



# Vernacular Aristotelianism in Italy from the Fourteenth to the Seventeenth Century







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Vernacular Aristotelianism in Italy  
from the Fourteenth to the  
Seventeenth Century

Edited by Luca Bianchi, Simon Gilson and Jill Kraye

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## Francesco Robortello on Popularizing Knowledge\*

Marco Sgarbi

My aim in this article is to discuss Francesco Robortello's theory of the popularization of knowledge. After some preliminary remarks on popularizing knowledge during the Renaissance, I shall present Robortello's three strategies for making scientific and philosophical material more relevant: schematizing, rhetoricizing and translating knowledge. My claim is that for Robortello popularization and translation into the vernacular were first and foremost means of educating people, not of reducing high culture to a lower level. His intention was to discover the most appropriate techniques for making the complex knowledge more accessible. Whatever the results of popularization might be, the process was motivated by an intent to democratize knowledge. Knowledge, after all, is power, a power that belongs to all – the power of the people.

### Popularizing Knowledge in the Vernacular

Humanism, especially in its early stages in the fifteenth century, entailed a commitment to classical antiquity, both Greek and Latin; and humanists campaigned vigorously for the identification of *res* and *verba*, object and word, form and content. The range of humanist approaches was very wide, but a theme common to them all was the Ciceronian view that human beings manifest their fullest *humanitas* through the word, a view which effectively recalled rhetoric from the oblivion to which it had been consigned by medieval scholasticism, especially in the field of philosophy.<sup>1</sup> A mutually sustaining relationship was thus formed between *verba* and *res*, eloquence and wisdom, which from the humanist perspective stood in opposition to the outlook of the so-called *barbari britanni*. Humanism was therefore characterized by two indivisible elements of thought: on the one hand, the thing (*res*) and its conceivability (*ratio*); on the other, the appropriate expression of the object (*verbum*).<sup>2</sup> Eugenio Garin rightly insisted that, despite internal tensions in humanism and its various developments, the axis between reason and word, wisdom and eloquence, was the same as the fifteenth-century humanist conviction that human beings, without reason and without words, would be beasts or barbarians, ruled

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<sup>1</sup> Cicero, *De oratore* I.32–3. See V. Cox, 'Ciceronian Rhetoric in Late Medieval Italy: The Latin and Vernacular Traditions', in *The Rhetoric of Cicero in its Medieval and Early Renaissance Commentary Tradition*, ed. V. Cox and J. O. Ward, Leiden, 2006, pp. 109–43.

<sup>2</sup> G. Paparelli, *Feritas, Humanitas, Divinitas. L'essenza umanistica del Rinascimento*, Naples, 1970, pp. 28–39.





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by sensual appetites alone and not worthy of the civilized existence which was their birth right.<sup>3</sup> *Ratio* and *elocutio* became the distinctive features of a new *humanitas*.

By the end of the fifteenth century, however, the tension between wisdom and eloquence, *res* and *verba*, was beginning to make itself felt, especially as a result of a growing obsession with the purely philological aspects of the text at the expense of the conceptual content it expressed.<sup>4</sup> The study of classical texts, in terms of both language and content, which was meant to lead to a dialogue with the great minds of the past, to the development of a historical-critical sensitivity and a moral conscience, became in some cases, as Garin pointed out, an a-critical parroting of past models and a sterile erudition which constituted a flagrant betrayal of the ideals of humanism itself.<sup>5</sup> From the outset, this later stage of humanism ran the risk of degenerating into pedantry. Passionate admiration for classical authors combined with a narrow-minded, obsessive study of their works, encouraged humanists to sanctify the languages and eloquence of antiquity as objects of veneration, whereas the contemporary vernacular was dismissed out of hand. Humanists deliberately avoided common ways of speaking and almost invariably shunned the public, adorning their diction wherever possible and cultivating elaborate elocution and gesture in both prose and poetry, in the knowledge that a popular audience would not understand them.

According to Garin, this degeneration of the *studia humanitatis* gave rise to the notion that the classical languages alone had the privilege of signifying mental concepts and the belief that Latin and Greek, by their very nature, definitively determined the structures of thought and of knowledge.<sup>6</sup> Running counter to this misconception of knowledge was the growing conviction that if language was to satisfy a human need to communicate thoughts, all languages and all styles must enjoy equal expressiveness.<sup>7</sup> As Jill Kraye has noted, moreover, some thinkers took the position that philosophical discourse should not be so unpolished and unrefined as to prove offensive to readers, but nor should it be embellished to the point of deformity through an excessive use of rhetoric. Philosophy, they felt, should not be reduced to mere philology by focusing on purely linguistic issues ‘in the new-fangled manner of pedantic grammarians such as Lorenzo Valla’, since it was ‘concerned not with words but with the uncovering of the secrets of nature’.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> E. Garin, *L’umanesimo italiano. Filosofia e vita civile nel Rinascimento*, Bari, 1994, pp. 11–14.

<sup>4</sup> V. Vianello, *Il letterato, l’accademia e il libro. Contributi sulla cultura veneta del Cinquecento*, Padua, 1988, p. 107.

<sup>5</sup> E. Garin, *L’educazione in Europa (1400–1600). Problemi e programmi*, Bari, 1957, p. 197.

<sup>6</sup> Garin, *L’umanesimo italiano* (n. 3 above), pp. 184–5.

<sup>7</sup> C. Vasoli, ‘Sperone Speroni: La filosofia e lingua. L’ombra del Pomponazzi e un programma di “volgarizzamento” del sapere’, in *Il volgare come lingua di cultura dal Trecento al Cinquecento*, ed. A. Calzona et al., Florence, 2003, pp. 339–59; Marco Sgarbi, ‘Pietro Pomponazzi sul linguaggio. Filosofia e retorica’, in *Poética da Razão. Homenagem a Leonel Ribeiro dos Santos*, Lisboa, 2013, pp. 441–55.

<sup>8</sup> J. Kraye, ‘Philologists and Philosophers’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, ed. J. Kraye, Cambridge, 1996, pp. 142–60 (145).

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It is within the context of and in opposition to this narrowly rhetorical style of producing knowledge for a sophisticated readership that new forms of popularizing and vernacularizing knowledge arose. The leaders of this movement were figures such as Antonio Brucioli (1498–1566), Sperone Speroni (1500–1588), Benedetto Varchi (1503–1565), Alessandro Piccolomini (1508–1578) and Orazio Toscanella (1520–1579), along with many others. In spite of the protests of more conservative humanists, who preferred to use Latin in every form of literary expression, these intellectuals paved the way for a split between eloquence and wisdom, rhetoric and philosophy, *verba* and *res*. Caution is obviously needed when describing this process. It was not based on an anti-humanist position, as some scholars have maintained, but instead the development of a new form of humanism centred on content and concepts rather than on words and expressions.<sup>9</sup> Nor did these authors advocate an uncouth philosophical discourse with no attention whatever given to communicative effectiveness. It was primarily a matter of putting an end to the disproportionate emphasis on textual philology and exegesis, in order to allow the content of the works to breathe. With its stress on the content of knowledge, the assertion in various countries of the vernacular against the classical languages was not the triumph of a less learned tradition; it was rather the determined pursuit of knowledge and the most effective means of disseminating it. There was a clear awareness among these intellectuals that philosophy or, more generally, knowledge was not a matter solely for universities and for restricted circles of intellectuals well versed in the classical languages. These authors were driven by a typically humanist civic commitment to writing for the purpose of communicating knowledge to as wide a section of the population as possible; and they were prepared to employ whatever techniques were needed in pursuit of that aim. As we shall see, Sperone Speroni, Giovanbattista Gelli and Bernardino Tomitano all wrote programmatic texts on this topic. To start with, popularizing meant enlarging the socio-cultural bases of access to knowledge and widening the audience and potential readership. This was a priority for vernacular humanism.

Luca Bianchi has recently maintained that not all intellectuals who wrote in the vernacular achieved this aim and that the intentions of authors should be understood in light of the result of their works.<sup>10</sup> While this is doubtless true, the fact that the actual readers of a work were for the most part fewer than those imagined or hoped for should not diminish the historical significance of this new conception of the popularization of knowledge. The use of the vernacular language was no longer conceived as a merely stylistic or literary exercise for literary composition, but as an instrument for the transmission of knowledge and making new discoveries.<sup>11</sup> This is particularly evident in

<sup>9</sup> M. Sgarbi, *The Italian Mind. Vernacular Logic in Renaissance Italy (1540–1551)*, Leiden, 2014, pp. 23–30.

<sup>10</sup> L. Bianchi, 'Volgarizzare Aristotele: per chi?', *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie*, 59, 2012, pp. 480–95 (494).

<sup>11</sup> M. Sgarbi, 'Aristotle and the People. Vernacular Philosophy in Renaissance Italy', *Renaissance and Reformation*, forthcoming.

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Speroni: ‘may God will it’, he writes, ‘that, for the benefit of those who will come after me, some learned and generous person will dedicate himself to rendering into vernacular all the books of all the disciplines, as many as can be counted in Greek and Latin, so that the number of good philosophers will be greater than it is now and their excellence more rare’.<sup>12</sup> He hopes, furthermore, ‘to translate the philosophy sown by our Aristotle in the fields of Athens from Greek into vernacular ... in this way Peripatetic speculations would become far more familiar to us, and we would be at home with them more than at present; and they would be easier to deal with and would be understood by us if some learned man would translate them from Greek into the vernacular’.<sup>13</sup> Bernardino Tomitano is even more direct in stating that:

il parlar Greco d’Aristotile et di Platone, più che mentre in Romane voci favellano, non accresce autorità alla cognitione delle cose lor dette, perciò che quello stesso che sotto la scorza delle Greche voci si contiene, fedelmente sotto le Romane inteso, et non pur quelle, ma le Toscane, Venetiane, Padovane, Bresciane, et altre voci renderà quello stesso odore a chiunque legge che nelle Greche.<sup>14</sup>

Aristotle and Plato’s speaking in Greek rather than Latin adds nothing to the power of cognition of the things they say; therefore, what is uttered beneath the outer skin of Greek words is faithfully understood beneath the outer skin of Latin ones, and not only these, but also Tuscan, Venetian, Paduan and Brescian [words] as well; and other languages will convey the same essence as the Greek words to anyone who reads them.

According to Speroni and Tomitano, the vernacular could claim full rights for its dignity and its capacity to express even the most complex of philosophical concepts. Moreover, the use of the vernacular was increasingly felt to be necessary for the purpose of divulging philosophy and other disciplines outside the universities so as to ‘conquer a different public and to be released from the constraints and limitations of traditional culture of which scholastic Latin was the vessel’.<sup>15</sup>

The arguments in defence of the vernacular and of popular knowledge put forward by Speroni and Tomitano, as well as by Varchi and Piccolomini, were rooted in a growing awareness that every culture is an ongoing transcription and translation of prior experiences, which, once transposed into different contexts, yield new fruits and make possible the discovery of new horizons.<sup>16</sup> The affirmation of vernacular language and knowledge was not only a polemic against the single-mindedly philological approach

<sup>12</sup> Sperone Speroni, *Dialogo delle lingue*, Pescara, 1999, p. 184: ‘Dio volesse in servizio di chi verrà dopo me, che tutti i libri d’ogni scientia quanti ne sono greci, et latini, alcuna dotta, et pietosa persona si desse a render volgari, che per certo il numero de i boni philosophanti sarebbe più spesso, che egli non è, et più rara diverrebbe la loro excellentia.’

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192: ‘dunque tradurre la philosophia seminata dal nostra Aristotele ne i campi d’Athene, di greco in volgar ... così le speculationi peripathetiche ci diverrebbero assai più familiari, et domestiche che non sono al presente, et più facilmente si tratterebbero, et intenderebbono da noi se di greco in volgar alcun dotto homo le convertisse.’

<sup>14</sup> Bernardino Tomitano, *Ragionamenti della lingua toscana*, Venice, 1546, p. 40.

<sup>15</sup> T. Gregory, *Origini della terminologia filosofica moderna. Linee di ricerca*, Florence, 2006, p. 72.

<sup>16</sup> T. Gregory, ‘Translatio studiorum’, in *Translatio studiorum. Ancient, Medieval and Modern Bearers of Intellectual History*, ed. M. Sgarbi, Leiden, 2012, pp. 1–21.

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adopted by the experts of antiquity: it also lent weight to the idea that the new philosophy must not blindly follow ancient authorities, hiding behind – in Speroni's words – a 'fable of words', and that, by adding new content to ancient wisdom, philosophy 'must advance our enterprise', that is, our knowledge.<sup>17</sup>

As a result, a new conception emerged, according to which knowledge was, above all else, power.<sup>18</sup> Antonio Tridapale makes this point explicit in the dedicatory letter to his *Loica*, in which Alexander the Great accuses Aristotle of seeking to popularize the knowledge in which he himself had been educated, resulting in a loss of strength for the Greeks in their struggles against the Persians, since knowledge implies dominion and power, both of which evaporate once possessed by all and sundry.<sup>19</sup> Knowledge, in Alexander's view, should remain the preserve of a select few, a standpoint which Tridapale regards as entirely unnatural, since human beings tend naturally towards knowledge and denying them the opportunity and means of knowing is inhuman. Knowledge must be made accessible to everyone, and this is the reason why it is necessary to write not only in Greek and Latin, but also in the vernacular: in this way one can also reach those who are not trained in the classical languages. The highest ambition must therefore be, without reservation, to facilitate mankind in the knowledge of things which nature has made available to all;<sup>20</sup> and it is the duty of every man to assist others in improving their knowledge of things and to turn such knowledge to useful and beneficial purposes.<sup>21</sup> Only thus, in the pursuit of the new idea of the human being enshrined in vernacular humanism, may each of us improve our lot and set ourselves apart from other living creatures.<sup>22</sup> Giovanbattista Gelli shared the same ideas, asserting that: 'our language is well suited to expressing any concept in philosophy or astrology or any other discipline, and it does so just as well as Latin, and perhaps even Greek, too',<sup>23</sup> and that 'there can be nothing more useful and praiseworthy [than pursuing knowledge in our language] because most mistakes arise from ignorance'. Therefore, 'may the princes see to it, and in so doing be like fathers to their people; and it is the responsibility of a father not only to govern his sons, but also to teach and correct them'.<sup>24</sup> Princes like Alexander

<sup>17</sup> Speroni, *Dialogo delle lingue* (n. 12 above), p. 184: 'per altezza d'ingegno non siamo punto inferiori agli antichi, nondimeno in dottrine tanto siamo minori, quanto lungo tempo stati sviati dietro alle favole delle parole, coloro finalmente imitiamo filosofando, alli quali alcuna cosa aggiungendo, dee avanzare la nostra industria'. See Gregory, *Origini* (n. 15 above), pp. 35–8.

<sup>18</sup> Sgarbi, *The Italian Mind* (n. 9 above), pp. 127–32.

<sup>19</sup> Antonio Tridapale, *Loica*, Venice, 1547, fol. 2'.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 2<sup>r-v</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 2'.

<sup>23</sup> Giovanbattista Gelli, *Opere*, Bari and Roma, 1976, p. 182: 'la nostra lingua è attissima a esprimere qual si voglia concetto di filosofia o astrologia o di qualunque altra scienza, e così bene come si sia la latina, e forse anche la greca'.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203: 'non si possa da cosa più utile né lodevole [che il condurre le scienza nella nostra lingua] perché la maggior parte degli errori nascono dall'ignoranza ... i principi attenderci, con ciò sia che sieno come padri de' popoli: e al padre non s'appartiene solamente governare i figliuoli, ma insegnar loro e correggerli'.

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the Great have the duty to share knowledge in the vernacular in order to educate their vassals, thereby saving them from ignorance. Those who, like Alexander, want to restrict access to knowledge, because 'it is not right that any commoner (*volgare*) should know what it took another many years of toil to learn', in Gelli's view are affected by an 'accursed envy' and a 'desire to be held in higher regard than others'.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, he goes on, 'anyone who writes does so for no other reason than that their thoughts, being preserved in writing, which, unlike the spoken word, does not disappear, may be understood by the whole world'.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, even if some philosophical works still remain very complex to read and understand, the primary goal of vernacularization is to provide knowledge to the largest possible portion of population. In this sense, and in this sense only, to vernacularize means, above all, to popularize, and not merely to translate from one language to another.

The notion of democratizing knowledge, along with the idea that knowledge is power and must be communicated to every level of society, mark a radical departure from a past in which philosophical knowledge and the power of culture were restricted to the exclusive confines of the intellectual élites in the universities and the Church,<sup>27</sup> a departure made possible thanks to a genuine impulse towards the popularization of knowledge generated by a new culture. Gelli was well aware of the restriction of knowledge to a select circle of people, blaming it on

l'avarizia de' preti e de' frati, che non bastando loro quella prozione delle decime che aveva ordinato loro Iddio per legge, a voler vivere tanto sontuosamente come e' fanno ce le tengono ascose, e ce le vendono a poco a poco, come si dice a minuto, e in quel modo che e' vogliono, spaventando gli uomini con mille falsi minacci ... di maniera che egli hanno cavato di mano a' poveri secolari più che la metà di quel che egli avevano ... è similmente la impietà di molti dottori e avvocati che ci vogliono vender le cose comuni; e per poterlo far meglio, hanno trovato questo bel ghiribizzo, che i contratti non si possin fare in volgare ... e' sarebbe molto più utile che e' si faccessino nella nostra lingua, perché l'uomo intenderebbe quel che e' facesse.

the avarice of priests and friars, who, not content with the tithe which God apportioned to them by divine law, living in luxury as they do, keep things hidden from us and feed them to us bit by bit, piecemeal, in whichever way suits their interests, scaring us off with a thousand empty threats ... to the point that they have robbed the poor layman of more than half of what he owned; ... and likewise the impious doctors and lawyers who wish to sell us common

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 201: '... O qual cagione adunche può essere che gli muova a dire che le cose che si traducono in volgare si avvilitano e perdon di riputazione? ... Quella che io ti dissi l'altro giorno che era cagione di tanti altri mali, la invidia maladetta, e il desiderio ch'egli hanno di esser tenuti da più de gli altri ... . Certamente io credo che tu dica il vero: perché io mi ricordo che ritrovandomi a questi giorni dove erano certi litterati, e dicendi uno che Bernardo Segni aveva fatto volgare la *Retorica* d'Aristotele, uno di loro disse che egli aveva fatto un gran male; e domandato della ragione, rispose: "Perché e' non istà bene ch'ogni volgare abbia a sapere quello che un altro si arà guadagnato in molti anni con gran fatica".

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 202: 'chiunque scrive non lo fa per altro se non perché le cose sue, essendo conservate dalle lettere, che non vengono meno come le voci, sieno intese da tutto il mondo'.

<sup>27</sup> C. Dionisotti, *Geografia e storia della letteratura italiana*, Turin, 1967, pp. 47–73.

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knowledge and, in order to do so more efficiently, have come up with this wonderful little ruse whereby contracts may not be written in the *volgare*, ... and it would be far more useful to do these things in our language, because that way people would be able to understand what is going on.<sup>28</sup>

In the sixteenth century a new *forma mentis* took shape, which differed from the culture of the fifteenth century and which seemed to fulfil the Book of Daniel's prophecy (12.4) that 'many will pass through and knowledge will be increased'.<sup>29</sup>

There were many ways of popularizing knowledge in the sixteenth century. One, of course – probably the most important and innovative of the time – was the translation of knowledge from the classical languages into the vernacular; but there were other ways as well. For instance, there are examples of popularization in Latin such as the *Tabula* and *Theoremata* of Marcantonio Zimara (c. 1460–1532), which were designed to facilitate access to Aristotelian and Averroist doctrines and, by doing so, produced a body of knowledge on which many 'vernacular philosophers', including Varchi and Piccolomini, relied in their Italian philosophical works.<sup>30</sup>

It is important to stress that the popularization of knowledge did not necessarily entail its simplification; and we should not fall into the error of supposing that knowledge was more easily taught and understood as a result of wider diffusion. Undoubtedly one of the reasons why historians have consistently undervalued the vernacular and popular philosophical writings of the Renaissance is that they have been viewed merely as simplified versions of Latin works.<sup>31</sup>

Popularizing knowledge and philosophy meant making more accessible and relevant to a wider public what had previously been the prerogative of a small circle of intellectuals. Rather than trivialization, it always entailed an attempt to make the largest number of people more learned; so, we find in vernacular and popular writings references to past authors or interpreters, complex doctrines, even long Greek and Latin quotations or philological discussions on the reliability of manuscripts. Nor should this move be interpreted as an aristocratization of popular philosophy – not only would this be nonsensical, but it would also fly in the face of the intentions of the authors involved. On the contrary, it was an attempt to improve knowledge in every possible manner. In order, however, to assess the real extent of this widening of the socio-cultural bases of knowledge, we must focus, as Bianchi has warned us, not only on the authors' intentions but also on their frequent use of basic definitions of technical terms, examples, explanatory diagrams, schemes or tables, and meta-textual annotations aimed at helping

<sup>28</sup> Gelli, *Opere* (n. 23 above), p. 205.

<sup>29</sup> B. Vickers, 'Francis Bacon and the Progress of Knowledge', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 53, 1992, pp. 495–518.

<sup>30</sup> Sgarbi, *The Italian Mind* (n. 9 above), pp. 66, 100–102.

<sup>31</sup> L. Bianchi, 'Per una storia dell'aristotelismo "volgare" nel Rinascimento: problemi e prospettive di ricerca', *Bruniana & Campanelliana*, 15, 2009, pp. 367–85.

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inexperienced readers to orient themselves within Aristotelian works.<sup>32</sup> I propose to do precisely this in the section below, with a case study of Francesco Robortello, focusing, in particular, on some of his understudied manuscripts.

### Schematizing Knowledge

It is my conviction that an inductive historical approach based on the study of small traces left in the manuscripts of minor figures such as Robortello is often more useful in reconstructing the features of an age than investigations of major events or of first-rate thinkers – all too often unique individuals who do not clearly reflect the times they live in.

Francesco Robortello was born in Udine in 1516. He studied at the University of Bologna under Romolo Amaseo and afterwards taught Greek, Latin rhetoric and eloquence in Lucca (1537/38–1543), Pisa (1543–1549), Venice (1549–1552), Padua (1552–1557), Bologna (1557–1561) and again in Padua (1561–1567), where he died.<sup>33</sup> He is best known for his *In Aristotelis Poeticam explicationes* and *De arte sive ratione corrigendi antiquorum libros disputatio*, both published in Florence in 1548, and both traditionally viewed as marking a new era in textual criticism. His methods of

<sup>32</sup> Bianchi, 'Volgarizzare Aristotele' (n. 10 above), p. 494.

<sup>33</sup> G. G. Liruti, *Notizie delle vite ed opere scritte da' letterati del Friuli*, II, Fenzo, 1762, pp. 413–83 (424–5, 436); B. Weinberg, 'Robortello on the Poetics', in *Critics and Criticism. Ancient and Modern*, ed. R. S. Crane et al., Chicago, 1952, pp. 319–48; C. Diano, 'Francesco Robortello interprete della catarsi', in *Aristotelismo padovano e filosofia aristotelica*, Florence, 1960, pp. 71–9; id., 'Euripide auteur de la catarsi tragique', *Numen*, 2, 1961, pp. 117–41; B. Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, I, Chicago, 1961, pp. 66–7 and 388–9; A. Carlini, 'L'attività filologica di Francesco Robortello', *Atti dell'Accademia di scienze lettere e arti di Udine*, 7, 1966–1969, pp. 5–36; C. Diano, 'La catarsi tragica', in *Saggezza e poetiche degli antichi*, Vicenza, 1968, 215–69; F. Donadi, 'La catarsi storica secondo Robortello', *Atti e memorie dell'Accademia patavina di scienze lettere ed arti*, 82, 1969–1970, pp. 63–9; F. Donadi, 'Un inedito del Robortello: La Praefatio in Tacitum', *Atti e memorie dell'Accademia patavina di scienze lettere ed arti*, 82, 1969–1970, pp. 299–321; G. Cotroneo, *I trattatisti dell'ars historica*, Naples, 1971, pp. 121–68; E. E. Ryan, 'Robortello and Maggi on Aristotle's Theory of Catharsis', *Rinascimento*, 22, 1982, pp. 263–73; A. Carlini, 'Robortello editore di Eschilo', *Annali della Scuola Normale di Pisa. Classe di Lettere e Filosofia*, 19, 1989, pp. 313–22; M. J. Vega Ramos, *La formación de la teoría de la comedia: Francesco Robortello*, Cáceres, 1997; M. Venier, 'Belloni, Robortello ed Egnazio: Nuovi e vecchi documenti su una contesa umanistica', *Metodi e Ricerche*, 17, 1998, pp. 51–66; S. Cappello, 'Francesco Robortello e la sua opera nella cultura francese', in *I rapporti dei friulani con l'Italia e con l'Europa nell'epoca veneta*, Padua, 2000, pp. 117–46; F. Donadi, 'Francesco Robortello da Udine', *Lexis. Poetica, retorica e comunicazione nella tradizione classica*, 19, 2001, pp. 79–91; D. Blocker, 'Élucider et équivoquer: Francesco Robortello (ré)invente la catharsis', *Le Cahiers du Centre de Recherches Historiques*, 33, 2004, pp. 2–24; B. Zlobec Del Vecchio, 'Talia divino dum fundit Sontius ore. Nota in margine a un carne di Francesco Robortello', *Incontri triestini di filologia classica*, 6, 2006–2007, pp. 121–39; K. Vanek, *Ars corrigendi in der frühen Neuzeit. Studien zur Geschichte der Textkritik*, Berlin and New York, 2007, pp. 15–51; S. Cappello, 'Robortello, Francesco', in *Nuovo Liruti. Dizionario biografico dei Friulani*, II: *L'età veneta*, ed. C. Scalon et al., Udine, 2009, pp. 2151–7; M. C. Angioni, 'L'Oresteia nell'edizione di Robortello da Udine: alcuni casi di metafora e griphos', *Itaca. Quaderns Catalans de Cultura Clàssica*, 27, 2011, pp. 111–31; M. Venier, 'Francesco Robortello: Discorso sull'arte ovvero sul metodo di correggere gli autori antichi', *Ecdotica*, 9, 2012, pp. 183–218; E. Garavelli, 'Un frammento di Francesco Robortello: Del traslare d'una lingua in l'altra', in *Studi di Italianistica nordica*, Roma, 2014, pp. 287–305; S. Cappello, 'L'editio princeps ritrovata del De artificio dicendi (1560) di Francesco Robortello', in *Dal Friuli alle Americhe. Studi di amici e allievi udinesi per Silvana Serafin*, ed. A. Ferraro, Udine, 2015, pp. 133–148; M. Sgarbi, 'Francesco Robortello on Topics', *Viator*, 47, 2016, pp. 365–88; id., 'Francesco Robortello's Rhetoric. On the Orator and his Arguments', *Rhetorica*, forthcoming.

## FRANCESCO ROBORTELLO ON POPULARIZING KNOWLEDGE

popularizing and translating knowledge have received little attention, however, since all the material has remained in manuscript.

Robortello had at least three ways of popularizing knowledge. The first was schematization: using schemata, diagrams, graphs and trees to present information. Lina Bolzoni was the first to highlight this important aspect of Robortello's work, but her research focused primarily on the arrangement and memorization of knowledge.<sup>34</sup> My aim, by contrast, is to concentrate on schematization as a means of producing knowledge. Donà dalle Rose 447, misc. XVI–XVII, folder 29, in the Museo Correr in Venice contains a conspicuous number of Robortello's schemata in both manuscript and printed form, mainly in Latin.<sup>35</sup> Some of these schemata visualize the content of works by, for instance, Cicero, Quintilian, Hermogenes, Aristotle and Stobaeus, while others seem to be Robortello's personal elaborations based on commonly held doctrines. The schema which has attracted most notice is a printed folio, unfortunately divided into two pieces, which visualizes the course on rhetoric that Robortello held in Venice in 1549.<sup>36</sup> By means of this diagram, Robortello explicitly states that he

Tabulam hanc auditoribus suis spectandam offert; in qua omnia, quae ad artem pertinent dicendi ... suis locis disposita cernere quivis potest, & singulae quaestiones unde ortum habeant, ad quodque caput sint referendae, cognoscere.

is offering to his listeners for their perusal a table containing all things to do with the art of speech, ... which have been positioned in such a way that *anyone* can consult them and thus can *know* the origin of every question and the heading to which one must refer.<sup>37</sup>

This short statement makes two fundamental points: firstly, that *anyone* can consult and understand this schema and that schematization is therefore an effective means of making the content of knowledge more comprehensible; and secondly, that, more than just a valid mnemonic device, it generates knowledge. As Bolzoni has remarked: 'the secret of Robortello's new and efficient method' consisted in students being able to see clearly the network of relations, deductions and derivations which united one particular place to the others,<sup>38</sup> and by place he meant the strategies which enable an arguer to connect reason to conclusions for the purpose of constructing an effective proof. This has led scholars to believe that the key to Robortello's method was the use of topics and the visualization of procedures employed in classification in the wake of Rudolph Agricola or Peter Ramus.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup> L. Bolzoni, *The Gallery of Memory. Literary and Iconographic Models in the Age of the Printing Press*, Toronto, 2001, pp. 23–34.

<sup>35</sup> F. Seneca, *Il doge Leonardo Donà. La sua vita e la sua preparazione politica prima del Dogado*, Padua, 1959, p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Sgarbi, 'Francesco Robortello's Rhetoric' (n. 33 above).

<sup>37</sup> Transl. from Bolzoni, *Gallery of Memory* (n. 34 above), pp. 24–5. My emphasis.

<sup>38</sup> Bolzoni, *Gallery of Memory* (n. 34 above), p. 25.

<sup>39</sup> Weinberg, 'Robortello on the Poetics' (n. 33 above); Bolzoni, *Gallery of Memory* (n. 34 above), p. 25. While Robortello's knowledge of Agricola is certain, there are no direct traces of his acquaintance with Ramus's works or even with the Ramist tradition.



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Robortello's use of diagrams and trees as powerful instruments of knowledge appears to be a genuine innovation in the world of sixteenth-century Italian academies. He was part of a new generation of intellectuals who were well versed in the humanities, Greek and Latin eloquence, in particular, which included figures such as Ludovico Castelvetro (1505–1571), Orazio Toscanella (d. 1579), Giason Denores (1530–1590), Bernardino Partenio (d. 1589), Agostino Valier (1531–1606) and Celio Magno (1536–1602), who, especially in the Veneto, employed these visual techniques to make difficult knowledge more accessible to a wider public.<sup>40</sup> Robortello's independence from the Renaissance logical tradition is made explicit in the manuscript entitled *Discorso dell'origine, numero, ordine et methodo delli luoghi topici*, contained in Donà dalle Rose 447, misc. XVI–XVII, folder 22 (fols 1<sup>r</sup>–4<sup>v</sup>), where he clearly distances himself from Agricola, because, in Dutch humanist's work, as in those of the recent followers of Ciceronian and Boethian rhetoric and topics, there is no real derivation or deduction of the places which can produce a solid knowledge: places seem to be collected in a very heterogeneous and unsystematic manner, making it impossible to infer correctly from one place to the other. For Robortello, this flaw in Agricola's method stands in the way of a real understanding, through diagrams, of the process of production of knowledge, that is, how one place derives from another. Only by making clear the connections among the various parts of knowledge is it possible to transform a heterogeneous aggregate of ideas into a real system of knowledge. The purpose of schematization is the generation of knowledge, and this makes it essential; otherwise, schemes would be nothing more than a poor attempt at presenting content in a fashionable way. In the *Discorso dell'origine*, Robortello insists that all knowledge is reducible to and grounded on the laws of the topics. For Robortello, the topics are a universal tool which is based on the mind's natural forms of reasoning and which represents the general system of the invention of knowledge. Therefore, schematization, too, which employs places and reflects the topical laws, must be conceived in such a way that knowledge is not only presented in a proper arrangement but also produced.

Diagrams, schemata, trees and suchlike are thus more than merely a way of organizing knowledge: they must also reflect the processes of the mind in subdividing when faced with problems and in generating possible solutions. Following the path outlined in the text, the reader not merely learns and remembers the logical path followed by the author, but can also understand how knowledge is constructed and what its basic building-blocks are. Robortello was interested in the order and arrangement of knowledge, but he was also concerned with its method of inquiry and acquisition, combining two aspects that

<sup>40</sup> See, e.g., Orazio Toscanella, *Precetti necessarij, ovvero miscellanee*, Venice, 1562, fol. 100<sup>r</sup>: 'Tirerei in alberi anche la Loica di Aristotele, ma il Magnifico et Eccellente M. Celio Magno e il ben dotto M. Alessandro ... l'hanno tirata tutta in alberi felicissimamente: una gran parte della quale io ho in penna presso di me, e medesimamente essi hanno tirato in alberi l'Aftonio e Rodolfo Agricola. Le quali fatiche recherebbero incredibile giovamento agli studenti, se le lasciassero uscire in luce.'

would become decisive during the second half of the sixteenth century.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, with these new techniques for visualizing knowledge, which would be exploited in the following years by the Venetian polygraphs working in close collaboration with printing presses, Robortello opened up new horizons for popularizing philosophy, as well as other disciplines.

### Rhetoricizing Knowledge

The second method of popularizing knowledge developed by Robortello was rhetoricizing. It might seem contradictory to speak of the rhetoricization of knowledge after emphasizing that a large portion of those who promoted the popularization of knowledge dwelt on the division between eloquence and wisdom, a separation which Robortello also maintained. He, however, conceived of rhetoric differently from the humanists, who based their conception on the connection between *res* and *verba*. While humanists held that one of the aims of rhetoric was to embellish discourse, sometimes making it very complicated and artificial, Robortello did not accept that rhetoric served this purpose, nor did he think that it was related to persuading and deceiving.

Rhetoric for Robortello was useful for making philosophical discourse more understandable and relevant to a wider public. In the process of making it more comprehensible, however, the discourse might sometimes fail to reflect exactly and precisely the true state of things. In his eyes, this did not amount to deception or the provision of knowledge which was erroneous or simplistic; it meant instead that one should offer knowledge which was accessible to all kinds of people, whose learning would thereby gain in depth and detail. Robortello believed that rhetoric was particularly necessary in education and teaching, in other words, as a means of introducing everyone to the knowledge of things. Those who were already philosophers did not require rhetoric in order to know the truth, since they were already capable of penetrating the innermost secrets of things. Robortello therefore still maintained the distinction between rhetoric, eloquence and appearance, on the one hand, and wisdom, philosophy and truth, on the other. The relationship between knowledge and rhetoric was not essential and intrinsic, but extrinsic – we might say practical and pragmatic. This relationship was treated by Robortello in his dedicatory letter to *De artificio dicendi*, which was addressed, appropriately, to Giovan Battista Campeggi, known as the ‘Christian Cicero’.<sup>42</sup>

In the second dispute of this treatise, Robortello considers the question of how rhetoric can accommodate the truth for common people. Rhetorical discourse, which deals with truth, is specifically called ‘oratorical’ (‘oratorius sermo’). Unlike the discourse of

<sup>41</sup> N. W. Gilbert, *Renaissance Concepts of Method*, New York and London, 1960.

<sup>42</sup> N. Aksamija, ‘Architecture and Poetry in the Making of a Christian Cicero: Giovanni Battista Campeggi’s Tuscolano and the Literary Culture of the Villa in Counter-Reformation Bologna’, *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, 13, 2010, pp. 127–99 (133–43).

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philosophy, which deals with truth in itself by means of strict syllogistic arguments, and poetry, which merely depicts and 'sings' an image of the truth in verses, oratorical discourse, for Robortello, must have a certain degree of eloquence. Its task is to make knowledge clear to the public, giving them the opportunity to judge 'concretely' the truth or falsity of what has been seen.<sup>43</sup> In order to convey truth, philosophy usually employs either the dialectical (also called disputative) or the demonstrative process, neither of which is capable of generating knowledge for the populace.

The dialectical process, which proceeds by means of answers and questions, has the defect of being fragmented and not continuous, and it sometimes presupposes that the listener knows the topic of discussion or is at least interested in it. The demonstrative method is proper to philosophers, but proceeds according to continuous and cogent arguments which can be overly complicated. Moreover, it starts from necessary propositions which must be known a priori but which are not usually accessible to the public.<sup>44</sup> Poetry, too, cannot be a vehicle of knowledge, according to Robortello, since while knowledge is about everything, poetry sings with eloquence only about extraordinary things. The oratorical method, on the other hand, which is suitable for popularizing philosophy, should be as continuous as the demonstrative one, but should proceed from probable premises or at least be taken to be true by the populace, which can start from a common and shared knowledge and then refine what it has learned.<sup>45</sup>

Not all knowledge, however, can be popularized, according to Robortello. There are some disciplines such as jurisprudence, mathematics and theology which in themselves can be eloquent and popularized, even if common people find them hard to grasp primarily because so many technical and specific terms are employed. Medicine and architecture, on the other hand, are exceptions, because their highly technical terms are learned for the sake of their utility and as a matter of necessity, for instance in restoring health or building a house.<sup>46</sup> This has given rise to the belief that Robortello maintains the idea of a possible popularization of only certain topics and that people should learn very technical words useful for things of ordinary interest. In his view, Aristotle's technique, which he deploys in his writings on natural philosophy, of providing definitions in order to elaborate concise discourses does not work.<sup>47</sup> Common people cannot learn in such a manner: they know only through oratorical discourse, which is limited by neither brevity nor specific technical terms. In general, however, Robortello points out that it is important to follow the rules to explain the specific terms of the

<sup>43</sup> See Francesco Robortello, *De artificio dicendi*, 2nd ed., Bologna, 1567, fol. 9<sup>r-v</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 10<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 13<sup>r</sup>: '... hoc uno excepto, quod Medicorum, & Architectorum sermo ad popularem formam redigi non potest, quia prior se populis ad illorum aures accommodat, necessitate quadam compulsus ...'.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 15<sup>r</sup>.

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various arts and sciences, referring also to the Greek and Latin meanings, and then giving a translation in the common language.<sup>48</sup>

The most interesting writing is the 'Quomodo sermo philosophicus ad popularem et oratorium redigi possit' ('How Philosophical Discourse Can Be Made Popular and Oratorical'), contained in the final unnumbered pages of the *De artificio dicendi*. In general, Robortello states, philosophical discourse is composed of words such as universal terms which are unfamiliar to the general public. Popular discourse, by contrast, refers directly to things using words which are instantly comprehensible and shared by all.<sup>49</sup> For the philosopher, the things which are most known are those which are universal and abstract, while for the people at large they are those which can be seen. This is an important aspect to consider when translating and popularizing a philosophical discourse. According to Robortello, just as there are two general types of philosophy – one contemplative, which searches for the causes of things, and the other moral, which deals with the behaviour and the actions of human beings – so, too, there are two ways of composing a philosophical discourse in a popular form. Unfortunately, however, he discusses only moral philosophy. There are also two types of moral philosophical discourse: one which is concerned with ethical precepts about how to live well, and another which explains happiness and the nature of the good. He regards the first type of discourse, developed by authors such as Hesiod, Epictetus and Virgil, as already sufficiently popular and not really philosophical at all, but rather oratorical. It is the second type of moral philosophy which needs to be translated and disseminated; associated with philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, it is concerned with virtues and vices, with good and evil actions and with the definition of happiness and of goodness in the abstract, topics which are not immediately comprehensible by common people.

Robortello sets out four ways of making a philosophical discourse popular, in other words, of transforming an intellectually challenging philosophical text and making it relevant to a broader public. These four ways are also listed in a manuscript, now in Naples, entitled 'Regula deducendi sermonem philosophicum ad oratorium' ('The Rule for Turning a Philosophical Discourse into an Oratorical One'). The first way is to make an abstract notion more concrete, which is possible thanks to the rhetorical inference of the example. The second is to transform a universal concept into a particular one: the orator does not deal with happiness in terms of its definition, but instead with regard to

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., fol. 15: 'Primum igitur perquirere diligenter oportet rerum omnium in singulis artibus, ac disciplinis vocabula, tanque suis locis seponere collecta ex antiquis authoribus, qui de ea re pure latineque locuti existimantur; ut nobis si quando opus fuerit, inservire possint.'

<sup>49</sup> Robortello, *De artificio dicendi* (n. 43 above), sig. \*3', 'Sermonem appello philosophicum, qui certis vocabulis constat populo minime notis; sed generalibus, ab ipsis met philosophis, qui universalis sectantur, singularia vero vitant, excogitatis, ac inventis. Popularem sermonem voco, qui pervulgatis conficitur appellationibus rerum, nec generale quidpiam complectitur; sed singularia semper persequitur; vocibus constans ab ipso usu paulatim effectis, et consensu hominum comprobatis.'

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the happy man.<sup>50</sup> The third is to speak about philosophical concepts by means of metaphors. The fourth and final way is to employ many words and phrases to explain and clarify a philosophical concept. A philosopher who overindulges in words and metaphors runs the risk of falling into error and making his discourse more obscure; but an orator can use these techniques to explain repeatedly and more effectively notions which are not readily clear to the general populace.<sup>51</sup>

We can therefore see that rhetoric, for Robortello, was not a method of embellishing knowledge, but instead a tool for reaching a wider public.

### Translating Knowledge

Robortello's third and final way of popularizing knowledge was translation. He is not known for his works in the vernacular: only a handful of writings in Italian by him have been identified, all of them still in manuscript.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, they are all traceable to his time in Venice and Padua and to his private lectures in the academy which he established in his own house.<sup>53</sup> At the Museo Correr in Venice, however, in Donà dalle Rose 447, misc. XVI–XVII, folder 28, there is an interesting manuscript attributed to Robortello and entitled *Noi voltiamo di greco in latino, o d'un et l'altro linguaggio in italiano nostro* ('We Turn Greek into Latin, or One or the Other Language into Our Italian'), which was published by Enrico Garavelli in 2014. The work is datable to before 1557, perhaps 1552.<sup>54</sup> It is an interesting text not only because it combines his reflections on the art of translating and of making knowledge more popular or common, but also because of his use of diagrammatic trees.

Robortello distinguishes two kinds of translation into the vernacular: one related to common speaking, the other to scientific disciplines. This distinction – he states – comes from the first book of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Robortello is referring to a passage which was important to him and which he also mentions in *De artificio dicendi*.<sup>55</sup> In this passage, however, Aristotle was discussing, not translation from one language into another, which would have been inconceivable for a Greek mind, but instead speaking according to either

<sup>50</sup> MS Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli, V D 45, fol. 70r: 'Primo, quando ex abstracta aliqua voce concretam facimus, id est quando quod pluribus convenit alicui assignamus, ut si loquendum esset oratori de prudentia, quae est vox abstracta – consistit enim in mente – attribuet eam alicui homini. Secundo, quando ex universali particulare facimus, id est quod plura significat in multa distrahimus, ut si vellet orator loqui de foelicitate, non dicet foelicitas est actio secundum virtutem, nam philosophi est definitio, sed potius, si actiones omnes secundum virtutem ei quem laudabit adaptans, ostendet eum esse foelicem.'

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., fol. 70v: 'Tertio quando methaphorice loquimur ... Quarto, quando figures sententiae, et verborum plurimis utimur.'

<sup>52</sup> Sgarbi, 'Francesco Robortello's Rhetoric' (n. 33 above); id., 'Francesco Robortello on Topics' (n. 33 above).

<sup>53</sup> The meetings in Robortello's house are also testified to in a letter from Giulio Tiranni to Antonio Carafa of 15 May 1565 and in a letter of Robortello to Antonio Carafa of 17 May 1565: MS Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Barb. lat. 5728, fols 123<sup>r-v</sup>, 186<sup>r</sup>. On Robortello and Carafa, see R. De Maio, *Riforme e miti nella Chiesa del Cinquecento*, Naples, 1992, pp. 121–36.

<sup>54</sup> Garavelli, 'Un frammento di Francesco Robortello' (n. 33 above), p. 290.

<sup>55</sup> Robortello, *De artificio dicendi*, (n. 43 above), fol. [7]<sup>v</sup>.

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the ‘common’ or the ‘proper place’ of a particular discipline or art.<sup>56</sup> Robortello applies this theory of places (*loci*), which usually concerns constructing a discourse and argument starting either from general or specific premises, to translating in either a common or learned way. While in the Aristotelian sense of place, ‘common’ means general or universal, for Robortello, in this instance, ‘common’ means ‘popular’; so, from an analogy based on the same word, a conceptual shift of meaning is generated.

This shift is particularly interesting, because there is no parallel to Robortello’s interpretation and reading of the passage in the vernacular textbooks of rhetoric of the time such as those by Felice Figliucci (1525–1590), Bernardo Segni (1504–1558), Antonio Brucioli, Orazio Toscanella, Annibale Caro (1507–1566) and Giason Denores. A similar, but not identical, conception can, however, be found in Alessandro Piccolomini’s *Copiosissima parafrase nel primo libro della Retorica d’Aristotele*, in which he states that, for the same subject, it is possible

si possano formare propositioni, & argomentationi scientifiche, appropriate ad alcuna particolare scientia, ma ancora propositioni probabili, & argomenti communi, accomodati alla moltitudine per il piu imperita.<sup>57</sup>

to form propositions and scientific arguments appropriate to a particular discipline, but also probable propositions and common arguments, accommodated to the multitude, who are for the most part not learned.

Evidence for the meaning of the conceptual shift made by Robortello comes from the simile he uses to explain the difference between learned and common speaking:

Parlare scientifico è simile a una vigna piantata di pali, et arbori. Li pali et albori sono li termini delle scienza, fra questi è qualche palo di pianura, cioè di parlar commune, et si come per le vigne per li pali non si puo trascorrere cosi facilissimamente cosi anchora nel parlar scientifico bisogna incappare spesso nelli medesimi termini. Et per questo dicea il Mela della sua cosmographia non esser opera capace di eloquentia.<sup>58</sup> Il parlar commune è simile a una lunga pianura, per la quale possiamo trascorrere a nostro beneplacito, ne ha pali, ne termini saldi.<sup>59</sup>

Scientific speaking is like a vineyard planted with poles and trees. Poles and trees are the terms of the discipline. Among these, some poles are in the plains, and this is common speaking. Just as it is not possible to pass very easily through poles and trees, so, too, in scientific discourse it often happens that we run up against the same terms. And for this reason, [Pomponius] Mela said of his *Cosmographia* that it was incapable of eloquence. Common speaking is like a wide plain, with no poles or solid terms, through which we can go at our leisure.

<sup>56</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric* I.2, 1358<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>57</sup> Alessandro Piccolomini, *Copiosissima parafrase nel primo libro della Retorica d’Aristotele*, Venezia, 1565, p. 16.

<sup>58</sup> Pomponius Mela, *De chorographia libri tres* I.1: ‘opus ... facundiae minime capax’; the treatise was translated by Tommaso Procacci and printed in Venice in 1557 with the title *I tre libri di Pomponio Mela del sito, forma e misura del mundo*.

<sup>59</sup> Donà dalle Rose 447, misc. XVI–XVII, folder 28.

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Common speaking is therefore like a plain which may be readily traversed, in that it is easy to understand and learn, while scientific speaking is like a dense and tangled vineyard: it is often repetitive and hard to understand and therefore cannot be rhetorical and eloquent.

It is worth noting that by arts and sciences Robortello means a specific category of discipline: physics, metaphysics, astronomy, logic, rhetoric, medicine, architecture and military art. Interestingly, he does not include ethics or politics in this list, though perhaps this is no coincidence. The disciplines he mentions seem to be grounded in solid, epistemic principles, from which it is possible to derive necessary and scientific conclusions. Disciplines such as ethics and politics, on the other hand, which are based on actions that happen most of the time, but not necessarily, cannot be the subject of a science in Aristotelian terms and therefore are more appropriately handled in common rather than scientific discourse, as Robortello explicitly states in *Dell'oratore*.<sup>60</sup>

In translating sciences, one must distinguish universal and scientific terms such as *substantia* ('substance'), *qualitas* ('quality') and *predicamentum* ('category') from ancient words such as *toga*, *paludamentum* ('soldier's cloak') and *logio* ('breastplate'). Universal and scientific terms, Robortello states, 'must be translated into our language using terms coined by the translator according to the meaning of the word, so: orator, *dicitore*.'<sup>61</sup> In point of fact, however, Robortello, in one of his very few vernacular works, translates 'orator' as *oratore*, not *dicitore*, in contrast to Annibale Caro in his *Rettorica*.<sup>62</sup> This shows that his considerations here are merely theoretical. The translation of universal and scientific terms should be made according to what Robortello calls the 'first' rule, implying the existence of others, which, however, are not present in the manuscript. Scientific terms, he maintains, can be translated in a variety of ways, using either: 'our popular terms' (*nostris popolareschi*); 'our terms but which are not popular' (*nostris ma non popolareschi*), that is, learned terms; ancient terms which have been 'made popular or accepted of necessity by people' (*o fatti popolareschi, che accettati dal popolo per necessità*); or ancient terms which have 'not been made popular' (*o non fatti popolareschi*). What is important for Robortello is that these terms should always be comprehensible to all. There is no intention of expressing technical terms in a higher register which is not accessible to everyone.

<sup>60</sup> Sgarbi, 'Francesco Robortello's Rhetoric' (n. 33 above): 'Et l'ignorante a pena vede il particolare, perché non è usato ad abstragere speculando l'universale dalli particolari, come il sciente, perché tutte le scienze sono fatte di termini universali. ... Et invero è più difficile da prendere l'universale, che il particolare, onde ben habbiamo detto che l'universale è apreso solamente dal sciente, et il particolare dal'ignorante, et rozzo, ovvero popular huomo.'

<sup>61</sup> Donà dalle Rose 447, misc. XVI–XVII, folder 28: 'Li termini universali et scientifici si debbono voltare nella nostra lingua in termini fatti dal voltatore secondo la significatione di quella, come dire *orator* il *dicitore*.'

<sup>62</sup> Annibale Caro, *Rettorica d'Aristotile fatta in lingua toscana*, Venice, 1570, pp. 11, 98, 202: 'Et de gli Dicatori similmente, alcuni sono esemplari, & alcuni Entimematici... La conditione del Dicitore è di maggiore utilità ne' consigli ... . Tre sono le cagioni per le quali i dicatori vengono in credito degli ascoltanti ... . Onde bisogna, che i dicatori nascondano l'arte.'

## FRANCESCO ROBORTELLO ON POPULARIZING KNOWLEDGE

When ancient and vernacular terms refer to the same thing – for instance, *ephippium* and *sella*, which both mean ‘saddle’ – Robortello says that the vernacular term should be used to translate the ancient one; but when ancient terms are similar to those ordinarily employed, the Latinized vocabulary should be maintained in the *volgare* – for example, ‘due sesterzi’ and ‘cinquanta ducati’. In those cases, however, where there is no correspondence either of terminology or of content, it is necessary to preserve ancient words as they are. This was a significant category of words, since ancient arts or sciences had many specific terms and subjects which were no longer in use. We can therefore understand Robortello’s reason for using Greek and Latin words in vernacular texts: it is not because the readers of these texts are learned, but because there is no other way to teach the populace than by indicating with precision what no longer exists or what had its own specific term. Only thus, he believed, is it possible to disseminate knowledge easily and to educate the public.

Common speaking proceeds, according to Robortello, by means of simple words, locutions and metaphors. Simple words are not a problem to translate. As for locutions, there are different kinds. Proper or ordinary locutions such as ‘conticuere omnes’<sup>63</sup> (‘all were silent’) can be translated without any difficulty into the vernacular. Locutions of circumstance, if there are analogous terms in vernacular, should be translated; if not, they can stay in the original language. For instance, although the locution of circumstance ‘Diffugere nives, redeunt iam gramina campis’<sup>64</sup> (‘The snow has fled; already the grass is returning to the fields’) can be translated, it sounds bad in the vernacular. Locutions associated with legends (‘locuzioni fabulari’) such as ‘indulgere genio’ (‘to lead a pleasurable life’) or ‘Bacchus amat colles’<sup>65</sup> (‘Bacchus loves the hillside’) are easy to translate. Metaphors should be translated only if there are vernacular words analogous to the ancient ones; if not, the translator should find equally effective metaphors in his own language, enabling the concept to be understood fully.

Robortello’s conception of the translation of knowledge is far from simple: one must translate, it is true, but not always, not necessarily and not unconditionally. There are various ways of translating; and various linguistic registers should be adopted in order to render in the best possible manner the sense of what is being translated. This means not only remaining faithful to the original, which for Robortello is the main priority in terms of acquiring reliable knowledge, but also being understood by the wider public. Robortello’s theory of translation is therefore a product of his idea of the popularization of knowledge, but also of his philological approach, which demands high quality knowledge, not cheaply bartered goods. Like many other Italian intellectuals of his day, therefore, Robortello did not adopt an anti-humanist approach. These authors retained

<sup>63</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid* II.1.

<sup>64</sup> Horace, *Odes* IV.7.

<sup>65</sup> Virgil, *Georgics* II.113.





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a certain desire to be faithful to ancient authors and texts, while holding to the idea and the conviction of the need to popularize knowledge.

To conclude: in this article I have attempted to show that, for Robortello, along with numerous of his contemporaries, popularizing and translating into the vernacular was, above all, a process by which the public's knowledge could be raised without bringing high culture down to a lower level. Authors such as Robortello sought out the most advanced techniques for making complex material more accessible; and, in doing so, it was by no means their intention to water down or trivialize the knowledge they were disseminating.

