA'S COMMENTARIA AND THE «COLLEGIO BARBERINO PROJECT»

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The Roman years of Tommaso Campanella, from 1626 to 1634, were made possible by the protection and patronage of the pope Urbano VIII Barberini. It is not surprising that one of his largest works of these years were in strict connection with the cultural production of the pope himself: Urbano VIII, Maffeo Barberini, had cultivated poetry from his youth and was a well-versed poet in Latin and a very talented one in Italian. Campanella composed from 1627 to 1631 three series of lengthy *Commentaria* on the *Poemata*, the book of Maffeo's Latin poems, of which in the same 1631 the Vatican typography published an official edition – but the *Poemata* were by more than ten years a real bestseller in Italy and in France.

What (actually) are the *Commentaria*? This complex, full-length bunch of manuscripts kept in the Barberini funds of Biblioteca Vaticana and only partially edited in modern times¹, seldom deserves more than few pages in scholarly monographs on Campanella and is often dismissed as pure flattery or as another strange, slightly delirious fruit of the exalted mind of the prophet-monk, basically cut out from the cultural edifice erected with his main philosophical system.

Indeed, we think that *Commentaria* are not only part of the edifice, but that they were seen by their author – at least in the happy Roman years – as its new grounds, posited to reinforce it and shedding on the complex of the philosophical work a new light: the light of a *system*, and the reassuring clarity of a *pedagogy*. In reason of a powerful masterwork as *Città del Sole*, we are

¹ BOLZONI 1977; FORMICETTI 1983.

accustomed to see Campanella's pedagogy floating in the realm of Utopia and it is difficult to imagine him dealing with the daily tasks of teaching rhetoric, philosophy, manners and morals with the aid of often mortally boring Latin texts, as all teachers in the Seventeenth century did. But with *Commentaria* Campanella climbs down to earth and tries to found a new educational system fitted for the city and the cultural needs of the élite. And when the city is Rome and the élite is the well paid cultural court gathering around pope Urbano VIII Barberini at the culmination of his fortune, every foundation has the character of a total revaluation where languages are rewritten from scratch and reorganized in a design coordinating all knowledges and arts.

The writing of the *Commentaria* and the connected project of a *Collegio Barberino* «di tutti i primi ingegni d'Europa» [“endowed of all the best brains in Europe”] must be read in the framework of Barberini culture, of an all-encompassing “cultural policy” as Rietbergen² calls it. The main features of this policy were its strong humanistic flavour, in the sign of Florence, Maffeo Barberini's native town, and its unperturbed drive for renovation that *de facto* eradicated many symbols and myths of humanism – first of all the one of a restricted circle of elected minds - in the name of a public, theatrical dimension of culture coordinating arts around the great Baroque achievements: spectacular painting, sculpture, architecture and theatre.

Campanella's Roman years were also the ones of the big frescoes of Palazzo Barberini and other visual achievements of the papacy. Starting almost twenty years before (Maffeo not yet a pope) with the Cappella in Sant'Andrea della Valle, whose program was written by Maffeo himself in collaboration with the Jesuit playwright Bernardino Stefonio³, the project culminated in 1629 with the *Divina Sapienza* of Andrea Sacchi, whose complex astrological and

² RIETBERGEN 2006.

³ Bernardino Stefonio was the author of *Crispus*, one of the best-known masterpieces of Baroque Jesuit didactic theatre. *Crispus* underwent a controversy for his too strong spectacular drive and its ambiguous situations, and encountered the defense of another Jesuit, Tarquinio Galluzzi, in *Renovatione dell'antica Tragedia e Difesa del Crispo*, where the real tradition of Greek tragedy was denied to Aristotle and given to Plato. See also SALVARANI 2014.

allegorical program was almost surely authored by Campanella himself⁴, and went on in 1632 with the starting of *Divina Provvidenza* ceiling fresco by Pietro da Cortona, whose program was written by Francesco Bracciolini, the official epic poet of the pope⁵ - with this fresco *pittura di storia* followed epic poetry, that was seen in Campanella's *Commentaria* as source of philosophical truth. (After the Barberini age, in 1654, Cortona took the program for his frescoes on *Storie di Enea* at Doria Pamphilj palace from the humanistic commentaries of Cristoforo Landino, on which we shall come back soon, where the *Aeneid* was given the same philosophical value). And it is very interesting to find in painting this diptych of "sapienza" and "provvidenza" that echoes the keywords of the returning Campanella project for a universal monarchy. In 1624, the well-known composer and theorbo virtuoso Johann Hieronymus Kapsberger set to music Maffeo's *Poemata*, later commented by Campanella, and in 1633 added more music to the new poems written by the pope for the first, "official" edition of 1631.

We could go on with more and more examples, but it is already clear that *Commentaria* are composed in a timespan in which the "Barberini cultural policy" was at its full bloom and that at the core of this policy there were not only the most public, blatant achievements of visual arts and Baroque music and theatre - aimed at instructing the people and all the citizens - but also the more refined, cultivated work of the pope as poet. The Barberini project still lacked a school policy to counteract or assimilate the Jesuit-Aristotelian monopoly in education, well known by Maffeo as a former student of *Collegio Romano*, and persuade not only the crowds but also the clique of intellectuals, somewhere reluctant to adhere to the self-centered culture promoted by the Barberini and to its courageous anti-traditional, *hoggidiana* vein.

⁴ We find very convincing the analysis of the frescoes by LECHNER 1976.

⁵ Francesco Bracciolini (1566-1645), a poet from Tuscany, was well-versed in epic and heroicomic poetry. He is best known for *Lo Scherno degli Dei*, aimed at scorning Pagan mythology, and for *L'Elettione di Papa Urbano VIII*, perhaps the only seventeenth-century epic in which the narrative and allegorical plan alternates with the chronicle of political contemporary facts (inclusive of some controversies on the legitimacy and the procedure of the Pope's election). The poem has been edited by us in tryptich with Maffeo Barberini's *Poesie Toscane* and Hieronymus Kapsberger's music for the *Poemata* (SALVARANI 2004).

Certainly it is not an accident that Urbano VIII's *Poemata*, already published in 1620, in Paris, when Maffeo wasn't yet elected to the Holy See, and again at least seven times between 1623 and 1628 (not to mention the French translations) never had an official, Vatican edition until 1631, the year in which Campanella completed his *Commentaria* and presented them to the pope with a letter that we shall see afterwards and that links explicitly the *Commentaria* with his "Collegio Barberino project". Not even could be an accident that the sumptuous, Vatican edition 1631 – with plates by Bernini and Cortona – is not only a luxuriant *strenna* but also a didactic edition with full metrical apparatus, and that an *editio minor* of the *Poemata*, probably for the use of teachers, was printed at the same time by the Camera Apostolica press⁶. And especially for this edition the pope composed the vast, programmatic elegy *Poësis probis et piis documentis primaevo decori restituenda*, promptly commented by Campanella, in which he explained his poetic principles and gave instructions for poets and scholars.

So it emerges more and more that the 1631 edition was the starting of an ambitious educational project that would have envisaged the adoption of papal poems, with Campanella commentaries, in all schools and colleges in Papal States, and the erection of *Collegio Barberino* as the top level institution, in which the cultural program expounded in *Poemata* and *Commentaria* would be fully put into practice. And as we shall see, this global reform of teaching was based on a full recovery of Humanistic ideal, the centrality of poetry as philosophy. The Aristotelian tradition was, of course, dismissed by Campanella – perhaps beyond the real intentions of the pope – and substituted by a Platonic frame in which poetry as fable was condemned while poetry as a result of the *furor* of the philosopher-prophet was the real and best way to access true knowledge. Seventeenth-century Aristotelianism had from a long time undergo a dangerous transformation from philosophical content to mere intellectual lexicon and jargon, especially in the Jesuit practice of *disputatio* and dialectic exercise⁷, and in this sense Campanella's project aims at reallocating philosophy at the top of the curriculum.

⁶ RIETBERGEN 2006, 113.

⁷ CASALINI 2012.

Indeed, the “Collegio Barberino project” was from the beginning ambitious and, by way of consequence, in potential competition with other *collegia* – mainly the Romano and the Germanico, the great standpoints of Jesuit culture in Rome; while Jesuits could be half-flattered half-feared by the *Collegio Barberino de Propaganda fide*, that borrowed much from their teaching style and curriculum but substituting the collective rule of an Order a centralized rule, not only Jesuits but all the orders (most of all the Dominicans) implied in education through the consolidated *Collegium* model, with its traditional scholastic-aristotelic curriculum differently surrounded by rhetoric or morals, should see the *Collegio Barberino* like a real threat. This is not the place to reconstruct the steps of the progressive misfortune of Campanella at the papal court (partly still uncovered), precipitated by the printing, perhaps in Rome, of a clandestine version of *De fato siderali vitando*, where his astrological and magic practices with the pope were described; an edition prompted, according to Campanella himself and many historians, by a clique of Dominicans (father Ridolfi and father Riccardi, the so-called “padre Mostro”)⁸. It is certain that these sabotage actions occur in coincidence with the permission granted by the pope for the new *Collegio* in 1630⁹, promptly revoked. Campanella writes his *cahier de doléances* in a letter (“Il dì delle Palme 1630”) that we can find in Barberini manuscripts immediately before the letter of presentation of the *Commentaria* to the pope:

[...] Item [il Ridolfi e Padre Mostro] cercano contaminare il Sig. Card. Barberino, che non si pigli informatione contra il tradimento fattomi da loro col Brugiotti a stampar il libro. Il qual non ha però errore, come lei disse; e per che [il Cardinale] non sa la Theologia recondita, e per malignità, credendosi alienar la volontà di V.B. da me servo suo; e far che mai non stampi¹⁰.

The history of Campanella’s misfortune and his repeated requests for his *Collegio*¹¹ are so strongly interwoven that it looks more than probable that the action of Dominicans was acted not only against Campanella as possible *consultor* of the Holy Office, but also against the *Collegio Barberino project*. Domini-

⁸ ERNST 2003, 31-35.

⁹ WALKER 2000 (1958), 208.

¹⁰ BARB. LAT. 2048, c. 38 r. Where possible, texts are checked on BOLZONI 1977.

¹¹ AMABILE 1887, 356-364.

cans were strongly involved in education and their opposition is clearly understandable, while the Jesuits could have chosen, more in their style, to wait for the foundation of the Collegio and then assimilate it with some of their best teachers; or, with their long-exercised political instinct, perhaps they understood that somebody else would have performed the dirty work. Anyway, Campanella did not lose his temper. In 1631, as already said, the official “didactic” publication of *Poemata* was ready, and so was Campanella with his new series of *Commentaria*, including the elegy *Poësis probis et piis documentis primaevò decori restituenda*. He presents the manuscript, accurately copied, to the pope with an autograph letter signed «Zopiro non conosciuto prostrato a’ suoi piedi» and dated 1631:

Santiss.o Padre.

Viene a V.B. il commento della generosa elegia proemiale di V.B. laqual col ristoro della Poesia porta seco il ristoro di tutte le scienze appresso. Ho fatto il resto de’ comenti e si potrebbero stampare, sendomi chiesti da tutte schole e librai e letterati.

[...]

Il Marchese Manso Napolitano vecchio d’età e dottrina, vuol venire a morir in Roma et ajutarmi con sue ricchezze (che non ha figli ne’ parenti) a far il collegio Barberino di tutti primi ingegni d’Europa. Ma senza consenso di V.B. non vuol partire. Suplico mi dia licenza, ch’io li scriva, ch’a V.B. piace, & dir’ al sig.r Card. Ginnetti, che faccia il breve della chiesa di Regnicoli, che m’è già concessa. Da tutte parti d’Europa mi scrivono lodando V.B. in me suo liberato, e desiano questa Academia per ristoro della Religione e delle Scienze. E questa è la via di far caminar i zoppi; conciar prima le gambe: altrimenti son vani i comandamenti che caminin bene: e lascin le stampelle di statisti¹². Così il frumento crescerà senza vedersi come¹³.

We find somewhat hard to believe that so many people from Europe was writing to Campanella and asking for the new *Collegio*, but this letter does not only show his strength in believing in a project that the pope, from his side, was apparently patronizing with the edition of *Poemata* mentioned above. If the sly old fox Giambattista Manso, always able to choose his *protégés* among the best talents of the time – first of all Torquato Tasso, then Giambattista Ma-

¹² The people that follows the mundane suggestions of *Ragion di Stato* and not superior and moral reasons.

¹³ BARB. LAT. 2048, c. 40 r.

rino – had decided to take Campanella's *Collegio Barberino* as his last investment, this means that the project was on the launch pad and with good probabilities of success. This makes the abortion of the project even more surprising, and reinforces the belief that the Dominican sabotage wasn't aimed at the (unlikely) election of the friar as *Consultor*, but at the probable realization of the *Collegio*. Of course, the author imagines for the *Commentaria* all a scholastic life on their own:

In primo luogo il Campanella si mostra molto interessato all'adozione nelle scuole dei *Poëmata* barberiniani accompagnati dai suoi *Commentaria*. Nelle lettere dalla Francia ricorda più volte che richieste in questo senso gli vengono dagli Scolopi, dai Somaschi, dai Gesuiti. Non doveva trattarsi solo di vanterie: sappiamo che in effetti, tra il '31 e il '32, egli viene accolto da Giuseppe Calasanzio nella sua casa di Frascati perché insegni filosofia a un gruppo di chierici scolopi¹⁴.

The relationships between Campanella and Calasanzio would deserve further insights; here we take for granted that there was a correspondence and the teaching experience quoted above, but we think *Commentaria* would not have been used in Calasanzio's *Scuole Pie* themselves, but more as a means of teacher's training, as the expression «chierici scolopi» suggests. Even if they fitted perfectly the pedagogical ideas of the friar, *Scuole Pie* were founded for primary schooling of the lower classes, while the cultural project of the *Poëmata-Commentaria* diptych is clearly thought for the education of an *élite* (Campanella, in the letter quoted, calls the *Collegio* also *Accademia*) and his framework is the Florentine *Accademia Platonica*, reflecting both the anti-Aristotelian views of the friar and the humanistic taste and background of Urbano VIII.

¹⁴ BOLZONI 1988, 116; see also FORMICHETTI 1983, 19-20.

The anti-Aristotelism of the *Commentaria*, and more in general of Campanella's thought and of the whole his pedagogy, doesn't need further demonstration (it is always against Aristotle¹⁵ that Campanella writes his passionate defence of Calasanzio's *Scuole Pie*). The scope of a more in-depth analysis of *Commentaria* is to understand what sort of "Platonic schooling" the author had in mind and how the utopian, shaman-like identity of the *maestro* in *Città del Sole* could find his possible realization in the daily reality of *Collegio*, even in a very selective and sophisticated one.

The choice of poetry as best teaching medium for all subjects, including philosophy, is a well-established Humanist paradigm and is clearly stated in the Letter to the pope: when poetry is good and restored to his native purity, all the sciences are good («laqual col ristoro della Poesia porta seco il ristoro di tutte le scienze appresso»). This paradigm, in the Seventeenth century and particularly in the Italian context, resurfaced in connection with the debate on *poesia honesta* triggered by the success of Giambattista Marino's *Lira* and *Adone*, with all its neo-pagan, Gnostic and materialist subtexts. Of course the façade of the debate focused on more flat themes, more apt to easy propaganda, as the presence of obscenities or the praxis of copying the best turns from other poets¹⁶. Campanella takes for granted that the poetry of the pope shall be honest and void of all obscenities, and that his expression will be original or coming from appropriated Classical sources. He goes right to the heart of the problem: what is the purpose of poetry? The ancient *docere et delectare* was always a good motto but was clearly too general to be the basis of

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ The Jesuits had already come some years before on the stage of the controversy with the treaty *L'huomo di lettere difeso, ed emendato* by Daniello Bartoli (1624). Needless to say, the moralistic statements of Bartoli are *tongue-in-cheek* and clearly supportive of all the new instruments and enchantments of Baroque poetry.

a theory on the educational potential of poetry. For Campanella *fabulae* et *delectatio* were only side effects of a poetry whose aim was knowledge, going back to her mysterious origins: well before Plato, if himself had to drive Homer away from his Republic. He has in mind the idea of *prisca sapientia* flowing from the origins of mankind in an esoteric lineage through Egypt and later Greece.

Unde Aristoteles in fabulis situm esse finem ac substantiam poëseos, coecus coecorum dux, docet; alii in delectatione, sive pura sive impura, ut Catullus, Martialis, Ariostus, recentesque versificatores, quoniam puram desperant; alii poëtam non esse nisi qui mentitur, artem cudentes patris mendaciorum, contendunt.

[...]

Itaque nos, qui in Poëtica nostra hoc carmen, veluti et Plato olim — propterea enim de sua republica Homerum aliosque impietatem ac vitiositatem redolentes expulerat — desiderabamus, quippe qui et alias scientias, iuxta Lateranensis Concilii decreta ac desideria, ad suam originem revocare satagemus, opperientes gavisus valde ad scholarum utilitatem decrevimus explanationem et grammaticalem et philosophicam adiicere, ut et scholares et magistri in quo delectarentur et proficerent in promptu haberent¹⁷.

The Aristotle *magister sapientiae* on which all the educational praxis of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth-century colleges and universities was based, had become *coecus coecorum dux*: not only he is wrong, but also he induces men in error and is literally corrupting them, so being the opposite of an educational author. This could have been stated in the debate about Greek *paideia* in 15th and early 16th century, but in Campanella's years it sounded not less than a revolution.

An educational revolution, also, for other two reasons: the abdication on the absolute value of classics in the name of *gentilismus* - the vice of the "know-it-alls" (*scioli*) of Aristotelism that put the word of the Philosopher over the one

¹⁷ BARB. LAT. 1918, c. 4 r., c. 6 r.-v.

of the Church Fathers – and the necessity to reinterpretate the classics of poetry in order to uncover their hidden truth.

Praeterea non modo gentilismum in poësi fugiendum esse patres nostri docuerunt, unde David, «Narraverunt mihi iniqui fabulationes, sed non ut lex tua, etc. Disperdat Dominus labia dolosa et linguam magniloquam etc.», sed etiam in philosophicis doctrinis, ut Augustinus in 8. de Civit. cap. 9 admonuit, et Clemens Alexandrinus 1. Strom., et Canus 9. de locis et Concilium late ibidem. Quapropter miror unde aristotelismum tam tenaciter contra patrum decreta scioli defendunt. At poëtae non malum id videri suis cationibus fabulosis faciunt, propterea puto purgata poësi omnes scientias suo decori restituendas, ut in nostro prooemio animadvertebamus¹⁸.

This “anti-philological” way to comment the classics was not new. It had an illustrious ancestor in Cristoforo Landino, friend of Ficino and one of the most remarkable intellectuals of *Accademia Platonica*. Landino commented extensively Virgil’s *Aeneid* in his *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, arguing that the real philosophical truth was to be found primarily in epic poetry, but the usual rhetorical and literary analysis were not sufficient to uncover it:

Quod autem petis, id est multo divinius est et magis in obscuro latet et a nullo, quod ego quidem sciam, hactenus sua serie patefactum, quod neque grammaticus neque rhetor noverit, sed sit ex intimis philosophiae arcanis eruendum¹⁹.

The commentator must be initiated in *intimis philosophiae arcanis*, the “Theologia recondita” of which Campanella spoke in one of the letters quoted above, given that philosophy and knowledge of God are the same for a Christian Platonist; a simple *grammaticus* or *rhetor* had no chance to give back to poetry his full potential. This grants the commentator the permission to change the structure of the artwork and intervene on *dispositio* in order to make clearer the contents, as Landino does in commenting Virgil²⁰ and Campanella does in

¹⁸ BARB. LAT. 2048, c. 82 v.

¹⁹ Cristoforo Landino, *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, cit. in KALLENDORF 1983, 524.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 532-533.

commenting Urbano VIII. The order of the *Poemata* is changed and the didactic structure of the commentary is focused on the displaying of hidden meanings rather than in the metric and rhetorical analysis.

Even if the *Commentaria* follow a pattern in which the *Commentarium philosophicum* is reserved to the older students, keeping the younger ones on the more secure paths of *grammatica* (*Prooemium / Distinctio, metrum et numerus* or *Distinctio formalis / Commentum grammaticale ad minores*, with *Constructio / Commentum philosophicum ad maiores*) the close inspection of the texts reveals that to grammar in itself and to proper *constructio* very short place is given. *Commentum grammaticale* is the place where, with quotations from other poets, etymology and paraetymology, the history of every word and the net of meanings around it is displayed, pointing to the research of an inner, original meaning that was the one of Adam's language or *prisca theologia*. And little difference, except in length and degree of difficulty, is indeed between the structure of *Commentum grammaticale* and *Commentum philosophicum*.

What could look like a didactic flaw is the logic consequence of Campanella's vision of meaning as a *continuum* from concepts in their higher sense, their metaphor for the human comprehension of them and the use of poem and *fabula* in order to give order to metaphors and address men to their hidden, real meaning:

Cum enim sensilibus rebus vocabula imponerentur, iuxta passionem obiectorum, sensibus illatam, unde de sensilibus iudicamus, quemadmodum in Physiolog. monuimus. Res quae non sentiebantur, sed cogitatione ac ratione convincebamus extare, mutuatis vocabulis sensilium coepimus nominare. Itaque animam et angelos, et Deum vocavimus spiritum, eo quod instar spiritus, id est venti invisibiliter, et fortiter operatur; intellectus separatos Angelos, id est missos, quia sunt Dei legati, sicut regis, apud nos; amicitiam, necessitudinem, quia instar necessitatis copulat. Alia vero ex effectibus non aequatis nominavimus, ut Deum a τῆου, quasi videntem; mentem rationem, quia ratiocinatur, etc. Igitur theologia primitus vocabula transtulit mutuando illa a sensilibus et haec mutu-

atio dicitur metaphora, quam extendimus etiam de sensilibus ad sensilia, nedum ad intellectualia: sic dicimus pratum ridere, et sagittam volare, quod tamen minus rationabiliter factum est, quam dum ex sensilibus insensilia nominamus.

Mox eadem necessitas peperit fabulam, cum nedum vox, sed significatio quoque sermonis transfertur²¹.

If *necessitas peperit fabulam*, but *fabula* isn't and must not be the ultimate end of poetry, we are right in the cultural tradition of Neoplatonic humanism, where poets – not only the classics, but also Dante and Petrarca, so often quoted by Campanella in *Commentaria* – were seen as the enlightened witnesses of *furor* and greatly praised, but not as artist of the word, but as bearers of the torch of truth. Florence *Studium* is so far the most probable model for Campanella's pedagogical framework: an education based on poetry not for its beauty's sake (beauty to which Jesuit rhetoricians were more inclined) but as the only science able to contain the whole edifice of philosophy, revaluated and revived out of the shackles of the “professional philosophy”, the Scholastic Aristotelism taught in colleges and universities. As Simone Fellina points out,

Con l'intento di contrapporsi all'Argiropulo e più in generale alla riproposizione di una filosofia 'tecnica' e scolastica, Landino decide di leggere quell'anno [1458] le *Tusculanae* di Cicerone, facendosi in tal modo promotore di una filosofia non professionale aperta alle tradizionali istanze della cultura umanistica²².

Given the genuine hate of Campanella for the “professional philosophers” (often assimilated with the “statisti”, or followers of the earthy *Ragion di Stato*), Landino gives here another element to understand the cultural grounds of the *Commentaria*. And following Landino, it is important to focus that Campanella states the superiority of the poet as philosopher taking into consideration that the poet is the pope, that is to say, the top theologian. Be-

²¹ BARB. LAT. 2048, c. 64 r.-v.

²² FELLINA 2012, 204.

ing a true theologian (i.e., cultivated in the *Theologia recondita*) is to be a poet, and being a poet is to be a philosopher, establishing a clear descent line from Hermetic science to the new Christian *sapientia*.

Neque enim alius est magnus verusque poeta quam theologus, quod non solum Aristotelis tanti philosophi auctoritas testimoniumque ostendit, sed ipsorum quoque scripta apertissime docent. Duplex enim theologia est: altera quam priscam vocant, cuius divinus ille vir Mercurius cognomine Trismegistus primus fontem aperuit, altera nostra est, quae non modo verior comprobatur, sed ita verissima, ut neque addi quicquam nec imminui inde possit²³.

Inserting Campanella in this 15th-century lineage – in spite of the great changes in social context and, most of all, in the cultural role of the court in front of the great European monarchies – becomes easier when we consider its continuity in Florence, where the cultural tradition founded under Lorenzo followed all the history of the Medici family also through the time of its decadence, and we keep in mind its reflections in Rome under the Medici popes, Leone X and Clemente VII, all along the 16th century. Still in 1545 Benedetto Varchi could open a lesson on Petrarch at Accademia Fiorentina with these words:

[...] io assai volte ho non minor frutto della lezione de' Poeti, che delle equale de' filosofi, riportato, né vi paia ciò meraviglia Accademici ingegnosissimi, cionciosiaché i poeti, & i filosofi sono nel vero una cosa medesima, né alcuna differenza è tra loro, se non di nomi, perciocché la Poesia non è altro che una filosofia numerosa et ornata, la quale aprendosi dolcemente per l'orecchie la via al cuore, & quivi bene e dentro sentir facendosi, ne alletta maravigliosamente anzi rapisce gli animi, & massimamente de' più gentili & più generosi; & i poeti altro non sono che filosofi, i quali non meno con gravi & dotte sentenze, che con parole belle & leggiadre, & con dolcissimi concerti n'insegnano luce apertamente, & ora sotto fingimenti di favole (oltra i più bei fiori di tutte l'arti, & discipline liberali) non solo odiare, & fuggire i vizij, ma seguire, & amare le virtù²⁴.

²³ Cristoforo Landino, *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, cit. in KALLENBACH 1995, 50.

²⁴ VARCHI 1590, 459.

But Aristotle, particularly in religious colleges, means also Scholastic tradition: the structure of the *quaestiones* is always the one provided by Thomas Aquinas, and, even if Jesuits – for example – had renewed the commentary tradition giving more space to *disputatio* and to rhetorical and dialectic refinement, the Scholastic was always the cultural background of the “official” teaching of philosophy, the one that one Renaissance humanism once, and now Campanella’s project wants to avoid.

Thomas Aquinas, he says, teaches that we cannot in any natural way know the Trinity, which is not reflected in the creatures. But St. Thomas “had not read the Platonists nor Trismegistus, whose works in his time had not been translated into Latin.” [...] For Campanella's theology needs to be put into the context of the history of Thomism in the Renaissance, a history which has not yet been written. It should begin with Ficino and his devious efforts to implicate Thomas Aquinas into approval of the use of talismans. These efforts seem less strange when it is found, as Walker has pointed out, that Cardinal Caietano in his edition of the works of Aquinas, published in 1570, defends in his commentaries the legitimacy of talismans. Campanella used Caietano's edition, since he appealed to it when defending his astral magic²⁵.

This “revaluation” of Aquinas as one of them that legitimated magic practices marks an obvious break with all the Scholastic tradition, implying its rationalism is not the full portrait of Aquinas’ legacy. Campanella states all this very clearly in the *Commentaria*, once more against the *scioli* of the official Scholastica:

Nobis satis est ostendisse quod neque nos divo Thomae adversamur, qui sane prudentia (non agnita sciolis magistrum magistrorum putantibus esse Aristotelem Thomamque eius discipulum) ubi Aristotelem non commentatur, in suis Theologicis, flagellat ab eoque recedit, et Patribus Aristotelem odientibus adhaeret et adulterium spirituale vocat torturamque scripturarum cum trahuntur ad Aristotelis sensum. Nec vates noster sapientissimus Aristotelis regulis si minus arridet celebrandus non erit valde, id quod ex expositionibus sequentibus perspicuum fiet. Cesset zelus sine scientia, erubescat scientia sine zelo²⁶.

²⁵ YATES 1964, 379.

²⁶ BARB. LAT. 1918, c. 14 r.-v.

In a virtuoso *tour-de-force*, Campanella “de-Aristotelizes” and reevaluates Aquinas and with him all the Church Fathers, not only the ones, as Gregorio di Nissa or Origen, more in contact with Eastern thought and so thought to retain more spurs of *prisca theologia*. To bring together Aquinas and Virgil, Ovid and Trismegistus, Plato and Baroque art, is indeed an acrobatic exercise that counts more for the exceptional wit of the friar than for the educational and philosophical incoherencies of the project.

With or without its physical incarnation in the *Collegio Barberino*, the educational framework built by Campanella in the *Commentaria* was an inventing, almost paradoxical – but this is exactly what we expect from him – connection between the *reservato* world of Platonic circles in Quattrocento Florence and the spectacular, extroverted, all-encompassing spirit of Barberini culture. A selected educational path for a handful of initiates was the first phase to bring “true knowledge”, made public and practical, to all the world, beaming from Rome as the real *Città del Sole*. That the project never came into being and that Campanella had to try again his fortune in France – where the Sun King (*le Roi Soleil*) was to become a reality – has prevented the *Commentaria* to undergo the cut-and-paste disasters of daily teaching practice, losing his date with History, but catching the possibility to bring us the original vision of their author and to stand untouched the test of time.

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