From Wit to Shit: Notes for an “Emotional” Lexicon of Sophistry during the Renaissance

Jorge Ledo

Abstract: From the late fourteenth century to the early sixteenth century, authors of neo-Latin literature developed an ever-increasing catalogue of disparaging terms aimed at their perceived rivals, the ancient and contemporary sophists. This extensive vocabulary was deployed against the sophists’ perceived attempts to confuse their listeners, misguide their interlocutors, and corrupt classical learning. This vocabulary ranged from philosophical jargon, to straightforward critiques, to directly derogatory sobriquets. In these pages, I seek to tease out the origin, evolution, and adscription of these terms. In addition, I argue that the study of this lexicon can shed light on the role played by sophistries in the culture of disputation, conversation, and intellectual exchange during the Renaissance. Finally, I will clarify some issues related to the evolution of Latin during the sixteenth century.

Keywords: history of communication, history of education, history of derogatory language, humanist Latin, humanist-scholastic debate, abusive remarks.

Introduction

After the first confrontations of classicists with scholastic philosophers and theologians at the end of the fourteenth century, humanists never stopped collecting labels from classical and Christian tradition, or coining new ones, to caricature scholasticism. Far too frequently, this vocabulary has been read as a manifestation of the humanists’ interest in stressing the gap between themselves and the predominant culture in cathedral schools and universities through the display of their command of Latin and their wit. This view, based upon the fact that such terms were basically abusive remarks, has left aside questions such as how a humanist selected and disseminated certain phrases, labels, and epithets, how they were approved and used by his peers, and under what circumstances they endured. Furthermore, once one of these labels was incorporated into their vocabulary, humanists took it for granted that their fellows could grasp its nuances without further clarification. Because of this, Renaissance scholars, as well as editors and translators of early modern texts, have been commonly misled by such terms; and, contrary to the general understanding, they should be considered more than a mere cabinet of lexical curiosities and their study far from trivial.

Before outlining the history and evolution of some of these words, I need to give one definition and explain two limitations with regard to my approach. As for the definition, the “emotional” in the title stresses that I do not intend to explore how Renaissance humanists dealt with classical and medieval insolubilia and obligations, late-medieval speculative grammar, classifications of arguments, issues of scholastic logic, theology, and so on; but rather, that I aim to appraise how these authors created and developed an ever-increasing lexicon of derogatory labels to refer to scholasticism as a form of sophistry, and how these terms acquired new overtones through their relationship to each other and their signifieds. “Emotional” also alludes to a particular quality of this vocabulary; namely, that it was shaped with the intention of being precise with regard to which aspects of scholasticism it wanted to deride, but, at the same time, was never intended to provide a philosophical criticism of scholasticism as such. Finally, “emotional” denotes the historical evolution of this vocabulary, as anger, verbal violence, and coarseness eventually replaced both elegance and wit.

In line with the general topic of this issue of Philosophical Readings, I have limited my exploration of these terms to those which exploited the identification between scholasticism and sophistry. As a second limitation, imposed by the amount of material that must be considered for such a task, and by the fact that the following pages represent a research in progress, I have provided a cursory set of problems which correspond to the main sections below: “What is a sophist?”, “How to fight and defeat a hydra”, “Scholastic disputation redux: The logotheca of verbal duels”, “The logothecae of minutiae scholasticae”, and “Sophistry as shit”.

1. What is a sophist?

As researchers on late-medieval education have explained, around the middle of the thirteenth century two new concepts, quaestionista and sophista, started to be used at the University of Oxford with a very precise meaning that went far beyond the traditional attribution of the terms. They were rooted in quaestio and sophisma, two common terms in cathedral schools and universities across Europe, where they referred to the stages in students’ education and masters’ careers and to the specific roles students and masters were expected to perform within the university.

The Latin origin and evolution of each term is nonetheless quite different. Quaestio, on the one hand, already referred to instruction in classical antiquity, and it kept
this meaning during the middle ages until around the twelfth century. At that point, it started to acquire a more refined connotation that included, in the first place, the lectio—that is, a master reading and commenting on a text—and, secondly, a direct inquiry addressed to the student concerning exacting passages. This inquiry could only be answered positively and negatively, through the proposition (propositio) of arguments pro et contra, to find a solution (determinatio) to the problems (dubia) posed by the master. As this procedure became common in schools and universities, these conundrums, which had their origin in the reading and exposition of particular authoritative texts, were soon gathered into collections of quaestiones. As the popularity of such collections increased, the discussion of these puzzling questions increasingly came to replace the lectio in classes for advanced students. The collections evolved into several subgenres, among them the quaestio disputata—a record of a given disputation or a treatise written following the mode of the quaestio itself—widely used in faculties of arts, law, medicine and theology, and the quodlibeta (Hamesse 17–48).

Sophisma, on the other hand, did not enjoy such a long tradition as a Latin educational term. Only after its inclusion in medieval instruction did it partially shake off the negative connotations it had carried from classical antiquity onwards. In medieval universities, sophismata referred to statements with twofold implications found in readings of the curriculum. These statements led to discussions on general or abstract issues of grammar, logic, natural philosophy, law, and eventually theology, based on other readings also included in the curriculum. The student was not only expected to have a good knowledge of assigned readings, but also to demonstrate his command of logical reasoning and debate. Like quaestio, once transformed into a technical concept sophisma evolved to refer either to the statement itself or to the conjunction of the statement and its subsequent discussion. Soon, sophismata were gathered into collections and, like quaestiones, came to constitute a literary genre (Spade).

By the late thirteenth century, sophismata had become one of the premises of the medieval curriculum, from its first steps to the baccalaureate. From the fourteenth century onwards, sophismata also became public disputations in which different schools competed: bachelors played the roles of respondents and opponents, and the masters were present as a jury. But the role of quaestiones and sophismata did not end there. To become baccalaureus and then doctoratus required proof of the mastery of both techniques. At the University of Paris, this assessment was composed of three long, exacting, and complex exams called vesperiae, aula, and resumpta or resumptiva, to which tentativa and magisterium were eventually added. These exams were part of the curriculum until certain reforms were made to the course of studies from the sixteenth century onwards. This system was adopted, although with differences, in late-medieval universities all across Europe and lived on during the Renaissance.

Given the complex and excursive nature of these curricula, it is not difficult for a scholar of the Renaissance to find attacks made by humanists against this highly technical approach to disputation, with its exceedingly strict norms and the disregard for the elegance of Latin by masters and students alike. However, not all humanists shared a negative opinion of these practices. For instance, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, who had the chance to attend the vesperie of Johannes Laillier, celebrated at the Sorbonne between July 1485 and March 1486, extolled them as follows in his so-called Oratio de hominis dignitate [1486].

Primum quidem ad eas, qui hunc publice disputandi morem calumniatur, multa non sum dicturus, quando haec culpa, si culpa censetur, non solum obvius omnibus, doctores excellentissimi, qui sepsi huc munere non sine summa et laude et gloria functi estis, sed Platon, sed Aristotel, sed probatissimi omnium etatum philosophos mecum est communis. Quibus erat certissimum nihil ad consequendum quam querebant veritatis cognitionem sibi esse potius, quam ut essent in disputandi exercitatione frequentissimi. Sicut enim per gymnasmac corporis vires firmiores fluent, ita dabio procul in hac quasi literaria palestra animi vires et fortiores longe et vegetiores evadunt.

First, to those who slander this practice of disputing publicly, I am not going to say much, except that this crime, if they judge it a crime, is the joint work not only of all you very excellent doctors—who have often discharged this office not without very great praise and glory—but also of Plato and Aristotle and the most upright philosophers of every age, together with me. To them it was most certain that they had nothing better for reaching the knowledge of the truth which they sought than that they be very often in the exercise of disputing. As through gymnastics the forces of the body are strengthened, so doubtless in this, as it were, literary gymnasiun, the forces of the soul become much stronger and more vigorous.

Over against Pico’s intellectual vigorexia; we find the derogatory position, predominant among Renaissance humanists. In 1506, twenty years after the Oratio, Erasmus himself fled from Paris partly to avoid taking these exams; and yet twenty years later he remembered the practice very well, as is clear from the following statement from his De utilitate colloquiorum (1526).

Huiusmodi permutla grammaticuli discunt ex meis colloquiis, quibus sic obmurmurant isti. Sed indecorum est theologum ipsi esse potius, quam ut essent in disputandi exercitatione frequentissimi. Nunquam enim per gymnasmac corporis vires firmiores fluent, ita dabio procul in hac quasi literaria palestra animi vires et fortiores longe et vegetiores evadunt.

Beginners learn many things of this sort from my Colloquies, about which these fellows mutter so. “But for a theologian to do with boys what they, grown men, permit themselves publicly against their banning by the Faculty of Theology of the Sorbonne as a confrontation between two different ways of understanding education, conversation, dialogue, and dialectics.

2. How to fight and defeat a hydra

As I have already mentioned, however, Erasmus was not, by any means, the first to oppose the medieval academic curriculum and the practice of disputation that it propagated. In The Sophistic Renaissance, Eric MacPhail col-
lected a number of passages from the works of Petrarch that are quite illustrative for understanding one of the first opinions on “modern sophistry” made by a fourteenth-century classicist. However, I shall follow a different path here and call attention to this well-known excerpt from Plato’s *Euthydemus* (297c–d).10

You are running away, Socrates, said Dionysodorus; you refuse to answer. Yes, and with good reason, I said: for I am weaker than either one of you, so I have no scruple about running away from the two together. You see, I am sadly inferior to Hercules, who was no match for the hydra—that she-professor who was so clever that she sent forth many leads of debate in place of each one that was cut off; nor for another sort of crab-professor from the sea—fancy, arrived on shore: and, when the hero was so bothered with its leftward harks and bites, he summoned his nephew Iolaus to the rescue, and he brought him effective relief.

This passage is of interest insofar as it was unknown until the late fifteenth century. In fact, Socrates’s comparison of Euthydemos with the Hydra of Lerna survived—before Ficino recovered and translated Plato’s *Dialogues*—thanks to St. Jerome’s translation of Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Chronicon*,11 where it was found in turn by Giovanni Boccaccio, who made the following comment in the *Genealogies of the Pagan Gods* [ante 1375].12

Eusebius autem in libro temporum de hac Hydra alter sentire Platonem dicit, quem ait assere Hydram callidissimum fuisse *Sophistam*, nam *Sophistarum* mos est, nisi quis auertat, adeo *propositiones suas* tradere, ut uno *soluto dubio* multa consurgant. Sed *astutus philosophus* *dimissis accessoriis ad internitionem principalis conatur, quo remoto, caetera remouentur.*

In the *Chronicon*, Eusebius states that Plato had a different interpretation of this Hydra. Plato affirms, he says, that the Hydra is a most skillful *sophist*, as *sophists* are accustomed—unless someone brings them into light—to say their *propositions* in such a way that once a *doubt is solved*, many more arise. But the wary philosopher, putting aside *subsidiary* issues, seeks to destroy the *main proposition*, so once it is removed, so are the rest.

This brief second-hand mention and the elaboration made by Boccaccio are enlightening. It is evident from the words he chooses for providing a Euhemeristic interpretation of Socrates’s comparison—and it could not have been otherwise—that the *sophista* he has in mind is the one bred in the art of the *quaestiones* and *sophismata*. Both this brief mention and its contents would be enriched soon.

Only eight years after the death of Boccaccio, Coluccio Salutati had already begun one of his most ambitious works, *De laboribus Herculis* (1383–1391). In the ninth chapter of the third book, Salutati provides a much more extensive interpretation of Socrates’s Hydra, partly drawn from medieval sources,13 introducing three important ways of looking at the acceptance of “sophist” within a new intellectual paradigm—that of the humanists—and marking a clear difference over against the succinct treatment by Boccaccio. Salutati first approaches the fundamental opposition between the philosopher and the sophist, which, as can be inferred, has nothing to do with Plato’s *Euthydemus*, but rather with the defense of a new art of disputation that is clearly opposed to the culture of medieval schools and universities. From this point of view, Salutati contrasts his reckoning of education as based on the recovery and study of the classics with the technical scholastic view related to the creation of experts through verbal confrontation.

The second aspect of Salutati’s approach is the distinction between logic, grounded in reasoning, and sophistry, built upon arguments that hide fallacies. The third is the establishment of an art of disputation which contrasts a technical approach to the defense and legitimization of certain ideas with an ethical inclination which includes, paradoxically, the classical definition of rhetoric on the one hand, and the definition of ethics on the other.

Because Boccaccio and Salutati lacked the sources that would have been required for a correct interpretation of what Socrates meant by “sophists”, they were able to establish a fortunate parallel with contemporary affairs and to use the authority of Plato, the master of Aristotle, to attack scholasticism. This interpretation instituted a tradition which identified scholastic sophistries and sophists with the Hydra of Lerna and which would become much richer during the fifteenth century.14 Furthermore, when Plato’s works began to be exhumed, epitomized, and translated into Latin, this association of sophist and Hydra was not simply discarded in favor of more historically accurate understandings.15 As a matter of fact, Marsilio Ficino—who knew Plato’s works and the deeds of Plato’s sophists extremely well—wrote the following passage in a letter dated 15 September 1489 and entitled *A defense treating medicine, astrology and the life of the cosmos, and also the Magi who greeted the new-born Christ,*16 calling his circle to defend the publication of his *De vita libri tres* (1480–1489):

Tu vero, Guicciardine, carissime compater, ito nunc, ito alacer, Politianum Herculem accersito. Hercules quondam ubi periculo sios certandum foret, vocitabat Iolaum. Tu nunc similiter Herculem. Nosti profecto quot barbara monstra Latium iam devastantia Politianus Hercules inaservat, laceraverit, interemerit; quam acriter expugnet passim, quam tuto propugnet. Hic ego vel centum hydrae capita nostris libris munitantia statim contundet elava, flammisque comburet.

But you, Guicciardini, dearest comrade, go now, go swiftly, fetch Poliziano, our Hercules. Long ago, when there was to be a particularly dangerous fight, Hercules used to call out for Iolaus; you must now likewise call out for Hercules. You know only too well how many barbarous monsters Poliziano, our Hercules, has attacked, battered and destroyed; monsters ravaging Latium. You know how fiercely he fights on all sides, how sure is his defense. Therefore, he will immediately pound with his club and burn up in flames even the hundred heads of the Hydra which are now threatening our children.

Here, Poliziano is represented as Hercules—a sobriquet as adored by Ficino as it was disliked by Angelo17—that is, as the champion of the *politeia sive humaniores litterae* against an ever-increasing number of sophists who constantly threatened to spoil the aims and destroy the fruits of the new erudition.

The influence of these allegorical and mythological interpretations of the Hydra, as the monster of mystifying sophistry who had to be defeated in order to impose a new model of learning—a model that would erase the dark
middle ages and pave the way for a new golden age—was not constrained to Italy or humanists. This powerful image spread widely, employed at the beginning of the Reformation not only by Luther himself (from 1509 onwards), but also in H. Eobanus Hessus’s representation of Reuchlin as Hercules and in his attacks against Edward Lee, and even by Reuchlin himself in his letters to Hermann von Neuenahr the elder. It appeared also in the widely popular image of Luther as the “Hercules Germanicus”, destined to slash the many-headed monster of the Catholic Hydra. The Hydra was deployed to such an extent that Andrea Alciato’s words in his Epistula—a declamatio, in reality—contra vitam monasticam (c. 1517–1518), addressed to Bernardus Mattius, a fellow humanist who entered the Franciscan order, seem more than fair some ten years after the comparison became widespread:

Cum enim divinus ille Plato sophistam quendam fuisset Hydram prodidit, vaticinabatur credo et unum aliquem vestrum animo volutabat, cum quo quisquam de suo dogmate disputare ausit. Quotquot argumenta referes, rursus pullulant et mille syllogismos fortiores insurgunt.

For when divine Plato declared, as someone dared to dispute with him about his doctrine, that a certain sophist was a hydra, he was prophesying, I believe, and had in mind one of your people. However many arguments you put, they multiply theirs in return and rise up stronger again with a thousand syllogisms.

3. Sophistry redux: the logosethea of verbal duels

As the hydra of “new sophistry” had many heads, the war against the “new sophists” had to be fought on several fronts and by diverse methods: the institutions of studia humanitatis and academies, the (literary) foundation of a new way of intellectual exchange, new models to approach texts critically, the display of formidable erudition, providing precise concepts with terms from a wide variety of sources, usually supplies of this arsenal. First, the incorporation of new ideas with reinf

Nothing will make me believe that Paul, from whose learning we may judge all the other apostles, would so often have condemned questions, arguments, genealogies, and what he himself called “battles of words” if he had been well up in those niceties, especially when all the controversies and disagreements of that time would have been clumsy and unsophisticated affairs in comparison with the more than Chrysippian subtleties of the schoolmen of today.

This passage appears in Erasmus’s Folly just after three extensive lists of sophistical technicalities, quaestiones, and sects, delineating the fields of action for the detrac-
tion of sophistic scholasticism and clearly showing Erasmus’s procedure in providing a fair number of equivalent terms. But what interests us here is that, in bringing back *logomachia*—the original Pauline term in Greek, which St. Jerome rendered as *contentiones*—Erasmus was not providing a Greek equivalent to a Latin word, but rather expressing where the battle against sophistry was about to be fought—in the study of the three sacred languages, in a new translation of the New Testament, etc. 31—comparing the confrontation between humanism and scholasticism to the Pauline endeavor to disseminate the evangelical message in its purity against Jewish sects, pseudo-Christians, and mystifiers.

Besides its ability to produce this set of equivalences in an educated reader, the *logotheca* of verbal duels expanded in two more directions. In the first place, as I have said, it established connections with the other two *logothecae* (which insisted on the dogmatism of scholastic explorations and their irrelevance, as we will see below). These links were at times established by simple morphological variations (*nuga*, *nugator*, *logodaedalia*, *logodaedalus*, etc.), but at other times by the creation and expansion of a whole conceptual field (*nuga*: *delirationum*, *ineptia*, *inquinamentum*, *naucus*, *latratus*, *peripsama*, *sterquilinium*, etc.). Secondly, the speed with which new terms were able to be incorporated into these *logothecae* raises the question of how this was done; and although the inclusion of a candidate in a blockbuster such as the *Praise of Folly* would not exactly hurt, the key for the success of a new term was its ability both to add something which was lacking in the *logotheca* (as we have seen with *logomachia*) and to relate with its peers.

This procedure can be seen over and over again. Pauline *kenophoniat* or *kainophoniat*, another concept included in this *logotheca* (although secondary and with very reduced circulation), was presented in Erasmus’s *Annotations on 1 Timothy 6–20*. 32 His commentary on this passage not only provides a translation of *κενοφωνιά* to Latin, but it does so by accompanying it with a whole set of terms which will be related to it both in the *logotheca* of verbal confrontations and in that of *minutiae scholasticae*. Examples abound. Take, for instance, this formulation from the *Colloquium formulae* (1518) as applied to Scotists: “All right, he shall be admitted, as long as he leaves at home his sophistical monsters, his nonsense, sycophancies, arrogance, virulence, sardonic grin, Thrasmonial boasts, and self-love”. 33 As a matter of fact, the new labels for the scholastic disputations and controversies became a genre in themselves, going well beyond Erasmus and extending to the practices of the faculties of arts, law, medicine, and theology and their respective professions. A final example can be found in connection with the study and practice of law in Cornelius Agrrippa’s *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum* (1531) 34:

Quibus tum ad hoc ipsum adsunt procuratores et notarii, quos vocant, tabelliones, quorum injustias et damna, et nequitàtas et falsifica, omnes patien ter ferre oportet, cum omnium fiedem et licentiam, ac potestatem apostolica et imperiale authoritate se obtinuisse videntur. Atque inter hos illi sunt praecipui qui nonin forum egregie perturbare, miscere lites, confundere causas, supponere testimonia, instrumenta, rescripta, diplomata, tum egregie fallere, decipere et uti opus est pejere et falsum scribere. *Omniaaudere*, et constreundis dolis, fraudibus, technis, calumnis, laqueis, captiunculis, insidīis, trīcĭs, ambagiibus, circumventionibus, *Scyllis et Charibdibus* se a nullo vincìi patiunt.

Among these publice notaries are to be reckon’d, whose injuri es, falsities, and mischiefs continually by them wroght, all are bound to endure, while they pretend to have their credit, license, and authority from the Apostolike and Imperial power. Among whom they are to be accounted the chiefest, who know best how to trouble the court, perplex causes, counterfeit wills and deeds, to abuse and deceive their clients, and, if need be, to forswear themselves, venturing at any roguery, rather than be outdone in plotting and contriving cheats, scandals, quirks, tricks, quiblets, treacheries, Scylla’s and Charybdis, by any other person whatsoever.

4. The *logothcae of minutiae scholasticae*

Together with the derisive terms employed to refer to the medieval and contemporary practice of disputation held in universities (and to scholastic disputation in general), humanists’ re-collection, coinage, and use of labels to express their contempt for old-fashioned grammar teachers, to scorn scholastic sophists, and to attack the arguments and the techniques employed in their disputations soon conformed to two more complementary *logothecae*.

In the attacks on scholastic teachers and philosophers, sometimes irony sufficed. The titles employed in the schools and universities of the time usually included a pinch—sometimes a handful—of scorn, following a tradition started around the middle of the twelfth century. For instance, one of the more popular titles assigned to doctors in theology, *magister noster* was already employed with irony by Peter Abelard against his master, William of Champeaux, 35 and it continued to be used from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century to stress that, as a matter of fact, these *magistri nostri* did not master any discipline at all. 36 Other titles employed in the universities of the time, such as *baccalareatus*, *licenciatus*, *magister*, *doctor* (use most often when accompanied by *angelicus*, *seraphicus*, etc., to refer to authorities) and common designations such as *summulista*, *logicus*, *physicus*, *intrante*, 37 *modista*, *logista*, *quaestionista*, *calculista*, *glosator*, *legista*, and *canonista* were used scornfully as well, not only to censure the pride behind these titles and as an attack against what they represented with regard to the institutionalization of philosophy and theology, but also because they were considered to be unclassical barbarisms, coined in a period when the European classical tradition and heritage were lost in darkness. 38 The same motivations lay behind the attacks *ad hominem* of the surnames of scholastic philosophers. 39 Even such common terms as *dialectica* and *dialecticus* could become derisive when employed by humanists such as Lorenzo Valla. 40

When irony did not suffice to stress the divide between the cultural, educational, and philosophical traditions of the new sophists and those of the humanists, there were a number of procedures that reinforced it—for instance, contrasts such as *grammatista*/*grammaticus*, 41 *argulator*, *disputator*, *logicus*; 42 *logista*, *nebulus*, 43 *occamicus*, *occamista*, *occanista*, *philoscotus*, 44 *pseudodialecticus*, *se(h)olasticus*, * sophicaster*, *sortista*...
(or sortistus)\textsuperscript{45} logicus and dialecticus; morologus,\textsuperscript{46} morosophilus,\textsuperscript{47} philomorus,\textsuperscript{48} philobarbarus/ philosophus; or aristotelicatos, magisterculus, sententianarius, Sorbonicus, Sorbonista, theologaster, theologastrus, theologist\textsuperscript{a} theologus\textsuperscript{59}—but also with characterizations of teachers of grammar, sophists, and philosophers taken from the classical tradition. In this last instance, wrath and pride, common to the first logotheca, were depicted and taken to the extreme. But to follow them, I am afraid, would divert us from our main topic.

For the third logotheca, which interests us more here, humanists collected and created from c. 1400 to c. 1530 an outstanding set of terms to refer to the arguments employed by scholastic philosophy and to their mnemonic formulas.\textsuperscript{50} The census of the set of terms grew as a result of two main complementary procedures. On the one side, humanists gathered references to ancient dilemmas, fallacies, and paradoxes from classical sources\textsuperscript{51} with the aim of linking them to the logical arguments taught in the schools and universities of their time. For instance, in a renowned passage of the Praise of Folly\textsuperscript{52}—“and I’ll demonstrate (docebo) it, not by the Crocodile’s Syllogism (crocodilitis), or the Heap (sortitis), or the Horns (ceratinis), or any other dialectical sublty of that kind; no, with what is called sound common sense”—Erasmus mentions terms already explained in classical authorities\textsuperscript{53} and brought together in Poliziano’s Miscellanea.\textsuperscript{54} However, Folly’s allusion cannot be understood as a mere erudite exhumation and repetition of classical loci; it needed to be connected with the instruction in logic of her own time. Therefore, there is no doubt that she is bearing in mind the tradition of insolubilia in the context of obligatory dispositions here, a connection that can be easily established once Melanchthon’s treatment of conservatio\textup{nes} in his Compendiaria dialecticæ ratio (c. 1520), or Vives’s treatment of insolubilia,\textsuperscript{55} is taken into account.\textsuperscript{56} The contrast between the somehow aseptic approach to sorties in Lorenzo Valla’s Retractatio\textsuperscript{57} and the bitter attack against scholastic sophistries made by late fourteenth- to sixteenth-century scholars—either humanists, like Elio Antonio de Nebrija,\textsuperscript{58} or non-humanists, like Jean Gerson\textsuperscript{59}—only makes the antithesis between the emotional or derogatory use of the term and the technical use more clear.\textsuperscript{59} The ludic role played by these terms, most probably motivated by the educated Renaissance reader’s familiarity with them, is evident not only when we observe how humanists played with some of these concepts, but also when we move forward in time and find that Thomas Wilson offers in The Rule of Reason (1551) a collection of examples of crocodilites, antistrephon, ceratinæ, asistatun, cacosistatun, utis, and pseudomenos “to delyte the reader.”\textsuperscript{61}

Besides commenting on classical dilemmas, and in order to provide points of comparison between themselves and scholastic logic, humanists also enlarged the logotheca of arguments and reasoning by adapting classical and post-classical vocabulary to add nuances to their attacks. The terms they chose sometimes amplified a traditional acceptation when this was originally very precise; or, conversely, the original terms were transformed into precise terms to attack a certain aspect of sophistry, notwithstanding their more general meaning in classical and post-classical Latin. Such a catalogue would include ar- 

---

Jorge Ledo

---

108
the relation of captiuncula with capicio. At the same time, this new acceptance is in line with medieval use, that is, to designate the quasi-magical power of sophistry to catch the attention and mystify the listener, as happens in Giovanni Pontano’s Charon (c. 1469). This idea is also reflected in Marsilio Ficino’s Commentary on Plato’s Symposium or De amore (1469), wherein after presenting the lemma incantator fascinatorque, potens, veneficus atque sophista, he writes the following passage:

Sophistam Plato in Sophiste dialogo ambitioso et subdolum definis disputatorem, qui captiuncularum versutis falsum pro vero nobis ostendit cogitque eos qui secum disputant sibimet in sermonibus contradictice.

A sophist Plato defines, in the dialogue [the Sophists], as an ambitious and crafty debater who, by the subtleties of sophistries, shows us the false for the true, and forces those who dispute with him to contradict themselves in their speeches.

Interestingly enough, in later works both Pontano and Ficino abandoned this reference to magic, and used captiuncula according to its new acceptation as “sophistical” tricks, or a more general “deception.” Antonio de Ferrariis uses the term to mark a clear distinction between two kinds of philosophy, one focused on disputation and linguistic tricks (captiunculae), the other on the Stoic tradition, which teaches that forgetting both material things and passions leads to a good and a happy life—the term is related therefore to the concept of philosophical persona which Christopher Celenza (2014, 149–150) discussed in a recent essay. Interestingly, the passage is also a reformulation of Salutati’s De laboribus Herculis:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Salutati</th>
<th>De Ferrariis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Huic igitur, sicut oportet, intentus depræhendit duos esse disputandi modos, unum veris et existentibus rationibus, alium sophistico et apparentibus, ut, nisi discatur uteque, aut habebi philosophia nequeat aut inventa nullo modo defendi.</td>
<td>Pater illi optimus philosophus fuit et medicus, qui in illum simul cum anima philosophiam quoque infudit, non eam quae in captiunculis disputatiobusque, sed quae in bene beatique vivendo versatur et in contemnedis humanis rebus, hoc est, in coercendis affectibus.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Therefore, the one who attends in a fitting way to this perceives that there are two manners of debating, one with true and manifest reasons, the other with sophistical and apparent ones, so that, unless he learns both, either he will not be able to acquire philosophy or else, having found it, there will be no way to defend it.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, most humanists would have agreed that captiuncula in its classical meaning had been displaced by its value as a technical term—a technical jibe, if you wish—to refer to the arguments used in scholastic disputations, and, more precisely, to its practice in universities. So extensive was this updated use that Agostino Nifo felt the need to include a new term in the logotheca devoted to sophists: captiunculatores.

5. Scholastic sophists and sophistries as shit

To do justice to the title of this article, and to the process of degradation of scholastic sophistry in the logothecae of the humanists, these pages that opened upon the thirteenth century, when quaestiones and sophisma were considered wit, need now to be closed with these practices’ eventual comparison to excretion and, more particularly, to excrement, which happens to be much more frequent than expected.

Although there are comparisons of scholastic logic with dirt, rubbish, and even dunghills as early as the twelfth century, it was only between the 1510s and 1530s that humanists developed freely into this commonplace. Several factors explain this. In the first place, humanism’s achievements had become widespread thanks to the popularity of some of its representatives, the role of the printing press in disseminating the materials they created, and the clear impact of classical learning in the curricula of many universities across Europe. Secondly, even though scholasticism was far from exhausted in higher education, students arrived at colleges with a body of knowledge much nearer to the litterae humaniores than that of previous generations, especially outside Italy; moreover, traditional bastions of scholasticism such as Oxford, Cambridge, and Paris had modified—or were close to modifying—their curricula, and humanists were appointed as teachers and tutors on a regular basis. It seems feasible that these changes led to a hastening decline in the ability to identify the nuances of the logothecae created and developed by scholars who were, if not dead, at least in their forties or fifties. Thirdly, when wit descends to scatology, it is probably a good sign that the possibilities of playing with and elaborating on an idea have come to an end.

From this point of view, it will not come as a surprise that Erasmus, following in the steps of Petrarch and Bartholomaeus Coloniensis (among many others), was one of the most active contributors to the logothecae of scholastic mystifications, nor that he played with comparing (sophistic) scholasticism to rot, excrement, and so forth from time to time—a game which soon attracted the attention of a considerable number of followers, imitators, and “emulators.” A well-known example is his use in the Parabolaes of the analogy of rotten food, sprouting from rotten brains, when speaking of the literature of the Scotists:

Vt cibi male olentes non videntur male olere his qui ederint, ita quae in bene vivendo versatur et in contemnedis humanis rebus, hoc est, in coercendis affectibus.
Food which smells unpleasant seems to have no smell to those who have eaten it. The *filthy literature of Scotists and sophists* is like that: it gives great offence to others, who have had a more liberal education, and makes them feel sick, but to men soaked in that sort of *rubbish it gives no offence and even seems to show neatness and elegance.*

It was Erasmus also who provided, when vividly describing his life in the Collège de Montaigu, the link between university life and dirt. In 1532, the comparison of medieval textbooks and glosses with excrement had become widespread, as can be seen in this passage on Accursius’s glosses to the *Pandectas* in Rabelais’s *Panarum*: 82

Ainsi vint à Bourges où estudia bien long temps et profita beaucoup en la faculté des loix. Et disoit aucunes fois que les livres des loix luy sembloient une belle robe d’or, triomphant et précieuse à mervelles, qui feust bordée de mende: “Car (disoit il) au monde n’y a livres tant beaux, tant ornés, tant élegans comme sont les textes des Pandectes: mais la brodure d’icieux, c’est assauroir la glose de Accurse, est tant salle, tan infâme et punaise, que ce n’est que ordure et villenie”.

So he came to Bourges, where he studied quite a long time, and learned a lot in the law school; and sometimes he used to say that the law books seemed to him a beautiful golden gown that was bordered with shit. “For”, he said, “there are no books in the world so beautiful, so ornate, so elegant, as are the texts of the Pandects; but their border, to wit, the gloss by Accursius, is so foul, unspeakable, and smelly, that it’s nothing but sewage and sludge”.

Around two decades later, in a wonderful passage from his *Hieroglyphica* (1556), 83 Piero Valeriano animates his explanation of *nugae* and *cavillae* with the following image of a sophist as a pig romping in its own excrement:

Et ut, quod initio dicere coeperamus, prosequamur, sacerdotes illi cum nihil aeque abhorrent quam inanes sophistarum nugae et cavillosas verborum arguitas argumentorumque decipulas in naturae viribus indagandis, eiusmodi notae hominem per suis hieroglyphicam significabant. Eodem intellectu apud Hebraeos suillum abstinere praeceptum ait Philo, admonitosque ut inde nunquam avelli possint, sed ad extremam usque senectutem ibidem computrescunt, nam et porci nihil illustre, nihil purum, nihil limpidum amant, sed turbida tantum spissa et sordida et faeculentia sectantur, inque haec praecepium statuunt voluptatem.

And to go ahead with what we started to say at the beginning: because there was nothing more abhorrent to those priests than the empty trivialities of sophists, quibbling nimbleness of words, and logical traps when investigating the forces of nature, they indicated this type of man by means of the hieroglyphic of a pig. Philo affirms that the commandment among the Hebrews to abstain from swine-flesh was understood in the same way; and that, by this divine law, through the avoidable impurity of such an animal we are admonished to avoid sophists. For they, by their so sharply pointed and highly elaborate distinctions about things, which they explain by means of a cloven-hoofed animal, are as it were caked in mud, and they stick to those things so much that later they can never scrape it off, but stink of it all the way to extreme old age. For pigs also love nothing bright, nothing clean, nothing transparent, but run after only what is muddy, thick, foul, and mucky, and their principal pleasure is in these things.

With some highly valuable exceptions, 84 the history of verbal violence, derision, and contempt during the Renaissance as yet lacks a study which accounts for how this vocabulary was inspired, learned, and driven. From the starting point of a simple image—the identification of sophistry with the Hydra of Lerna—and its reinterpretation in the fourteenth century, I have sought to explain schematically the dramatic multiplication of derogatory terms against scholastic sophistry during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Poetic images aside, my hypothesis can be summarized in three main points.

First, the thriving of this vocabulary cannot be explained by increasing tensions between scholasticism and humanism—a less-than-accurate historiographical commonplace—but was in line, rather, with the evolution, maturity, and partial decadence of the Latin of the humanists. With this in mind, we ought to be able to identify discrete patterns of linguistic evolution in which this word-stock was able to prosper. In pursuit of such a pattern, I have borrowed from Guillaume Budé the concept of the *logotheca*, which allowed me to explain two complimentary facts. First, I showed that in the evolution of this vocabulary, the survival and eventual success of a new term depended upon its relations with its likely peers. This was most often done through the new term’s inclusion in lists of correlatives and through the exemplification of its unique contribution to that list.

Secondly, for clarity’s sake and due to the volume of terms considered, I have approached this vocabulary by sorting it out in three separate yet permeable *logothecae*: (1) terms that highlighted the opposition between the communicative and intellectual aims of humanism and those of scholasticism, (2) terms that referred to the agents and guardians of scholastic sophistries, and (3) terms that referred contemptuously to the arguments and “tricks” employed in scholastic debate.

In addition, given the permanent need to find new and effective derogatory terms and the fact that Latin was an artificial language in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, I have outlined the predictable consequences of carrying this process to an extreme. In this spirit, I have chosen to close my exposition with two complementary expressions of contempt: humanists’ attacks *ad hominem* against scholastic thinkers and the comparison of scholastic sophistry with shit. It was certainly not by chance that Europe’s doctrinal schism and the shift from creative derision to an outbreak of coarseness went hand in hand. My aim in these pages has been to offer an alternative to scholarly accounts explaining the trajectories of this early modern vocabulary with recourse to political or intergroup animosities between humanists and scholastics. Instead, we ought to examine closely (and indeed at greater length) the institutional and formal characteristics that drove the evolution of these derisive repertoires “from within.”
Bibliography

All the works cited in this essay and in its footnotes are collected here. There are, however, a couple of exceptions. For Erasmus’ works, I have used common abbreviations—CW (Collected Works of Erasmus). To 1974) – A.S. (2002). Opera omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami. Amsterdam, 1966– ). Erasmi Opuscula (Collected Work – Supplement to the Opera omnia. Ed. Wallace K. Ferguson. The Hague, 1933, and Al- len, Opus estopularum (Suppl. Opera estopularum Des. Erasmi Roterodami Ed. P.S. Allen, H.M. Allen, and H.W. Garrod. 11 vols and index, Oxford 1901–1941. I have kept this bibliography as short as possible; only editions other than these are gathered here. Likewise, I have used WA to refer to the Weimar edition of Martin Luther’s works.


Notes

1 I would like to express my gratitude to Eric MacPhail for his comments on this text. All the remaining mistakes and omissions are my own.


4 The attacks on sophismata and sophiste from the twelfth century onwards, see Loan, 101–126, esp. 104–107.


7 Garin’s essay, “Per una cultura nuova: la polemica contro i ‘Barbari’” (Garin 1969, 137–177), still offers a balanced approach to the problem. See also his “I filosofi italiani del Quattrocentro”, Garin 2009, 156.


9 Erasmus, ASD I. 3: 751; CWE 40: 1108.

10 Plato, 469, 471.

11 Ibsen, 91; “Hercules consummat certamina, Anteum interficit, illium usque. Dictum autem Antheus terrae filius, quia solorum palmariae artis certaminum quae in terra excentercurit scientissimae erat et ob id uidebatur a terra matre adiuvauerit. Hydram autem caullissimam fuisse sofistrium adversatur Plato” (Ibsen’s Hercules finishes his labors, slays Antaeus, devotat Ilium. Antaeus, her son, is said to be the son of the earth, because he was most versed in the art of wrestling in single matches that are staged on the earth, and on that account was seen to be aided by the earth as his mother. But Plato asserts that a Hydra was just a very cunning sophistry), my italics. It should be noted that Jerome himself identifies heresies with the Hydra several times: “contra Vigilium et Antheum de Ilium uastat. Dicitur autem Antheus terrae filius, quia solorum palmariae artis certaminum quae in terra excentercurit scientissimae erat et ob id uidebatur a terra matre adiuvauerit. Hydram autem caullissimam fuisse sofistrium adversatur Plato” (See also his “I filosofi italiani del Quattrocentro”, Garin 2009, 156.

12 Ibsen, 91; “Hercules consummat certamina, Anteum interficit, illium usque. Dictum autem Antheus terrae filius, quia solorum palmariae artis certaminum quae in terra excentercurit scientissimae erat et ob id uidebatur a terra matre adiuvauerit. Hydram autem caullissimam fuisse sofistrium adversatur Plato” (Ibsen’s Hercules finishes his labors, slays Antaeus, devotat Ilium. Antaeus, her son, is said to be the son of the earth, because he was most versed in the art of wrestling in single matches that are staged on the earth, and on that account was seen to be aided by the earth as his mother. But Plato asserts that a Hydra was just a very cunning sophistry), my italics. It should be noted that Jerome himself identifies heresies with the Hydra several times: “contra Vigilium et Antheum de Ilium uastat. Dicitur autem Antheus terrae filius, quia solorum palmariae artis certaminum quae in terra excentercurit scientissimae erat et ob id uidebatur a terra matre adiuvauerit. Hydram autem caullissimam fuisse sofistrium adversatur Plato” (See also his “I filosofi italiani del Quattrocentro”, Garin 2009, 156.

13 See, for instance, Cristoforo Landino, De vera nobilitate [1469–1470, c. 1487] 1970, 10; Rabih, 257; “[…] sed et in altum et ad divina pertinere, tuque tunc illic nonnullos fundamentis pertinet omne terrae rerum libido. Neeque nec cancrum, qui pedem Herculis advers versus hydram validissime pugnatus mordicus apprehendit, ullo modo contemnemus. Est enim animi torpor cancer qui magnos persaepe viros doctrinam per hydram, id enim est per dialecticas subtilissimas insinuationes inquirientes saepè defugiat, sed illum vir magno animo et qui nullo labore succumbat, caris, teret, idest pervertentes exsequar” (“But if our minds are lifted up on high to divine things and seized by the love of those things, all desire for earthly things completely perishes. You should not in any way scorn the crab who, with his teeth, seizes the foot of Hercules while he is fighting fiercely against the Hydra. The crab is so great a mind that, which very often wearsied great people seeking learning through the Hydra, that is, searching through the most subtle dialectics; but one with a great mind who does not give way under any labor grinds him under his heel, that is, overcomes through perseverance”), Landino, Disputationes Camalaldeones [c. 1474] 1980, 235; Barceloneo Sacchi, De falsa et vera bene [ante 1484] 1990, 25 and 111; Niccolò Perotti, Curna copia [1478, princeps 1489] 1994, I. V. 61, 89: “Plato Hydram acussissimam sophistram scribit fuisse, cuius mos erat caullarii et questiones ita propone, ut uno soluto dubio multa renascerunt. Ego inde datum huic fabulae locum existimo, quid angustus genus, sub quo hydra continuat, omnium fertilitissimum sit, et nisi insidias exuereferunt, non essec fatecludiit areri resister.” (“Plato writes that the Hydra was a cunning sophist whose habit was to criticise and to put questions in such a way that, when one doubt was resolved, many more would arise. I think what gave rise to this fable is”).


27 Poliziano 1526, fols. 103v–104r, also collected in Kristeller 1937b, 278 (LXXI.3). A translation into English can be found in Cicero 2009, appendix F, 47. Further data on Poliziano as Hercules in Batkin, 108–114.

28 WF 8: 48, WA 9: 29 (Murphy 64), etc.

29 Eobani Hessi de Capioni eulogium [c. 1514]: “That subudder of monsters, Jupiter’s son, is renowned all over the world in recognition of his heroic deeds. Reuchlin’s glory is not inferior to his. He has vanquished monsters no less savage than the Hydra and the other beasts. Nobody asks what kind of monsters they are — unless you, cowl, perhaps don’t recognize yourself anymore,” Eobanus Hessus 2012, 49–51. See also Mutianus Rufus’s addition and gloss to the poem (dated November 1, 1514): “Hacemus inimicum ficta gravitate Catonis, non poterit populo nunc dare verba Magus; Deputa Capioni laui inviolata manebat, sed tua quam simulas gloria, Barde, jacet. / Ceu Nemesis s

30 The word is a coined by Budé to describe Erasmus’s Adagia in a letter (Paris, 19 May 1517) to Cuthbert Tunstall: “[…] certe quum ther and contemporary heresies following Ambrose and Jerome, see Reuchlin 2013, 51, 75, and 238. See also Reuchlin ‘dispute’ or ‘quarrel’), the Greek word is more expressive, like the judicious mingling of Greek forms with the Latin. This can be when, as Eck (1979, 274, 404, and 415), once the situation changed, the term normally adopted for the commonplace of the Hydra as multiplication of errors, see, e.g., Biondo Flavio’s De verbis romanicae locutionis Blondi ad Leonardum Aretinum XXV. 104 (Tavoni, 214), Marcus Musurus’ introduction to Aristophanes (Manutius, 276–277), and Erasmus’s (ASD II. 1: 338–340; CWE 31: 238) Adaegia I. III. 27. Lerna malorum.

31 The word is a coined by Budé to describe Erasmus’s Adagia in a letter (Paris, 19 May 1517) to Cuthbert Tunstall: “[…] certe quum
tentiam Epicurici, qui contendit, voluptatem esse neque. Rectius autem in Philosophia dici. Virtute esse finem hominis, id est, recte faciendum esse, etiamsi dolores et detrimenta sequantur ("Here is the question: is virtue finis, or is it, in fact, pleasure? Aristotle says that virtu-
ous activity is man’s end. When I say that virtue is the end, I do not mean an inactional disposition; rather, I support Aristotle’s opinion, even if, for the sake of brevity, I refer to it simply as virtue, in the manner of Cicero. Let us be done, therefore, with logomachiae and clearly establish that Epicurus’s opinion is false. He contends that pleasure is our end. It is stated more accurately in philosophy, however, that man’s end is virtue, that is, doing what is right even if pain and loss are the conse-
quences"), quoted from Melanchthon 1553, 11 and Turmeda et al., 112, my italics.

35 "Vocum novitates. Caeperoxioν, id est 'vocem inanitates'. Ambrosio et ipsis legisse videntur caeperoxioν. Quamquam Graeca scholia per e legunt. Nec enim hic agit de novandis vocabulis, sed de disputationibus supracavmates. Ex interpretatione Chrysostomoni non liquet quid legi et. Theophylactus legit et interpretatur caeperoxioν, id est μεταξυγονα, non dissimilans tamet Chrysostomum videri legesse caeperoxioν, per ut diphthongum. Addit 'videri' quod quodemadmodum diximus, ex illius enarratione non liquet quid legi. Falsi nominis. Ψευδωνυμονοι, quae dicam falsa 'falso nominatae scientiae'. Nec enim ne scintia vita fides non est. Et haec omnia mire quadrant in hos quosdam spinosos theologistas. Non enim de omnibus loquor et fortassis nulli futuri sunt. Et apte dixit 'vocem inanitates', quod omnes remanentes intet nas laudantis "Vocum novitates" ["newness of voices"]. Kenophonias, that is, "empiness of voices". Ambrose and the translator appear to have read kainophonias, although the Greek glosses give an 'epsilon'. For this is not dealing with new voices but with unnecessary voices. From Chrysostom, it is not clear when the reader or listener reads. The fact reads and interprets it as kenophonias, that is, matoiologia, while not hiding the fact that Chrysostom appears to have read it as kain-
ophonias with the diphthong ai. He adds 'appears to' because, as we said, it is not evident from his commentary what his reading was. Falsi nominis [of a false name]. Pseudonoun as if you were to say, 'of falsely-named knowledge'. For there is no knowledge where there is no faith. And all these things fit amazingly well with certain of these thorny theologians. For I do not speak of all of them, and possibly not all will be such. And he aptly said antiitheses, "confrontations", for among these men every topic is a marvellously fierce combat"). ASD VI. 10: 118.

36 “Age admetetur, modo doni reinquat gryphos sophisticos, mata[ae]logos, scypchantias, superciliation, virulentias, rivas Saron-
donium, glorias Thrasonicas, from where the translation into English has been drawn

37 Not at all, for it has been assaulted even by that barbarism which dwells falsely named knowledge. For I do not speak of all of them, and possibly not all will be such. And he aptly said antiitheses, "confrontations", for among these men every topic is a marvellously fierce combat"). ASD VI. 10: 118.

38 Estúñiga’s attack against the humanist of Rotterdam in 1504 [1970, 207]: “Et est simili illi quod dicunt apo

39 Quaestio de speciebus intelligendi. Logiculus

40 Logiculus stems from the famous textbook of Paolo Veneto, the Parva logicalia. See Pomponazzi’s Quaesito de speciebus intelligibilibus et intellectu speculativo [c. 1504] 1970, 207: "Et est simili illi quod dicunt sophistas et logici] quod nomen et signum signiﬁcat signiﬁcatum et signiﬁcat
seismus" ("And it is similar to what the sophists and logicians say, that the name signifies its signified and signifies itself"), my italics.

Nebulas or nebulousness were much to the liking of Thomas More, see by way of the three of the Opuslogistarum in Libri VII. 27: "nec alius mirabilium generis, quam sentinus, coacras, latinas, merdas, stercora, facient quod ulterior, alias ex tempore capiensius conulium, uelinus ne sic bacchan- tem ex eius tractare uirtutibus et coloribus suis depingere: a furiosum fraterculum et latinarium nebuleomnia, cum suis fursis et furboribus, cum suis merdis et stercoribus, cacament cacatamque lingenque" ("and to carry nothing but boldness and anger, sewers, muck and dung, then let the other do what they will, we will take timely counsel, whether we wish to deal with the fellow thus ranting according to his virtues and to paint with his colors, or to leave this mad friar and privy-minded rascal with his rantings and ravings, with his filth and dung and muck and mire") More for the rest of his italics. See also: "Scholastic sophists and Sophistry as shit".

See Mutianus Rufus’s (1885, 658, 665) letter to Erasmus (Gotha, c. March 1523): "Quorsum tendat ternetitas et persueras ostentacio non video. Non obscur cantem et philosocie…" ("…where their headstrong folly and their perversive desire to shine will end, I do not know. The Camels and the Scotophiles are no obstacle…") also collected in Allen, Opus estipolatum V. 1425: 409; the translation is taken from CWE 10: 191. There is a wordplay (Duna) Scotos/ scóitus (‘darkness’ in Greek) here, see Erasmus 2011, 327n355.

See from Soretus, that is, ‘Socrates’ abbreviated in medival syllogisms. It is a fairly uncommon term, but it can be found inポンポナツィIのgesitibī de substantia aris [1507] 1966, 63.

On morologus, far less common than morologia, see Perotti 1995, I. X. 114, 63: "Et morologici dicuntur qui in sermo morosi, hoc est, molesti, dicuntur, et morologi huiusmodi dicuntur morologus. Plautus: ‘Nec molestum esse nec sermonibus morologis uti’ ("And those who are fussy, that is, affected, in their speech they call morologi. Thus words of this sort are also called morologi. Plautus: Neither be affected nor use morologi words.") Erasmus translates μορολογία as stultiloquium, another term with a long tradition in the attacks against sophistry; in his translation of Epik 5:4, AS VI. 3. 530. See my note to Erasmus 2014, 69n7 and later examples in Ramus fol. 63r; Cardano III. XII, 177b; and Estienne I, 111.

On morosaurus—a term taken from Luc. Alex. 40—and, more generally, for the Greek derogatory terms employed by Erasmus, see Thompson 2015. 333–335. The term became very common after Erasmus used it in the Praise of Folly, either in direct imitations of the work, such as the one found in Palingenius Stellatus 2012, vv. 504–520, pp. 325–326, or in original pieces, such as Rabelais’s Tiers Livre or Gillemiles Graecum’s play, Morosalus (1531).

Bude signs. pdr, gvn, qbr, and riv.

For the term theologist (or theologskarus), see Erasmus’s Adagia 870. Elephantus non capiti murem (ASD II. 2: 388–390) and Apologia contra Sanction Caracram (ASD IX. 8: Ioannis 20. Dominus meus et Deus meus, 34) and Melanchthon 1834, 286–326. The vocabulary was introduced into Latin which very soon thanks to the attacks against sophistry, in his translation of Epik 5:4, ASD VI. 3: 530. See my note to Erasmus 2014, 69n7 and later examples in Ramus fol. 63r; Cardano III. XII, 177b; and Estienne I, 111.

On morosaurus—a term taken from Luc. Alex. 40—and, more generally, for the Greek derogatory terms employed by Erasmus, see Thompson 2015. 333–335. The term became very common after Erasmus used it in the Praise of Folly, either in direct imitations of the work, such as the one found in Palingenius Stellatus 2012, vv. 504–520, pp. 325–326, or in original pieces, such as Rabelais’s Tiers Livre or Gillemiles Graecum’s play, Morosalus (1531).

Bude signs. pdr, gvn, qbr, and riv.

For the term theologist (or theologskarus), see Erasmus’s Adagia 870. Elephantus non capiti murem (ASD II. 2: 388–390) and Apologia contra Sanction Caracram (ASD IX. 8: Ioannis 20. Dominus meus et Deus meus, 34) and Melanchthon 1834, 286–326. The vocabulary was introduced into Latin which very soon thanks to the attacks against sophistry, in his translation of Epik 5:4, ASD VI. 3: 530. See my note to Erasmus 2014, 69n7 and later examples in Ramus fol. 63r; Cardano III. XII, 177b; and Estienne I, 111.

On morosaurus—a term taken from Luc. Alex. 40—and, more generally, for the Greek derogatory terms employed by Erasmus, see Thompson 2015. 333–335. The term became very common after Erasmus used it in the Praise of Folly, either in direct imitations of the work, such as the one found in Palingenius Stellatus 2012, vv. 504–520, pp. 325–326, or in original pieces, such as Rabelais’s Tiers Livre or Gillemiles Graecum’s play, Morosalus (1531).

Bude signs. pdr, gvn, qbr, and riv.

For the term theologist (or theologskarus), see Erasmus’s Adagia 870. Elephantus non capiti murem (ASD II. 2: 388–390) and Apologia contra Sanction Caracram (ASD IX. 8: Ioannis 20. Dominus meus et Deus meus, 34) and Melanchthon 1834, 286–326. The vocabulary was introduced into Latin which very soon thanks to the attacks against sophistry, in his translation of Epik 5:4, ASD VI. 3: 530. See my note to Erasmus 2014, 69n7 and later examples in Ramus fol. 63r; Cardano III. XII, 177b; and Estienne I, 111.

On morosaurus—a term taken from Luc. Alex. 40—and, more generally, for the Greek derogatory terms employed by Erasmus, see Thompson 2015. 333–335. The term became very common after Erasmus used it in the Praise of Folly, either in direct imitations of the work, such as the one found in Palingenius Stellatus 2012, vv. 504–520, pp. 325–326, or in original pieces, such as Rabelais’s Tiers Livre or Gillemiles Graecum’s play, Morosalus (1531).

Bude signs. pdr, gvn, qbr, and riv.

For the term theologist (or theologskarus), see Erasmus’s Adagia 870. Elephantus non capiti murem (ASD II. 2: 388–390) and Apologia contra Sanction Caracram (ASD IX. 8: Ioannis 20. Dominus meus et Deus meus, 34) and Melanchthon 1834, 286–326. The vocabulary was introduced into Latin which very soon thanks to the attacks against sophistry, in his translation of Epik 5:4, ASD VI. 3: 530. See my note to Erasmus 2014, 69n7 and later examples in Ramus fol. 63r; Cardano III. XII, 177b; and Estienne I, 111.

On morosaurus—a term taken from Luc. Alex. 40—and, more generally, for the Greek derogatory terms employed by Erasmus, see Thompson 2015. 333–335. The term became very common after Erasmus used it in the Praise of Folly, either in direct imitations of the work, such as the one found in Palingenius Stellatus 2012, vv. 504–520, pp. 325–326, or in original pieces, such as Rabelais’s Tiers Livre or Gillemiles Graecum’s play, Morosalus (1531).

Bude signs. pdr, gvn, qbr, and riv.
Eight Books of Aristotle’s Physics

remove themselves further f

ligious men [...] set their minds to civic struggles; others, in order to

simarum rerum quam

quillissimo portu trans Alpes

postea viri [...] ad civilia certamina animos applicarunt; alii ut longius a

twisting the many round and round into one, now unfolding and untwis

stumbles on

from it. The adolescent quibbler falls into three vices. As soon as he

this impiety [deny God’s Providence] and in the

procacitas statim exoritur” (“In the

unum, tum unum in multitudinem explicans et evolvens, ubi superbia et

unum, tum unum in multitudinem explicans et evolvens, ubi superbia et

stumbling and exults and throws his arms around

Inde tibi lector aceruus ille spurcissimorum latratuum, quibus solis

Lutheri pectus

defecit? Chirurgus. Indulgentiae sunt, quas iam pridem

medicinae vis ad inferiora descendit: audistis?

Johannes of Salisbury, 63: 32; J.L. Vives. “De cau-

Contra eum qui maledixit Italiae

Pirckheimer’s (Pirckheimer, 68

hrew up a red beret! Surgeon. He was

abused his stomach? Friends. We do, ad it’s no wonder he took sick.

The wonder more of how he could live! Surgeon. I arrived in the nick of

Pay attention: you’ll hear something that is very rare indeed”

you philosophers do when you’re measuring and investigating heavens.

ratio nisi in argutiis et

issues. Nor did they even lay the foundations of their disputations in

questions. Nor did they even lay the foundations of their disputations in

philosophy”).

scurriliter, aut meretrix petulanter, aut leno turpiter, aut balneator spurce,

(1969, 60

regions. Did you hear? He voided something. Friends. You mean he

whence

millennium, magnum se aliquid credit, dum ‘Phisicam’

no Greek or Latin learning, he thinks he is someone great when he

foule mouth into that railers’ book of his, like d

supercilium

Contra eum qui maledixit Italiae

in his

scoliosis; art; and whose fraud would be called

captatius

ipsi dicantur captiosi et fraus ipsa

captatio

ipsi

sdom and exults and throws his arms around

spits out

The adolescent quibbler falls into three vices. As soon as he

bilem egessit? Chirurgus. Indulgentiae sunt, quas iam pridem

medicinae vis ad inferiora descendit: audistis?

lame.

Renaissances, he thinks he is someone great when he

captatius vetul aranearum telis confidunt, nec eorum adhuc ullus

repetus est, cuius memoria ex improviso fecunda promptaque fuerit.

Itaque, qui non vis, ad acumen pervenire contendis, cum ipsis ramis

quos comprehenderis decidens” (“For they profess what they are ignorant

of, and only rely on certain tricks or skilful logical quirks, spiders’ webs

if you will; up to now we have found not one of them who can think on

his feet with a fertile and ready memory. And so be careful that, when

struggling, you do not fall down along with the very branches you take hold of”), my italics.

Pontano 2002, 114: “Si quod si captationem ipsam duplicem fecerimus, et
eorum quos cupiditas habendi trahit et quos popularis aerae atque

ambitionis studium, ut alteri pecuniae, alteri popularis aerae captatores
dicantur, fortasse non male distribuissse iudicabimur, quando etiam sunt
qui inter loquendum disserendumque etiam verba capent, qui quidem
ipsi dicantur captiosi et fraus ipsa capituncula” (“So if we should make

capitatio to consist of two kinds—of those whom acquisitive greed

moves, and of those moved by popular favour and the zeal of an

ambition—, so that both would be called captatores, one moved by

money, the other by popular acclaim: we will not be judged to have made a poor

distinction if there are also those who, in the midst of speaking and
discussing, ‘capture’ words too, who indeed would themselves be called

captiosi, and whose fraud would be called capituncula”), my italics.

Pontano 2002, 114: “Si quod si captationem ipsam duplicem fecerimus, et
eorum quos cupiditas habendi trahit et quos popularis aerae atque

ambitionis studium, ut alteri pecuniae, alteri popularis aerae captatores
dicantur, fortasse non male distribuissse iudicabimur, quando etiam sunt
qui inter loquendum disserendumque etiam verba capent, qui quidem
ipsi dicantur captiosi et fraus ipsa capituncula” (“So if we should make

capitatio to consist of two kinds—of those whom acquisitive greed

moves, and of those moved by popular favour and the zeal of an

ambition—, so that both would be called captatores, one moved by

money, the other by popular acclaim: we will not be judged to have made a poor

distinction if there are also those who, in the midst of speaking and
discussing, ‘capture’ words too, who indeed would themselves be called

captiosi, and whose fraud would be called capituncula”), my italics.


infamiam adversus legitimos philosophos Socratem praeerat hinc

exortam in Apologia testatur. Tri a haec incurrir vitae adolescencius cav

villator. Qui ut primum capitunculus attigat admodum congratulatur, tam-

quam thesaurum sapientiae nactus, laetitiae exultat ac gestit et argu-

mentatioanum omnes prompte pertentat, tum gyro multa retorexunt in

umanis mentibus. Quaerunt enim, quae est materia, quaerunt, quae

fendi infamy that befell legitimate philosophers, particularly Socrates, from

about, it the adolescent quibbler falls into three vices. As soon as he

stumbles on verbal paradoxes, he congratulates himself as if he’d come

upon a treasure-house of wisdom and exults and throws his arms around

with delight and promptly assays every paradoxical argument, now

twisting the many round and round into one, now unfolding and untwist-

ing the one into the many”). See also Ficino 2005, 136–137.

3 See, for instance, Merula IV, fol. 73d: “Ser proh dolor, religiosi poeta

postea viri [...] ad eiuclia certaminis animos applicarent; ali ad luctum

spectae tum molarum et seditionum procella se subducant, in tran-

quissilissimo portu trans Alpes philosophantes non tam speculatione alit-

simarum rerum quam frivolis quaestionibus et capitunculis quibusdam

vacabant. Quoniam concludituis fuisse [...]” (“But alas, afterwards re-

ligioun in our minds to civil things, and in February remove themselves further from the sight of the tempest of so many evils

and seditions, idled away their time in a most quiet harbour across the

Alps, philosophers not so much in speculation concerning the

highest matters as in frivolous questions and certain logical quirks. How

much more nuce the apostrophe verborum captationes”), my italics. In February

29th, 1520, in a letter to Pirckheimer, Reuchlin (2013, 321) uses capti-

uncula, according to its original meaning, to refer to legal sophistries.

De Ferraris XXV, 149–150.

31 See Choltevhe’s Commentary [1502] on LeFevre’s Paraphrases of the

Eight Books of Aristotle’s Physics (LeFevre d’Etaples 10); Eck, Briefwechsel 2 (to Matthias Ackermann, June 3, 1506); Erasmus. “Vita

Hieronymi”. Erasmi opuscula 178, CWE 6: 52; Id. Enarration on the first Psalm. Bonus vir, ASD V. 2, 54; CWE 63: 32; J.L. Vives. “De cau-

sorum corruptionum” 1783b, 201–202; and Agrippa von Nettelsheim 1551, ch. XCIV 118
voured dung. From there, reader, you receive that accumulated mass of indecent brawlings, with which alone the utterly foolish book is filled”).

See Erasmus’s *Spongia adversus aspergines Hutteni* [1523]: “Fortasse sic me volebat Huttenus scribere: ‘spurcissima latrina, tun’ audes viros heros tuis merdosis libellis aspergere?’ Forsitan sic deebat scribere Huttenum, at non deebat Erasmus” (“Hutten would perhaps have wanted me to address Hoogstraten in this fashion: ‘You filthy cesspool, how dare you defile men of heroic stature with your muck-filled books?’ Such a style might be fitting for Hutten, but not for Erasmus”), ASD IX. 1, 136; CWE 78: 56. Erasmus, as it is known, could be, and actually was, equally harsh when the situation required, see by way of example (there are many more) his *Concio sive Merdardus* [1531]: “Merdardus suas mertosas purulentias effuderit”, ASD I. 3: 655.

80 “Sed in nostrae tempestatis theologastros quosdam iocari libuit, quorum cerebellis nihil putidius, linguæ nihil barbarius, ingenio nihil stupidius, doctrina nihil spinosius, moribus nihil asperius, vita nihil fucatius, oratione nihil virulentius, pectore nihil nigrius” (“I merely wished to make a joke at the expense of a few quasi-theologians of our own day, whose brains are the most addled, tongues the most uncultured, wits the dullest, teachings the thorniest, characters the least attractive, lives the most hypocritical, talk the most slanderous, and hearts the blackest on earth”) Allen, *Opus epistolarum* I. 64: 192–193; CWE 1: 138, my italics.


82 Rabelais 1955, 189 and 1999, ch. IV, 149.

83 Valeriano IX. 5, 100.

84 Humanist invectives, for instance, have been thoroughly studied in the following articles and monographs: Mattioli, 127–139; Allen 1986, 417–55; Fabbri, 551–556; Godman, 26–30, 39–51, 54–56, 76–77, 82–100, 253–260, etc.; Laureys, 9–30; Rao; Helmrath, 259–293; and Rizzi, 145–158.