

THE ART OF INSULTS IN THE RENAISSANCE AND THE ULTIMATE EXEMPLAR OF STUPIDITY

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ABSTRACT

The subject of this thesis is the development of the humanist invective in the context of the humanist-scholastic debate. In the first chapter it presents the diversity of sources and Petrarch's reinterpretation of the invective. The second chapter is dedicated to the second stage of the humanist-scholastic debate and the shift of the satirical literature towards invective during the decade 1509–1519. The case study in the last chapter is an example of this shift and shows how the satire was used as a vehicle for the invective in the years immediately before the reformation.

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Table of contents

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
Table of contents.....	iv
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1– DEVELOPMENT OF THE HUMANIST INVECTIVE AND ITS CODIFICATION BY ERASMUS	5
1.1 The Genre of Invective and the Diversity of the Sources	8
1.2 Petrarch and his Models	10
1.3 Theory of the Invective	17
Chapter 2 – A SHIFT IN SATIRE (1509–1519).....	20
2.1 Intensification of the Humanist-Scholastic Debate	21
2.2 Setting the Stage.....	24
2.3 Taking Sides.....	29
2.4 On the Importance of Languages	33
Chapter 3 – <i>VITA S. NICOLAI SIVE STULTITIAE EXEMPLAR</i> (CASE STUDY).....	41
3.1 Context	42
3.1.1 Wilhelm Nesen’s arrival to Louvain.....	42

3.1.2	Truce between Erasmus and the theologians and Nesen's interference	43
3.1.3	The Subject of the Satire.....	45
3.2	Text Analysis.....	47
3.2.1	Structure.....	47
3.2.2	Intention	48
3.2.3	Authority	50
3.2.4	Strategies of Invective and the Humor.....	52
	Conclusion	60
	Bibliography	63
	Sources and editions	63
	Secondary Literature	63
	Appendix – <i>VITA S. NICOLAI SIVE STULTITIAE EXEMPLAR</i> (TRANSLATION)	68

Introduction

Around 20 October 1520, Godschalk Rosemond, rector of the University of Louvain, chaired an unusual meeting in his office. He was to mediate in a fierce dispute between the humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam and the theologian Nicolaas Baechem of Egmond. None of the two really optimistic for a resolution they presented their cases: Erasmus complained about being publicly defamed in Egmondanus' sermons, the latter to being ridiculed in Erasmus writings. While Egmondanus was red in the face because of all the uncontrolled rage (and because of the copious dinner he had recently had), Erasmus was speaking in a composed manner, preventing himself at all times from uttering a word, not suited to a man of letters such as himself. At least that is what he tells us in his famous letter to Thomas More.¹

Just like Cicero in the 1st century BC, Erasmus of Rotterdam received an enormous amount of attention in his own time. And similarly, just like bibliographies on Cicero take hours to peruse, few people have been studied by modern scholarship with more attention than Erasmus. This is not another study on Erasmus, nor the first one Nicolaas Baechem of Egmond, although both play a significant role in it.

This is, first and foremost, a study about invective. Invective was an integral part of oratory and epistolography in many parts of the world and many periods in history, such as ancient Greece, Rome, and Byzantine Empire. In short, an invective is a text, the purpose of which is to destroy the credibility of the author's opponent and enhance the authors' reputation. One should be cautious not to confuse invective with the equally diverse genre of polemics; a polemic is an attack against an idea, an invective is a direct *ad hominem* attack on a person or a group of people.

¹ Ep. 1033.

In this study, I focus on the humanist invective, which gained prominence with Petrarch and was developed by the next generations of humanists, especially in the context of the humanist-scholastic debate. I explore it from three points of view, corresponding to the three chapters, proceeding from the general to the particular. First, I present the general information and existing scholarship on invective and the humanist invective. In the second chapter, I focus on the development of satire in the decade 1509–1519. As I try to show in this chapter, the satire and invective, due to specific historical circumstances, go hand in hand. The third chapter – a case study of one particularly harsh example of satire/invective – shows, that fusion went so far, that the invective and satirical become almost inseparable.

In the first chapter, entitled *What is Invective: Development of the Humanist Invective and its Codification by Erasmus*, I discuss the genre of the invective. I attempt to show that the humanist invective is a specific field of rhetoric with its own laws and motivations, distinct from, e. g., the vituperative orations of the ancient Greece and Rome, as well as early Christian polemics. It is a fusion of different traditions, such as classical, early Christian, with very probable pagan influences, as some researchers suggest. The chapter mentions some of the most important personalities in the history of invective, but focuses principally on Petrarch and Erasmus of Rotterdam. The first has, in his *Invective*, joined the classical and early Christian invective and produced a distinctly humanist one: his contribution is especially important, as he has influenced the next generations of Italian humanists, who have given the humanist invective its distinct character. Shortly before the invective underwent a radical transformation in the context of the Reformation, Erasmus has attempted to codify it in his manual *De conscribendis epistolis* (1522).

The second chapter, entitled *A Shift in Satire (1509–1519)*, presents the transformation that satirical literature underwent in the context of the second phase of the

humanist-scholastic debate. The reasons I chose this decade are several. 1509 is the year when Erasmus wrote his famous and infamous *Praise of Folly* that has caused such an uproar – or *uffrur*, as Luther put it in his contemporary writings – and won him immortality. In the decade, following its publication, numerous invectives and satirical writings were produced, such as the *Letters of Obscure Men*, some of the Erasmus' *Colloquies*, *Julius Excluded from Heaven*, the *Dialogue of the Bilinguals and the Trilinguals*, etc. Towards the end of 1519, Wilhelm Nesen supposedly wrote the *Vita S. Nicolai*. In this chapter I try to demonstrate that the satirical literature shifted from the well-spirited Erasmian satire towards a very personal one, to the point where it becomes almost equivalent to the humanist invective.

The purpose of the third chapter, entitled *Vita S Nicolai sive stultitiae exemplar (Case Study)*, is to illustrate this proximity that the invective and satire have reached in the years immediately preceding the Reformation. In this chapter, I bring to light a hitherto unstudied text: The Life of S. Nicholas or the Exemplar of Stupidity (*Vita S. Nicolai sive Stultitiae Exemplar*), written by the German humanist Wilhelm Nesen. It is a satirical biography of Nicolaas Baechem of Egmond. Apparently, Nicolaas discharged his inquisitorial duties with utmost care, as he was a subject of numerous satires and was a frequent subject of letters, exchanged among the learned humanists. The satires are saturated with assertions about the inquisitor's stupidity, ignorance, and hypocrisy; the letters report on and frequently exaggerate his ignorance. As De Jongh carefully stated, after a brief glance at the catalogue of Egmondanus' (now lost) writings, we are inclined to believe that his ignorance of the Holy Scripture was not as bad as Erasmus and his friends would have us believe.² First, I attempt to put the *Vita* into the historical context, for any invective – as will become clear from the first chapter on – is, formally and in terms of content, highly dependent on the context of its genesis. At this point I also provide some biographical information – hopefully more

²De Jongh, *L'ancienne Faculté de Théologie de Louvain*. 154.

objective than the *Vita S. Nicolai* – about Nicolaas Baechem of Egmond. In the second part I discuss the author's intention, and present the ways in which he tries to persuade the reader about his authority as a writer. In the last part of this chapter I try to isolate the different strategies of invective that the author used, as well as some satirical elements of the *Vita*.

To sum up, the chapters attempt to answer different, but nevertheless very much related questions or premises: (1) Is the invective discourse distinct enough to merit a special attention in the study of history, rhetoric, and literary studies? (2) How did the satirical literature in the decade preceding the Reformation change and why? (3) In the third chapter I show, that at the height of the humanist–scholastic debate the satire became a sort of a vehicle for the invective.

At the beginning of each chapter I provide a short overview of existing relevant research. I have decided for this strategy, first of all, because the line of investigation, the temporal dimensions, and the subjects themselves differ significantly from chapter to chapter and, secondly, if I may permit myself, out of personal preference: constantly having to return to the beginning of the document is time consuming and interrupts the reading experience.

Throughout the study I quote passages from relevant satires, invectives or correspondence between the authors of the texts or other implicated persons, in order to provide the reader with a taste of the atmosphere of the events studied. All the quotations are translated, with originals provided in the accompanying footnotes. Unless otherwise stated, the translations are mine.

At the end I enclose the translation of the entire text of the *Vita S. Nicolai* by Wilhelm Nesen.

Chapter 1– DEVELOPMENT OF THE HUMANIST INVECTIVE AND ITS CODIFICATION BY ERASMUS

Almost exactly 500 years ago, Ulrich Zwingli received a letter from Wilhelm Nesen, in which the author described a certain Carmelite Nicolaas Baechem of Egmond. A modern reader cannot help but get shocked by the crude language and malicious insults which the learned humanist flings towards one of the leading members of the theological faculty of the University of Louvain: *beast, ass, vulture, the ultimate exemplar of stupidity*, etc.

However surprising such a language might seem to us, especially coming from a learned humanist associated with such personalities as Erasmus of Rotterdam and Thomas More, Nesen's letter was not an isolated example. *You stinking billy-goat, you horned monster*, Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459) addresses his sworn enemy Francesco Filelfo (1398–1481).³ Lorenzo Valla's *Elegantiae*, one of the most influential texts of Italian humanism, is a product of a heated dispute and exchange of insults with Poggio Bracciolini. In the 5th century, Jerome and Rufinus engaged in a violent verbal battle over the correct understanding of Origen. These insulting exchanges vary in terms of tone, medium, motivation, register, and also historical circumstances. And yet the genre of invective has for a long time been neglected by scholarship: literary, sociological, as well as historical.

The lack of treatment of the phenomenon as a distinct discourse with specific laws, motivations, contexts, and motifs reveals a somewhat ambiguous position that the invective holds in the recent scholarly tradition. While classical Roman and Greek invective (iambic poetry, Cicero, Catullus, Juvenal, etc.) have received extensive treatment, the humanist invective has been scantily investigated. The existing literature focuses on specific cases of

³ Test. *Satire: Spirit and Art*. 109.

invective mostly in vernacular languages and no successful attempt at a wholesome perspective is made.⁴ Much needed templates have been provided by Rutherford with his treatment of the early Renaissance invective (although he, too, ultimately concentrates on one specific case)⁵ and Applauso, who has written on political invective in the comic poetry of high and late medieval Italy.⁶

There exist several tangential treatments, e.g. in the context of subversive Byzantine politics in the 14th century⁷ or various contributions to the studies of humanism and Renaissance in Italy. Baños, for instance, has written an extensive monograph on epistolary literature from antiquity to the Renaissance, in which some cases of epistolary invective are treated.⁸

Part of the reason for the *lacuna* may be that the genre of invective has – because of our modern *a priori* judgments of direct *ad hominem* attacks – frequently been dismissed as “une simple ‘bordée d’injures’ aussi gratuites que disgracieuses.”⁹ Additionally, as confirmed by most of the researchers trying to tackle the question of invective, the definition of this genre is an elusive one. At least partially, the blurry situation might originate from the fact that the few authors who have dealt with cases of invectives proceeded either from existing definitions established by someone else, found a new definition, or did not deal with the question of classification at all and went straight to discourse analysis. The consequence is that we now have a number of definitions, the number itself being a proof of their insufficiency.

⁴ See for instance Morini, *L’invective: Histoire, Formes, Strategies: Actes Du Colloque International Des 24 et 25 Novembre 2005, Saint Etienne*; Charité, “Hélisenne de Crenne et L’infinie Variété de La Lettre Invective;” Rizzi, “Violent Language in Early Fifteenth-Century Italy: The Emotions of Invectives;” Eisenhauer, *Archeologies of Invective*.

⁵ Rutherford, *Early Renaissance Invective and the Controversies of Antonio Da Rho*.

⁶ Applauso, “Curses and Laughter: The Ethics of Political Invective in the Comic Poetry of High and Late Medieval Italy.”

⁷ Angold, “The Political Arts at the Late Palaiologan Court (1402–1453).”

⁸ Baños, *El Arte Epistolar En El Renacimiento Europeo, 1400–1600*.

⁹ Charité, “Hélisenne de Crenne et L’infinie Variété de La Lettre Invective.” 409.

The focus of this study lies principally on the humanist invective of the 15th and early 16th century, whereas this chapter focuses on some important earlier episodes that lead up to the humanist invective of the Quattrocento humanism in Italy and the so-called northern humanism. The aim of this chapter is not to provide a history of the invective, culminating at the beginning of the 16th century. I will rather focus on certain personalities which, in my view, shaped this form of discourse and contributed to the invective, as understood by the humanists who participated in the debate between the humanists and the scholastics. Finally, I will not come up with a definition of this literary activity, although it will be necessary to decide, whether we are talking about a genre of discourse or of literature, and whether we should be speaking about a genre at all.

In this chapter I therefore intend to show, what an arduous task it would be to attempt to circumscribe the invective, what a diversity of sources would have to be considered and how many different traditions that are now specific fields of research. Secondly, despite all the necessary hesitation in terms of its definition and existence of a specific field of invective, I will argue that there is such a thing as *the* humanist invective and that it should be considered as a specific field of research – if not as literary genre, at least as a type of discourse with great potential as a political tool. I will therefore point out the different invective traditions in the Western literary history that might have participated in shaping what we know as the humanist invective.

The first part is dedicated to the genre of the invective; in the second part I will show which traditions Petrarch fused and how he influenced to humanist invective of the next century and a half; I will conclude the chapter with Erasmus' theoretical treatment of invective in *De Conscribendis epistolis* (1522).

1.1 The Genre of Invective and the Diversity of the Sources

Every researcher of invective faces the same problem: the lack of definition of the invective genre. The question is, of course, how it can usefully be defined, given the multiplicity of sources, contents, purposes, and functions. I would agree with Crewe in proposing to regard it as a meta-genre, as the phenomenon is too dependent on contexts to be susceptible to abstract theoretical systems.¹⁰ As will be shown in the following chapters, the content, form, register, and content of invectives varies according to the political and intellectual circumstances of the time. Any attempt at a description will therefore, at least partially, need to be historical.

Broadly speaking, a humanist invective is a text, usually delivered in an epistolary form, in which an author attacks and insults his rival in order to damage his reputation. As Marc Laureys shows, it is very difficult to describe the humanist invective in any more detailed or comprehensive manner. The first problem that one encounters in such an endeavor is the inconsistent and irregular use of the term *invectiva*. It is used interchangeably with other terms, such as letter, speech, defense, or sermon.¹¹ Then there are cases of mixing prose and poetry, as in Bracciolini's orations Against Valla, or mixing satire and invective, as in the Case of Nesen's *Vita S. Nicolai*, examined in the last chapter of this study.

For the humanists, Cicero was the father of this genre of discourse. His speech *Against Verres* has been known for centuries and, unsurprisingly, influenced Petrarch's invectives.¹² The language of his invectives, however, is far more abusive than that of his Latin models. Whoever has read Petrarch's four invectives – *Invective contra medicum*,

¹⁰Crewe, "Can Polemic Be Ethical? A Response to Michel Foucault." 150–151.

¹¹ Laureys, *Per Una Storia Dell'invettiva Umanistica*. 14–15.

¹²*Ibid.*, 14–15.

Contra quendam magni status, De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia, Contra eum qui maledixit Italie— has been shocked by their obscene vocabulary and imagery, standing in marked contrast to the tone of e.g. Cicero’s invectives *In Vatinius* and *In Pisonem*.

There are also strong connections with the early Christian invectives of Jerome and Rufinus. It is in this context that the term *invectiva* came into use. During the 4th and 5th century AD, scholiasts and grammarians used it to describe epideictic and contumelious orations.¹³ Jerome was the first to use the invective not as a deliberative, but as a literary practice. He created a new, epistolary form of invective, and its language was mainly derived from imprecatory psalms. His language against, for instance, Jovinian, Vigilantius, Helvidius, Rufinus, was so strong that the humanists thought Jerome lost his self-control.¹⁴

According to Rizzi, humanist invectives are a product of various ancient literary traditions, pastoral poems by Catullus, Tibullus, Propertius, and, Martialis, verse satire by Horace, comedy by Plautus and epideictic oratory by Cicero.¹⁵ Although this study focuses on the humanist invective production in Latin, it is important to notice the influences outside of this scope. In the first place, Rossi and Grigio, in their studies *Il Quattrocento* and *La tradizione dell’invettiva*, respectively, convincingly suggest an influence of the Florentine vernacular tradition (13th and early 14th century), of which Dante’s *Divine Comedy* is said to be the most important model.¹⁶

Secondly, the 15th century also saw an important cultural influence, when Greek culture, once again, “penetrated the rustic Latium,” this time in the form of immigration of Byzantine scholars, who brought with them massive numbers of codices and engendered new interest in Platonic and Aristotelian doctrines in the Florentine republic. One of them was

¹³ Rizzi, A., “Violence and Emotions in Early Modern Europe.” 148.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 148

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 149 and *passim*.

John Argyropoulos, who travelled between Byzantium and Italy and played an important part in the burgeoning political and intellectual affairs of the time. In his comedy *Katablattas*, the purpose of which is the character assassination of one Demetrios Katadokeinos, he seems to have transformed the traditional Byzantine invective by mixing it with Latin characteristics of the genre.

Another invective in the form of a comedy, *Mazaris' Journey to Hades*, also describes the blurring of the spatial boundaries. One of the protagonists, Misael Mouskaranos, who, according to the author, represents everything that was the worst in Byzantine politics, was in charge of the imperial finances. The author warns the emperor that Mouskaranos is a Latin sympathizer and that it would be dangerous to let him conduct business with the Latin *podestà* in Galata. According to Angold,¹⁷ the comedy contains almost certain references to the synod of 1396.

1.2 Petrarch and his Models

This paradoxical status of the invective – e. g. regular use, but no regular designation or definition – is especially important in the case of Petrarch: firstly, because he is the first author to entitle his invectives as such – *Invective*; and secondly, because the status of the father of the renaissance of the modern invective is attributed to him. Studying the models for Petrarch's *Invective* will also allow us to introduce Augustine's and Quintilian's opinion of the invective discourse.

The celebrated humanist from Arezzo wrote four invectives, in which he attacks four sources of authority in the medieval Europe: the medical profession (*Invective contra medicum*), the ecclesiastical dignity (*Invectiva contra quendam magni status hominem sed nullius scientie aut virtutis*), the scholastic philosophy (*De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia*),

¹⁷Angold, "The Political Arts at the Late Palaiologan Court (1402–1453)." 92.

and French culture (*Contra eum qui maledixit Italie*). Again, readers who are more used to the works, where Petrarch celebrates his love for Laura, will be shocked by the abusive language of the invectives. Petrarch himself cites as his models the invectives exchanged by Cicero and Sallust and Jerome's harsh polemics with Rufinus. In order to understand Petrarch's invective, we need to shortly outline the characteristics of the Classical invective and what changes it underwent in the time of Jerome and Augustine.

Classical invective¹⁸ sought to denigrate one's opponent on the basis of the following *topoi*: birth, upbringing, "mechanical" professions, moral defects, physical shortcomings, etc.¹⁹ This was the epideictic oratory, and its purpose was to undermine the credibility of a witness in a judicial process, political rivals, etc. However, despite Petrarch's claims that his invective was inspired by classical models, it is precisely these topics that he avoids and relies instead on abusive epithets to denigrate his opponents.

Despite the considerable aesthetical difference between Cicero's vituperative speeches and the obscene language of the invectives of the Renaissance, we must not forget that the invective is a rhetorical technique. It is therefore appropriate to see what the father, as it were, of the Classical Roman rhetoric, Quintilian, thought of such techniques. Contrary to Cicero, who thought that the *movere* is an essential part of discourse, independent of *docere*, Quintilian thought that the two are inseparable, that they need to go hand in hand and that the orator should not seek victory at all costs. He condemns those who,

although the cases which they have undertaken give but small scope for eloquence, none the less trick it out with matter drawn from without and, if all else fails, fill up

¹⁸ I use the term invective for any text whose purpose is to denigrate the author's opponent, fully acknowledging the plethora of terms, applied by the scholarship to the wide range of texts mentioned here.

¹⁹ Marsh, "Introduction." xi. For studies of classical invective Marsh proposes also Watson, Lindsay Cameron, "Invective," in *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd ed. by Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 762; Koster, Severin, *Die Invektive in der griechischen und römischen Literatur* (Meisenheim am Glan: Verlag Anton Hain, 1980); Opelt, Ilona, *Die lateinischen Schimpfwörter und verwandte sprachliche Erscheinungen: Eine Typologie* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1965).

the gaps in their case with abuse of their opponents, true if possible, but false if necessary, the sole consideration that weighs with them being that it affords exercise for their talents and is likely to win applause during its delivery. Such conduct seems to me so unworthy of our *perfect orator* that, in my opinion, he will not even bring true charges against his opponents unless the case demands. For it is a *dog's eloquence*, as Appius says, to undertake the task of *abusing one's opponent*, and they who do so should steel themselves in advance to the prospect of being targets for like abuse themselves, since those who adopt this style of pleading are frequently attacked themselves [...].²⁰

As the passage quoted above shows, Quintilian explicitly condemns the *male dicere*, that is to say verbally abusing one's opponent. An orator who succumbs to such practices often has one thing in mind, that is to win applause from the audience, and is, according to Quintilian, far from the *orator perfectus*, the perfect orator. Anyone who knows Petrarch understands that the great poet and orator gives little consideration to these precepts and that the most important thing with him was to become the Virgil of his time. For instance, in his dialogue *Secretum, sive de Secreto conflictu curarum mearum*, St. Augustine (who, in reality, is one of Francesco's two alter-egos) justly reproaches him that instead of laboring towards a pious life (*ad vite [...] regulam*), he strives for the ephemeral applause of the audience (*ad ventosum vulgi plausum*).²¹ It therefore follows that Petrarch's statements about his models need to be taken cautiously. Let us turn then towards the other of his two cited models, the quick-tempered Jerome and his polemics with Rufinus.

Although Jerome probably never uttered the words famously attributed to him, *Parce mihi Domine, quia Dalmata sum* ("Spare me, o Lord, for I am a Dalmatian") referring to his easily irritable character, it is definitely true that his temper found expression in many of his

²⁰ "Ut quidam, etiamsi forte susceperunt negotia paulo ad dicendum tenuiora, extrinsecus adductis ea rebus circumlinunt ac, si defecerint alia, conviciis implent vacua causarum, si contingit, veris, si minus, fictis, modo sit materia ingenii mereaturque clamorem dum dicitur. Quod ego adeo longe puto ab *oratore perfecto*, ut eum ne vera quidem obiecturum, nisi id causa exigit, credam. Ea est enim prorsus *canina*, ut ait Appius, *eloquentia*, cognituram *male dicendi* subire; quod facientibus etiam male audiendi praesumenda patientia est. nam et in ipsos fit impetus frequenter, qui egerunt [...]."

²¹ Huss, Bernhard, and Gerhard Regn. *Francesco Petrarca: Secretum Meum*. Mainz: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 2013. xx.

writings – indeed, not only the ones recognized by scholarship as invectives *stricto sensu*, but also others, such as his prologues to the books of the Bible, where the *obtrectatores* (“disparagers”) of his translation are repeatedly styled as *latrantes canes* (“barking dogs”) and other epithets, worthy of the wildest Reformation pamphlets.

I agree with Davide Luglio’s finding that the fourth century early Christian polemics brought about more than just the introduction of the word *invectio*.²² The latter appears in the epistolary exchanges – although not in the case of St. Augustine – where one writer brings forth terrible threats, should the interlocutor choose not to convert. In these authors, observes Luglio, including St. Augustine, it is in the context of attacks towards the heretics that the discourse becomes polemic.²³ In the letter 49, Jerome writes:

I do not wish for such a fight, in which you only protect yourself, where your right hand stays inactive and your left is circling with the shield. Strike or fall! I cannot consider you a victor, unless I see the adversary slaughtered.²⁴

There is an obvious contrast between the Classical Roman rhetorical tradition and Quintilian’s recommendations on one side and early Christian polemic on the other. It seems that for Jerome, the violent discourse is the only acceptable form of discussion. The answer lies, similarly to the Luther’s rhetoric centuries later, in the quest for truth. St. Augustine provides a justification in his hermeneutical work *De doctrina Christiana*:

Since therefore the art of the word is available, with a very strong power of persuasion, be it wrong or right, why should the good people not use it to fight for the truth, since the malicious people usurp it for the perverse and deceptive causes, in the interest of injustice and error?²⁵

²² Luglio. *Ex eloquentia prophetarum*. 79.

²³ *Ibid.*, 79.

²⁴ Nolo tale certamen in quo te tantum protegas et torpente dextera sinistra clipeum circumferri. Aut ferendum tibi est aut cadendum. Non possum te existimare victorem, nisi adversarium videro trucidatum.

²⁵ Cum ergo sit in medio posita facultas eloquii, que ad persuadenda seu prava seu recta valet plurimum, cur non bonorum studio comparatur, ut militet veritati, si eam mali ad obtinendas perversas vanasque causas in usus iniquitatis et erroris usurpant?” quoted in Luglio 80

What justifies the use of the word as a tool for combat is the quest for truth. This rhetorical strategy was, of course, present in the pagan invective speeches, such as those of Cicero and Sallust, to which Petrarch refers, but Augustine and Jerome locate their authority elsewhere: it is in the work of the prophets, who, as Augustine remarks, knew well how to conceal the truth using the art of words. He wants to show that one needs to heed the precepts of the prophets, whose phrases were not coined by humans, but by the Holy Spirit. As an example he cites the prophet Amos:

Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came! [...] Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near; that lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches.²⁶

For Augustine, there is nothing better for a perceptive and pious ear than such a discourse.²⁷

The words should resonate with thunder, as if to wake up the sensibility that fell asleep. The invective in the cited passage is the admonition which the Divine providence addresses to the people of Israel, and it is terrifying, for it promises the worst future possible, come the Judgment day.²⁸ As Luglio shows, Petrarch has joined in his invectives the art of rhetoric of the Roman masters and the wisdom of the prophets. The alliance of the two sources of authority is visible, for instance, throughout the invective *Against a Physician*. When the latter questions the wisdom of the poets, Petrarch tells him:

With the astounding temerity of a lowly craftsman, you condemn these fictions and all others of this kind as contradicting the truth. Yet they contain a judicious and delightful allegorical sense which is purposely hidden from you and your ilk. This

²⁶ “Vae qui opulenti estis in Sion et confiditis in monte Samariae, optimates capita popolorum, ingredientes pompaticae domum Israel [...] Qui separati estis in diem malum et appropinquatis solio iniquitatis. Qui dormitis in lectis eburneis et lascivitis in stratis vestris [...]”

²⁷

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

allegorical sense also abounds in nearly every text of the Holy Scriptures, but I have no doubt that you would like to mock them, except that you fear punishment.²⁹

It seems that Petrarch realizes well the mystic potential of the word and the Biblical origin of such discourse. After the passage, quoted above, he asks the physician, what he thinks of Jerome, Augustin, and Cyprien, and other Christian writers. All these works, including the Bible, have some poetry in them. According to this comparison, the reckless, lazy language (*lingua temeraria et pigra*) then corresponds to the language of the pagans. It is by incorporating the truth of the prophets, filtered through the work of the early Christian authors, that Petrarch's discourse can legitimately become a weapon.

He describes his opponents with reference to three topics: stupidity or madness, bestial traits or behavior or repulsive substances, such as urine, vomit or sewage.³⁰ In *Against a man of high rank*, an early exemplar of humanist campaign against the power of the scholastics, he writes that good fortune has converted madness to rage.³¹ In all four invectives, comparisons to animals abound. The physician, is repeatedly called a beast,³² an animal,³³ he is compared to a hoopoe, a bird that feeds on excrement.³⁴

Petrarch, the so-called father of the humanist invective, just like his predecessors Jerome and Augustine, sought legitimacy for his violent language in the quest for truth, inherited from the biblical prophets. For the words to take effect, they need to strike the ears of the listener with furious thunder. Since I am principally dealing with the humanist side, Luther's use of invective is out of the scope of this research. However, it is important to

²⁹ "Quas tu atque omnes id genus fictiones, veluti vero adversas, mira plebei artificis temeritate condemnas. In quibus, tibi tuique similibus studiose abditus, allegoricus sapidissimus ac iucundissimus sensus inest, quo fere omnis Sacrarum etiam Scripturarum textus abundat; quas te animo irridere non dubito, sed supplicium times."

³⁰ Marsh, *Francesco Petrarca: Invectives*. xiii.

³¹ There, at a distance of fifteen years, you will see a completely different you, before favorable fortune had converted your madness to rage. *Ibid.*, 189.

³² "You are dumbfounded, you beast. I guess you never heard this before." *Ibid.*, 29.

³³ "O ridiculous animal, I was going to say: You are writing a book." *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁴ "You are surprised, O ignoramus, and ask: "How do I resemble a hoopoe?" The resemblance is perfect. The hoopoe is [...] very unclean and eats a filthy diet." *Ibid.*, 73.

notice a similarity here. As shown in an important article by Constance M. Furey, *Invective and Discernment in Martin Luther, D. Erasmus, and Thomas More*,³⁵ Luther used invective and insult for the very same reason, to scrub away centuries of detritus that the Catholic Church had accumulated. He saw himself as “compelled by the Word to refute all adversaries” and he insisted that the purpose of invective was “to render transparent the truth of salvation by faith alone.”³⁶

As is so often the case with Petrarch, his *Invectives*, too, were written to contribute to publicizing his moral and intellectual values and perhaps not so much to throwing his opponents into oblivion. After publication, his *Invectives* influenced several generations of humanists. The invective *Against a Physician* was translated to Italian by Domenico Silvestri, Boccaccio’s friend in Florence. There are more than forty extant manuscripts of this invective, and more than twenty manuscripts of *Against a Detractor of Italy*.³⁷ At the beginning of the 15th century (probably 1402), Leonardo Bruni quotes Petrarch’s *Invectives* in the first of his *Dialogues to Pier Paolo Vergerio*. In the dialogue the classicist Niccolò Niccoli recognizes that Petrarch wrote the *Invectives* to display his rhetorical skills,³⁸ he provided arguments, which the *Quattrocento* humanist accepted. And the pugnacious tone found imitators in the humanists participating in the literary disputes on the correct way of writing. Antidota of Lorenzo Valla are, as observed by Marsh, filled with Petrarchan touches.³⁹

³⁵Furey, “Invective and Discernment in Martin Luther, D. Erasmus, and Thomas More.” For an excellent study on appropriation of the humanist method by the Reformers, see Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance & Reformation*, chapter “The Debate and the Reformation”.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 472 and *passim*.

³⁷*Ibid.*, xvi.

³⁸ Leonardo Bruni, *Dialogi ad Petrum Paulum Histrum*, ed. Stefano Ugo Baldassarri (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 1994), 257: Scripsit praeterea *Bucolicon carmen* Franciscus, scripsit etiam *Invectivas*, ut non solum poeta, sed etiam orator haberetur.

³⁹Marsh, *Francesco Petrarca: Invectives*. xvii.

1.3 Theory of the Invective

At the beginning of the 16th century, not many debates escaped the feather of Erasmus of Rotterdam, and the invective discourse is no exception. Claude La Charité, in his case study entitled *Hélisenne de Crenne et l'infinie variété de la lettre invective*, provides a useful overview of the theory of the invective letter.⁴⁰ In the early attempts to codify the epistolary genre, for instance in the work of Pseudo-Demetrios of Phaleron and in that of Pseudo-Libanios, the first two theoreticians who have prepared a typology of the epistolary form, we can find forms, comparable to the invective letter. The absence of the perfect equivalence, in La Charité's view, can be explained by the fact that the ancient Greek language knew a more elaborate division of the invective discourse, as compared to the Latin tradition.⁴¹ It was Erasmus who provided the most accomplished consideration of the invective letter in his treatise *De conscribendis epistolis* (1522).

The invective letter, as we will see in the third chapter, was an extremely popular tool of the humanists all along the humanist-scholastic debate, which started in Italy and culminated with the northern humanists. Erasmus, who had a very clear idea of the invective letter, defines it in this way:

The technique of composing invectives is partly inspired by the demonstrative genre, and partly by the judicial. For it is necessary to make use of the censure, where we frequently point out a person's faults. Additionally, we refute accusations and forcefully return counter-accusations, and that belongs to the judicial genre. These lessons have to be learned from the rhetoricians.⁴²

Erasmus sees the invective letter as belonging to the demonstrative and judicial genres. He then explains that we need to insist on intolerable stupidity, arrogance,

⁴⁰Charité, "Hélisenne de Crenne et L'infinie Variété de La Lettre Invective." 413–415.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 413.

⁴² "Invectiviarum scribendarum artificium, partim ex demonstrativo genere sumitur, partim e judiciali. Nam in hominis vituperio versari necesse est, in qui notationibus frequentibus utimur. Praeterea et objecta diluimus, et fortiter regerimus crimina: quod ad judiciale genus pertinet. Ea a rhetoribus didicisse debemus."

stubbornness, etc. Additionally, we need to explain that our only purpose is to refute the insults brought against us and that – contrary to our adversary – we were forced into the practice of insults. By the means of satire, sarcasm, we need to show that the adversary is not only hateful, but also ridiculous. In the last paragraphs Erasmus provides some typical examples of invective, such as the ones exchanged by Demosthenes and Aeschines, Cicero and Sallust, Jerome and Rufinus, Poggio Bracciolini and Lorenzo Valla, etc.

Beside the opportunity for comparison of Erasmus' theoretical treatment and the humanist invectives produced in the third phase of the humanist-scholastic dispute (cc. 1500–1520), as well as the pamphlet production during the Reformation period, this codification of the invective letter tells us that the contemporary scholars and authors themselves saw the invective letter as distinct from other types of letters. As La Charité observes, the *littera invectiva* is, for Erasmus, an organic continuation of the *littera disputatoria* with other means.⁴³ Polemic, controversy, and the dispute were, as it appears, the necessary precondition in the quest for truth in all camps: scholastic, humanist, and later the camp of the reformers.

Before the humanists elaborated it and Erasmus codified it, the invective discourse has undergone a long history. This chapter shows how many lines of development need to be researched in order to describe the phenomenon of the invective. The humanist invective poses a particular challenge, as it has undergone important internal, as well as external changes. First of all, as in many other areas, the humanists have also attempted to revive the classical tradition of invective, which resulted in a fusion of medieval vernacular practice and classical pagan and early Christian invectives. Secondly, as hinted by the comedies *Mazaris*

⁴³Charité, “Hélisenne de Crenne et L’infinie Variété de La Lettre Invective.” 415.

and *Katablattas*, some Greek writers have been influenced by the humanist literature, and there is no reason to exclude the possibility that the influence worked both ways.

The humanist invective in the second stage of the humanist-scholastic debate, which developed around Erasmus, who waged battle against scholasticism, presents a set of specific characteristics, highly dependent on the new circumstances. The scholasticism was more centralized, as compared to the Italian phase – it was now firmly entrenched in the prestigious universities, which defended their status at all costs. It is now time to shift the focus towards the northern humanists and their efforts to replace the conservative dialectical method of studying the Scriptures with the new one, based on meticulous study of the original texts. The invective, which fused with a particular kind of satire, developed in the decade 1509–1519, was an important tool of social criticism, as it served to clearly separate the invested groups, to present their propositions and criticisms, and, finally, to garner support among the interested (learned) audience. In the next chapter I will examine the development of the satire in the critical decade 1509–1519 and the consequences it brought about.

Chapter 2 – A SHIFT IN SATIRE (1509–1519)

In this chapter I will examine the satirical literature of the humanists of the decade 1509–1519 in light of the humanist-scholastic debate. The temporal dimensions are not evident and require explanation. In 1509, Erasmus wrote the *Praise of Folly* (lat. *Moriae Encomium*), a mere trifle, as he called it, compared to his serious philological and theological works, which ironically – or perhaps understandably – is the only one of his works which has been continuously published and translated until today. It would be difficult to speak about Renaissance satire or any carnivalesque literature without mentioning the Praise of Folly and rightfully so: one only has to think of the inspiration it has provided for such authors as Rabelais, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and many others. The final event of this period is the publication of the *Vita S. Nicolai sive stultitiae Exemplar* by the German Humanist Wilhelm Nesen. He wrote the satire in quite different circumstances, with a different aim in mind, and the two satires could hardly be more different. This chapter is a study of the decade preceding the publication of the *Vita*.

In the course of this decade 1509–1519 we can trace a gradual turn from the playful epideictic satire of, for instance, Erasmus and Sebastian Brant, towards a profoundly personal one, which in its later stages sometimes overlapped with, but at all times stayed close to the genre of the humanist invective. The purpose of this chapter is therefore, first, to demonstrate this radical shift in satirical writing that occurred in this decade, and, second, to place the satire into the periodization of the Humanist-scholastic debate, proposed by Rummel.⁴⁴

Since the satire is, like pamphlet and invective, in itself highly sensitive to the contemporary society, and since we are studying how the former was shaped by the latter, it goes without saying that we might expect the best results from studying the most famous – or

⁴⁴Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance & Reformation*.

infamous – satires and their aftermaths. I will therefore start with the *Praise of Folly* by Erasmus; I will continue with *The Letters of Obscure Men*, a literary product of the Reuchlin Affair with its follow-up of international dimensions. The section will be concluded by *The Dialogue of the Bilinguals and the Trilinguals*, a satirical response to the *Collegium Trilingue* Controversy.

Before the study of these satires it is worth reflecting on two things. First, these satires have at least one thing in common: all of them were either written by Erasmus or, at different times, partially or entirely attributed to him. While this fact was by no means a criterion for the choice of these satires, it certainly invites one to reflect on what it meant to be Erasmus in the decade in question. As will become clear towards the end of the chapter, seeing these satires in connection to the personalities with which they were associated is a good starting point for studying what Matheson calls “the emergence of a public opinion.”⁴⁵

2.1 Intensification of the Humanist-Scholastic Debate

Before studying the satires, it might be worthwhile to review recent developments in the scholarship on the humanist-scholastic debate during the Renaissance. While it has received extensive scholarly attention, the assessment of its nature and significance vary considerably. The main question is whether the debate was just a succession of personal feuds, or it was a product of a deeper, cultural irreconcilability.

Traditionally, the irreconcilability of the scholastic position, based on medieval philosophical tradition, and the new philological methods promoted by the humanists, have been acknowledged.⁴⁶ However, some historians have expressed doubts about the intensity of the polemic. Paul Oskar Kristeller, for instance, has stressed that historians have exaggerated

⁴⁵Matheson. *Rhetoric of the Reformation*. *Passim*.

⁴⁶Rummel, “Et Cum Theologo Bella Poeta Gerit.” 714.

the opposition between the two camps and stated that the controversies were in general “personal feuds, intellectual tournaments and rhetorical exercises.”⁴⁷ He bases his argument on the fact that humanism never existed as a unified philosophy which could rival the scholasticism, which was, in general terms, a unified philosophy with a main source of authority, Aristotle, and a clear method, the dialectics. The *studia humanitatis*, on the other hand, were a limited cluster of academic disciplines. The humanist method, unlike that of the scholastics, never claimed to have a handle on the totality of human knowledge. Kristeller therefore suggests that what was happening was something rather similar to interdepartmental rivalries in modern universities.⁴⁸

James Overfield has dismissed not only scholarship, emphasizing the divide between the two camps, but also the corresponding opinion of the participants in the debate themselves. In his 1984 book *Humanism and Scholasticism in Late Medieval Germany*, Overfield argues that the documented disputes, albeit many are little more than a series of isolated feuds and personal rivalries. Even in the course of the Reuchlin Affair, he argues, the issue was not a controversy between Scholastics and Humanists, but simple Anti-Semitism, characteristic for Late Medieval Society.⁴⁹ This conclusion might be slightly oversimplified. The anti-Jewish discourse has indeed been present since at least 13th century and was in question during the decades gaining new momentum. While Pfefferkorn’s idea to confiscate all Jewish books and the actual initiation of the Affair was in accordance with general anti-Jewish atmosphere, the ensuing controversy of several years shifted from anti-Judaism – as the numerous sources that have come down to us clearly show – to the issue of competency of the two camps in the matters of theology.

⁴⁷ Kristeller, Paul O., *Renaissance Thought* (New York: Harper, 1961), 100, 114.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴⁹ Overfield, James H., *Humanism and Scholasticism in Late Medieval Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 247–297.

In his article “Humanism as Method.”⁵⁰ Nauert suggests that the research has to focus on humanism as intellectual method, which challenged tradition not only in the liberal arts, but also in theology, law and medicine. He gives some credit to both Overfield’s position and that of Erika Rummel (see below). There was some compatibility between scholastics and humanists, who were often able to peacefully coexist in the academic community. However, he generally agrees with Rummel’s assessment, that the conflict between the two camps was inevitable.⁵¹ The cultural divide was so great that they were speaking past each other: they did not actually engage in the same discourse, did not pursue the same goals and did not have the same ideas about using the human reason. More importantly, he argues that the central quarrel over methodology was reinforced by the humanist’s identity as rhetoricians, which, as we will see, was constantly a part of the discourse.

Rummel, who has valuably contributed to the scholarship on the humanist-scholastic debate, expresses caution in regard to such revisionist stances⁵² and shows instead, that both positions can be accommodated by periodization of the humanist scholastic debate. In the article *Et cum theologo bella poeta gerit; The Conflict between Humanists and Scholastics Revisited*,⁵³ Rummel has, on the basis of numerous sources, shown that the debate is by no means to be underestimated and suggested that for a better understanding a more detailed and systematic view is in order. She developed her argument three years later, in the study *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance & Reformation*,⁵⁴ where she has shown that the debate, which spanned roughly from 1450 to 1550, might have been oversimplified and proposes a division of the confrontation into three stages.

⁵⁰Nauert, “Humanism as Method.”

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 428 and *passim*.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 428.

⁵³Rummel, “Et Cum Theologo Bella Poeta Gerit.” 714–5 and *passim*.

⁵⁴Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance & Reformation*.

The first one includes the Italian polemics, exchanged between the humanist Salutati and the Dominican friar Giovanni Dominici, as well as contributions from Pico della Mirandola, Ermolao Barbaro, and Leonardo Bruni, etc. The youthful Erasmus is also included in this stage. They raised issues which were later elaborated, such as the value of dialectic in theology, the relative nature of scholastic and patristic authorities, and the value of classical learning. The first stage was moderate in tone.

However, when humanism spread to the Northern Europe around 1500, and humanists, exemplified here by Erasmus and Reuchlin, started calling for changes, the debate grew sharper: now, the issues of prestige and power were at play, which will be mirrored in the satires studied here. In this stage, the theological faculties, such as the one in Louvain, which provided context for the *Vita*, became strongholds of scholasticism and resistance to change.

The third stage, initiated by the outbreak of Reformation and represented here by the *Dialogue of the Bilinguals and Trilinguals*, *Epistola de magistris nostris* and the *Vita*, is the harshest in tone. Taking into account the number of examples of extremely violent and obscene language in the second and third stage, Rummel rightly suggests that it would seem legitimate for historians to characterize the humanist-scholastic debate as irreconcilable and an important feature of intellectual history of the time.

2.2 Setting the Stage

In view of my intention to demonstrate the intensification of the debate, I will, in the case of the *The Praise of Folly* (hereafter: *Moria*), as well as the subsequent examples, take into account two aspects that characterize its position in the studied timeframe and space: (1) the internal textual evidence in *Moria* and (2) the progression of Erasmus' defense and reception of the *Moria*. Despite the fact that the *Moria* is considerably tamer in representing

the scholastics compared to other satires here studied, we can notice the same progression of intensity, if we observe how the debate surrounding it becomes theological in nature after the publication of *The New Testament* in 1516.

Although the technical details, such as the time and place of composition, and its sources are not the subject of this study, some introductory details are in order. As Erasmus himself reports, he wrote it in a week in 1509, while staying at Thomas More estate in Bucklesbury. Until the publication of 1511 he considerably revised it. Its original title *Moriae Encomium* is a pun on More's name – an allusion to their collaboration in translating Lucian's satires some years earlier. The main protagonist is *Stultitia* ("folly") who at the beginning praises itself in an encomium in a Lucianic manner. The work then takes a more serious tone, when it moves to "praising" self-deception and madness of different strata of society.

In the Strasbourg edition of November 1514, long passages on the theologians and monks were added intended to satirize the superstitious and ceremonial practices of the Catholic Church and the corruption of the Catholic clergy. There are altogether six chapters in which *Stultitia* satirizes the clergy: 53–54, in which theologians and monks, respectively, are targeted, and again in the chapters 57–60, where she deals with bishops and popes. As it is specifically the theologians, monks, and popes that are regularly under attack in the studied works, it might be worthwhile to consider their representation more closely.

Chapter 53, dealing with theologians, is the largest. If only Erasmus knew how right he was, when he expressed through *Stultitia*, that he would perhaps do better not to disturb this "remarkably touchy and supercilious lot, [...] lest they marshal their forces for an attack

with innumerable conclusions and force [him] to eat his words.”⁵⁵ As Levi expressed it, this part forms the heart of the *Moria*.⁵⁶ In contrast to the subsequent satires here examined, the attacks are, while harsh, not the least personal. *Stultitia*, who has adopted a voice suspiciously similar to that of Erasmus, meticulously overviews all the traits of the theologians with which the humanists found fault, from the much despised art of dialectics, which included coining new words and posing ridiculous questions, to general character traits, such as greed, stupidity, and arrogance. It is in this context that the *magistri nostri* are, in the conclusion of the chapter, first introduced into the debate – at which point Erasmus had no idea to what extent the confrontation would escalate in the following years:

“Finally, they think themselves nearest to the gods whenever they are reverently addressed as “our masters”, a title which holds as much meaning for them as the ‘tetragram’ does for the Jews. Consequently, they say it’s unlawful to write MAGISTER NOSTER except in capital letters, and if anyone inverts the order and says noster magister, he destroys the entire majesty of the theologians’ title at a single blow.”⁵⁷

Ridiculing the arrogance of the leading theologians of Louvain is a commonplace in Erasmus’ writings as well as in that of other satirists. Especially Ulrich von Hutten⁵⁸ was going to exploit this in 1515 in the *Letters of obscure Men*, written to defend the humanist Johannes Reuchlin against the scholastics. Reuchlin was the first to provoke a concerted attack from the theologians. After his death in 1522, Erasmus wrote a colloquy in his honor.⁵⁹

Chapter 54 deals with the monks. They are attacked for their self-love, beggary and fasting practices, the motives, which we will encounter throughout this study. It was not

⁵⁵ Miller, *Opera Omnia Desiderii Erasmi: Ordinis Quarti Tomus Tertius*. 44. Translated by Betty Radice (1971). Orig.: “Porro theologos silentio transire fortasse praestiterit, [...] vt pote genus hominum mire superciliosum atque irritabile.”

⁵⁶ Levi, “Introduction.” 15.

⁵⁷ “Postremo iam diis proximos sese ducunt, quoties quasi religiose magistri nostri saluantur, in quo quidem nomine tale quiddam subesse putant, quale est apud Iudaeos Τετραγράμματος. Itaque nefas aiunt esse MAGISTER NOSTER secus quam maiusculis scribere literis. Quod si quis praepostere Noster magister dixerit, is semel omnem theologicis nominis perverterit maiestatem.”

⁵⁸ See section 1.4 for more details on the authorship of the *Letters of Obscure Men*.

⁵⁹ *Apotheosis Capnionis*, published in summer 1522.

without reason, that Erasmus published a preemptive apology for *Moria* in the prefatory letter, around 3 years before the first actual attack by Martin Dorp took place. It would be naïve not to expect retribution, seeing how he described them in the lowest terms possible. *Stultitia* neatly expresses everything that was not in accordance with Erasmus' evangelical humanism, from their preaching to flattering the ears of the gullible audience and to begging for money, which Nesen abundantly exploited in the *Vita*.

Another motive, to be frequently exploited by the satirists on the following pages is their "illiteracy." It symbolizes the fundamental fault the humanists found with the scholastics. Some orders, notably the Franciscans, were indeed distrustful of learning, especially the humanist learning, which they, because of its praise for pagan authors, regarded as leading to heresy.⁶⁰ While trivial at first sight, it symbolizes perhaps the fundamental difference between the two camps, namely the question of method. What Erasmus and other satirists from the humanist camp target is not their actual illiteracy (whatever the real state of literacy in the ecclesiastical orders), but rather their unwillingness to accept the new method of studying the Bible: returning to the original texts and using the philological method to reconstruct the meaning, as opposed to the scholastic insistence on the medieval tradition of the interpretation.

While it is not one of Erasmus' serious works, the *Moria* nevertheless expresses his Christian philosophy of life and theology more efficiently than any other of his serious works. The *Moria* calls into question the dominance of the Catholic authorities and their favoring of the extrinsic rituals as opposed to intrinsic faith and wish to lead a moral life. It lays the path and the topics of ridicule on which the satirists of the next decade would elaborate and take it a step further: they would pick individuals from the opposite camp, try

⁶⁰ Erasmus elaborated on this in the colloquy *The Abbot and the Learned Lady* (lat. *Abbatis et Eruditae*), where the lady tries to explain to the Abbot how the pursuit of learning is more beneficial to one's life than the hedonistic pleasures, such as sleeping, drinking and dinner parties which the Abbot seems to prefer).

to portray them as representing the whole class of scholastics and to publicly destroy their image.

The progression of Erasmus' defense deserves some attention, as it changed in response to the progression of the humanist-scholastic controversies. In the prefatory letter to Thomas More (which is explicitly intended for publication and not for the private correspondence with its addressee), which is usually printed together with *Moria*, Erasmus preemptively attempts to answer two possible charges against it. To the charge that this kind of writing is not appropriate for a serious scholar he replied by citing classical sources and stating that even a serious person has the right to some light-hearted jesting; moreover, even with such a work, he is expressing serious ideas;⁶¹ to the charge that such a harsh satire is not in accordance with Christian charity, he replied that he named no specific class of people, no individual names and avoided obscene vices.⁶² He thus set the terms of a possible conflict in the range of rhetoric: the nature of the work, its precedents, the scope of the subject, and the tone.

The first attack came from Martin Dorp in September 1514 and was apparently not prompted by three passages on theologians and monks, which were only added in November that year.⁶³ In his *Apologia*, Erasmus elaborated on his arguments from the prefatory letter and underlined that the *Moria* was well received by all the classes it satirizes, including the intelligent theologians. Until Edward Lee's attack in 1518 the conflict about the *Moria* was indeed waged in the sphere of rhetoric.⁶⁴

⁶¹Miller, *Opera Omnia Desiderii Erasmi: Ordinis Quarti Tomus Tertius*. 68.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 68.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 25.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 25; Lee attacked the following passages: 188, 106-110; 190, 156-158, and 192, 240 – 247 in Miller, *Opera Omnia Desiderii Erasmi: Ordinis Quarti Tomus Tertius*.

In the answer to Edward Lee's accusation, Erasmus' defense of *Moria* changes: it becomes theological, rather than literary. As observed by Miller,⁶⁵ the attack on the *Moria* becomes assimilated to the attack on *The New Testament*: the theologians (e. g. Lee, Stunica, Sutor), picked out individual sentences and labeled them heretical. Erasmus grew weary of responding to criticisms of passages taken out of their context and later expressed regret that he had written it.

In my view the main shift for the satire in the decade studied here apparently occurred in the years 1514–1515, with the Reuchlin Affair, which saw for the first time a concerted attack of the scholastics on the humanist cause (represented by Reuchlin), and Erasmus' publication of the New Testament. Even though the *Moria* was written and published before that, we can still observe the change in Erasmus' attitude towards the opposite camp in the fact that the passages on the theologians were only added in the Strasbourg edition in 1514, as well as in Erasmus' response on the attacks from the theologians. Although the passages on (about) the theologians and monks are sharper in tone than the rest of the work, Erasmus is right in saying that there are no obscenities and personal attacks, as he was not yet irritated or desperate enough to join the trend and pick out individual names from the opposite camp; moreover, the two camps were not yet unified and sufficiently defined enough through opposition to each other.

2.3 Taking Sides

Philological and theological issues are certainly reflected in the *Letters of Obscure Men* (*Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum*), arguably the most influential satire of the Northern Renaissance. It was anonymously published in 1515 and grew out of the controversy which

⁶⁵Miller, "Introduction." 26.

came to be known as the Reuchlin Affair, initiated by the Jewish convert Johannes Pfefferkorn.

In 1510, Johannes Reuchlin, renowned Hebrew scholar and legal expert from Pforzheim, who was also experienced in the matters of imperial politics, was asked to give opinion on the possession of Jewish books in the Empire. The process started two years earlier, when Johannes Pfefferkorn, accused his former coreligionists of possessing books which allegedly vilified Christianity. He convinced the emperor Maximilian to order the confiscation of all books in the possession of Jews, in order to discover and extirpate any heretical or anti-Christian elements. To everyone's surprise, Reuchlin took the Jewish side of the controversy in his famous reply *Augenspiegel* and held that the Jewish literature cannot be considered anti-Christian in its entirety.

Little did Reuchlin know at the time that the people who commissioned him did not actually seek his professional opinion on the matter, but rather confirmation of their anti-Jewish endeavors. The dispute soon turned into a full-blown pamphlet war and Reuchlin found himself under constant attacks by the Dominicans of Cologne under the leadership of Jakob Hoogstraten. The humanist cause, however, was by that time so sufficiently advanced that Reuchlin received wide support from the men of letters from all over Europe. At the height of the Controversy, he published under the name of *Clarorum Virorum Epistolae latinae, graecae et hebraicae variis temporibus missae ad Ioannem Reuchlin Phorcensenem LL. doctorem* (1514). It is a collection of letters from eminent German humanists such as Ulrich von Hutten, Johann Crotus, Konrad Mutian, Helius Eobanus Hessus, and others in support of Reuchlin, to show that his position in the controversy with the monks was approved by the learned. As for the authors, the main portion of the book is attributed to the

humanist Crotus Rubeanus, who is said to have originated the idea and the title and to Ulrich von Hutten. Reuchlin and Erasmus were also among presumptive authors.

The satire of the letters is simple. The “foes of the new learning,”⁶⁶ the scholastics, are made to display themselves in all their pedantry and even immorality, without any trace of self-consciousness. The letters are addressed to Ortwin Gratius, “in scholarship respectable, but damned to everlasting fame as the butt of the keenest arrows ever launched by relentless wit against arrogant bigotry.”⁶⁷ Ortwin’s correspondents are all imaginary characters – with exceptions, such as Hoogstraaten – with comic names, such as *Conradus Dollenkopffius* (letter 28). These senders are, obviously, portrayed as stupid, ignorant, horribly self-satisfied, with the implication that Ortwin is like them.

In one of the letters, a fictitious correspondent relates a dinner conversation, in which Petrus Meyer, theologian from Frankfurt and supporter of Hoogstraten, expressed his opinion about Reuchlin’s qualifications:

“Go to!” said he, “Doctor Reuchlin hath deeper learning than thou!” and he snapped his fingers at him. Then Magister Peter replied: “I’ll be hanged if that is true! Holy Mary! Dr. Reuchlin is a mere child in theology? A child knows more theology than Dr. Reuchlin. Holy Mary! Mark my words, for I have experience, and he knows not a whit of the Book of Sentences. Holy Mary! There’s subtle stuff for you! Thou canst not pick that up like grammar or poetry! I could easily become a poet if I would... But what is that to the purpose? Let him propound me a thesis in theology, and argue pro et contra.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶Stokes, *Epistolæ Obscurorum Virorum: The Latin Text with an English Rendering, Notes, and an Historical Introduction*. xlv.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, xx.

⁶⁸“Ipse dixit : “Ecce doctor Ioannes Reuchlin est doctior quam vos,” et dedit ei unum knipp. Tunc is magister noster Petrus dixit : “Ego mitterem solvere collum meum an hoc est verum. Sancta Maria, doctor Reuchlin est in theologia sicut unus puer, et unus puer plus scit in theologia quam doctor Reuchlin. Sancta Maria, credatis mihi, quia ego habeo experientiam. Tamen ipse nihil scit in libris Sententiarum. Sancta Maria, ista materia est subtilis, et homines non possunt ita capere sicut grammaticam et poetriam. Ego vellem etiam bene poeta esse, et scirem etiam componere metra, quia audiui in Lyptzick Sulpitium de quantitibus syllabarum. Sed quid est? Ipse deberet mihi proponere unam quaestionem in theologia, et deberet arguere pro et contra.” Translated by Stokes (1909).

The passage reflects the obstinacy of the scholastics in regard to their method. Despite the obvious exaggeration of the satire, it was, according to Nauert, actually impossible to fathom how a humanist – a “poet” or a “rhetorician” in their eyes – could ever claim competency over the interpretation of the sacred texts.⁶⁹

An anecdote, related by Hermann Buschius and colorfully presented by Rummel,⁷⁰ illustrates that the dispute over competency did not take place only among the scholastics and humanists, but also internally among the clergy. At a certain stage during the Reuchlin Affair, the bishop of Speyer rendered a verdict in favor of Reuchlin and against Hoogstraten. The verdict was, according to custom, posted on the church doors. A priest, who was reading it, was harassed by what must have been the representatives of the Hoogstraten camp. They shouted at him for choosing to read the verdict of a bishop over the verdict of Paris theologians, which was apparently posted nearby. They proceed by cutting up the verdict. When the priest asked them whether they were not afraid of being censured they said that they could not care less for the verdict of the pope.⁷¹ The episode is a testimony, what an uncontested influence the Paris faculty of theology exercises. Even the popes, without any reservation, consulted them on a regular basis.⁷²

In the very first letter, and the most quoted one, Thomas Langschneyderius, *duly qualified, albeit unworthy, Bachelor in Theology*,⁷³ asks the addressee, Ortwin Gratius of Deventer, *the supereminent and highly scientific Herr Ortwin Gratius of Deventer, Poet, Orator, and Philosopher – theologian too, and whatsoever else he listeth*,⁷⁴ for advice on a theological matter. In describing how the question arose in the course of a certain dinner

⁶⁹ Rummel. “The Importance of Being Doctor.” 198.

⁷⁰ Reported in Rummel, “The Importance of Being Doctor.” From *Illustrium virorum epistolae* (Haguenau, 1519), sig. yl recto.

⁷¹ Rummel. “The Importance of Being Doctor.” 198.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 198.

⁷³ “THOMAS LANGSCHNEIDERIUS, *baccalarius theologiae formatus quamvis indignus*.”

⁷⁴ “*supereccellenti necnon scientificissimo viro domino Ortvinio Gratio Daventriensi poetae, oratori, et philosopho, necnon theologo, et plus si vellet*.”

party, he recounts a “serious debate” that occurred among the guests, namely, how are the candidates for the doctors of divinity to be called, magister *nostrandus* or *noster magistrandus*. Magister Warmsemmel presents his interpretation:

We should say “nostermagistrandus”—in one word—because “magistrare” signifies to make Master, and “baccalauriare” to make Bachelor, and “doctorare” to make Doctor (whence come the technical terms “magistrand,” “baccalauriand,” and “doctorand”). Now Doctors in Divinity are not styled “Doctors,” but on account of their humility and sanctity, and by way of distinction, are named and styled “Magistri Nostri,” because in the Catholic Faith they stand in the room of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the fount of life, and the “Magister” of us all: wherefore are they styled “Magistri Nostri” because it is for them to instruct us in the way of truth—and God is truth. Rightly, he argued, are they called “our masters,” for it is the bounden duty of us all, as Christians, to hearken to their preachments, and no man may say them nay—wherefore are they the masters of us all.⁷⁵

Nesen in the *Vita* reports how they took every measure possible to display their higher status over the rest of the people even with in terms of the sitting arrangements.

It is, of course, impossible to accurately recreate the intellectual atmosphere of another century, but what effect did the *Letters* have on the Reuchlin Affair? According to Phillips, we know that some people did not get the joke, some laughed hard, but we also know that Germany did not forget the *Letters of Obscure Men*, which are referred to in an astonishing number of works of the following three centuries.

2.4 On the Importance of Languages

The Dialogue of Bilinguals and Trilinguals is, like *Iulius exclusus e coelis*, not conclusively attributed to Erasmus, which is why it is edited together with his minor works,

⁷⁵ Orig.: “[...] dicendum est “nostermagistrandus,” quod sit una dictio: quia “magistrare” significat “magistrum facere,” et “baccalauriare” “baccalaurium facere,” et “doctorare” “doctorem facere:” et hinc veniunt isti termini “magistrandus, baccalauriandus, et doctorandus.” Sed quia doctores in sacra theologia non dicuntur doctores, sed propter humilitatem et etiam sanctitatem, et propter differentiam nominantur seu appellantur magistri nostri, quia stant in fide catholica in loco domini nostri Iesu Christi qui est fons vitae; sed Christus fuit nostrorum omnium magister; ergo ipsi appellantur magistri nostri, quia habent nos instruere in via veritatis, et deus est veritas, quapropter merito vocantur magistri nostri, quia omnes nos scilicet Christiani debemus et tenemur audire praedicationem eorum, et nullis debet dicere contra eos, ex quo sunt omnium nostrum magistri.” Translated by Stokes (1909).

in the same volume as *Iulius*.⁷⁶ It was published some time in 1519, which is the third stage of the battle between the humanist and the scholastics, as proposed by Rummel. The controversy had, as we have seen, proved a fruitful source for the satirists and the *Dialogus* is of all the satires presented here by far the sharpest in tone.

It is a literary monument reflecting one of the hardest crises in Erasmus' long battle against the conservative theologians. Until Erasmus' publication of the New Testament, the war was waged on literary grounds. After that, however, the great humanist beyond doubt stepped into *other men's crop* and the Louvain theologians spared no efforts in defending their fortress, as they saw it threatened by the gradual penetration of the new method. The struggle entered a new level.

The foundation of *Collegium Trilingue* was equal in force as the storm after the publication of the New Testament, but of a more limited scope. It was an attempt by the humanists to finally put their theories into practice and establish a college, where studies of theology would be based on teaching the three languages – Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. It was perceived as a direct challenge to the *magistri nostri*, who were not young enough to learn new languages. After a period of relative peace with the theologians, the *Collegium trilingue* was opened on 1 September 1519. It was endowed by Erasmus' friend and patron Jerome Busleiden; however, it was Erasmus who proposed and prepared the scheme and was responsible for the fulfillment of the plan.⁷⁷

While a small number of humanists welcomed the *Collegium Buslidiani*, as it was sometimes referred to, it was immediately attacked by the conservative professors, as well as by students of the other faculties. The students of the *Collegium* were apparently harassed and attacked on the streets, and taking advantage of the College's proximity to the fish market, the

⁷⁶Ferguson, *Erasmi Opuscula*.191–224.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 194.

attackers were crying: “We do not speak the Latin of the Fish-market, but the Latin of our mother the Faculty.”⁷⁸

The attacks were pouring from all sides and Erasmus was convinced that Briard of Ath (*Athensis* or *Atensis*, as Erasmus referred to him) was the leader of a direct conspiracy against himself and the cause he promoted; during his visit in 1517 he learned that *Athensis* was also responsible for Dorp’s condemnation of his writings. Among more significant attacks were the one by *Athensis* in a public lecture against the colloquy *Encomium Matrimonii* on the 21 February 1519, and the one by James Masson, called *Latomus*. Erasmus was not mentioned by name and the attack ostensibly targeted the *Oratio de variarum linguarum cognitione paranda* by Peter Mosellanus. Erasmus, however, soon realized that he was the real object of the attack and published an *Apologia* on the 28 March 1519.⁷⁹

Meanwhile the famous controversies with Lee over the New Testament were at their sharpest; the relations were further embittered by public attacks by Vincent Diercx and Nicolaas Baechem of Egmond, called *Egmondanus*. The latter was convinced that he is one of the leaders of the Luther heresy, which added fuel to the fire.⁸⁰

It was in these circumstances that the *Dialogus* was published. The author presents Mercury and three three-tongues, *trilingues*: *Baramia*, *Titus* and *Pomponius*, who are hiding in a cloud and observing a funeral procession of *Calliope*, muse of eloquence and epic poetry.⁸¹ She was led to the pyre to be burned alive by the two-tongued, *bilingues*, one to

⁷⁸ Quoted in Ferguson : “Nos non loquimur latinum de foro Piscium, sed loquimur latinum Matris nostrae Facultatis.”

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁸¹ The humanists were frequently referred to as mere rhetoricians and poets, my which the opponents tried to underline the argument that they were not suitable for divine studies.

flatter and the other to disparage behind one's back. The *bilingues* are the caricatures of the Louvain theologians: Briart, Dorp, Baechem, Latomus, Goppin, Lee and some others.

The following section is representative of the general tone of the dialogue:

Tit. What about Calliope?

Mer. She is accused of heresy.

Tit. How is that a crime?

Mer. It's a pretext, not a crime.

Pom. Which judge pronounced the sentence?

Mer. They [the theologians] play both roles, the judges the executors.

Pom. If the heresy is a pretext, whatever is the real crime?

Mer. One of lese-majesty: Calliope conspired with her party, trying to abolish their tyranny.⁸²

In Erasmus' writings, this is a constant theme. When Titus asks Mercurius, what was Calliope's crime, Mercurius responds that it is not about crime, but rather pretext. He refers to the constant tendency of the scholastics to confuse the promoters of *bonnae litterae* with heretics (by which they mean Lutherans), who are endangering the prestigious position they hold at the universities.⁸³

Erasmus' feud with Egmondanus started after the publication of the New Testament and grew more violent after the beginning of the Lutheran movement. Some motives, appearing also in the *Epistola de magistris nostris* and the *Vita* can be observed here:

Bar. But who is that headless Phillip?

Mer. You mean the blear-eyed?

Bar. Yes, the one in rags and a coat, white on the outside and black on the inside.⁸⁴

⁸² TIT. Quid diuinemus de Calliope?

MER. Damnata est haereseos.

TIT. Quid istud est criminis?

MER. Hic praetextus est, non crimen.

POM. Quo iudice damnata est?

MER. Ipsi partes omnes egerunt, iudices et actores rei.

POM. Si haeresis est praetextum, quodnam igitur est verum crimen?

MER. Laesae maiestatis, aduersus quam conspirauerat cum suis Calliope, moliens istorum tyrannidem e medio tollere.

⁸³ See also letters 809, 25–38; 1007, 47–53; 1033, 234–40.

⁸⁴ Orig.: "Bar. [...] Sed quisnam [ille] Philippus acephalus?"

This is a clear reference to Egmondanus, for whom Erasmus frequently used the epithet blar-eyed. Nesen included it in the *Vita*: *Sed cum sit bibacissimus, tamen adhuc tantum lippus, cum multi oculos suos bibendo perdiderint.*

The authorship of the *Dialogus* has received considerable attention and has been much disputed. It has been attributed to the titular author Conrad Nesen, his brother Wilhelm, and to Erasmus. Geiger and Gasquet⁸⁵ argued for Erasmus' sole authorship, while Allen has – on the basis of more material than any previous critic – proven that Erasmus has at least contributed to the dialogue.⁸⁶ Ferguson, too, is convinced that the external and internal evidence leaves no doubt that Erasmus was at least partly responsible. He seeks solution in the joint authorship: that the dialogue was written by Conrad Nesen and polished by Erasmus.⁸⁷

De Vocht is, as we will see in the third chapter, very blunt in his statements. To attribute the dialogue to “Erasmus would be absurd; even his inciting to writing would have been sheer madness.” He agrees with Ferguson in that Conrad could not have been familiar with such an amount of detail as presented in the dialogue.⁸⁸ Although he is probably right in saying that, angry as Erasmus was, it was not in the best interest of his *Collegium* to have anything to do with such a satire. However, Erasmus, whether author or reviser or none of the two, did not straightforwardly deny his authorship, but did so elusively and quite indirectly, as in the case of *Iulius*.⁸⁹

MER. Quasi lippum dicas.

BAR. Videlicet, qui centonatus ac palliatus, extimus candidus est, intus niger?”

⁸⁵Ferguson, *Erasmi Opuscula*. 197–198.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 198.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 198–199.

⁸⁸De Vocht, *History of the Foundation and the Rise of the Collegium Trilingue Lovaniense, 1517-1550*. 547.

⁸⁹ See, for instance, a letter to Bucer, 1532, quoted in Ferguson, *Erasmi Opuscula*. 200: “De dialogo trilingui, vt largiamur quod tu suspicari videris, non illic ad Euangelii persuasionem adhibetur fucus: tarnetsi quid fuci est ubi nullum apponitur nomen?”

Quite expectedly, the contemporaries immediately and generally designated Erasmus as the author: Zwingli, Adelmann, Pirkheimer, and Lee seem convinced of his authorship. Adelmann wrote to Pirkheimer: “You are correct in ascribing Nesen's dialogue to Erasmus. Today I have read the names of those against whom it is written. They are all from Louvain.”⁹⁰ Boniface Amerbach, who was close to Erasmus, agrees in a letter to Zasius: “You will sense the author. Not even Lucian was more joyfully playing with words.”⁹¹

Ferguson is definitely right that the dialogue was not written by Erasmus. The dialogue has no finesse of the other Erasmus' colloquies and is simply too obscene to be written solely by him. It is safe to suppose that in the time of its appearance in Louvain, he was on enough bad terms with the *magistri nostri* to be able to condone the publication and quite possibly edit it – while the tone of the dialogue is definitely not on the level of Erasmian satire of the *Colloquies* and the *Moria*, there still are passages with wording suspiciously similar to his letters, *Colloquies* and *Adages*. This, however, is far from a proof.

Wilhelm Nesen could not have been the author. While the choice of targets seems worthy of him, his attacks were written with his own name or completely anonymous. Moreover, at the time of the appearance of the *Dialogus*, he personally had no reason for hostility towards the *magistri nostri*.⁹² Additionally, the language of the *Dialogus* and the *Epistola de Magistris Nostris* or the *Vita*, show no similarity. As for Conrad Nesen's sole authorship, De Vocht is probably right in assuming that young Conrad was at the time not

⁹⁰Letter From Adelmann to Pirkheimer, 1 Nov. 1518, quoted by Ferguson, *op. cit.*, 199;. Orig.: “Dialogum Nastadiensis Erasmi esse bene scribis. Legi hodie eorum nomina, in quos scriptus fuit; omnes sunt Louanienses.”

⁹¹ Letter from Amerbach to zasius, Sept. 1519. Quoted in Ferguson, *op. cit.*, 200. Orig.: “Subodoraberis auctorem. Non enim Lucianus festi[vi]us lusisset.”

⁹² See more on autorship in Ferguson, *Erasmi Opuscula*. 198–203.

familiar enough with the situation in Louvain to be able to produce a dialogue so replete with details.⁹³

I would agree that the dialogue was not authored solely either by Erasmus or Wilhelm Nesen and Ferguson's theory about joint authorship seems very attractive. However, from the extant letters it is not possible to suppose what Erasmus was thinking and feeling at the time, which is what De Vocht tries to do as well as Ferguson in their respective theories; the citations from Erasmus' letters that they provide are not convincing enough for any conclusive decision – as amusing and charming as Erasmus indirectness is, it can only be taken as an indication, not a proof.

The purpose of this chapter was to demonstrate the progression of the humanist-scholastic debate in the decade 1509–1519. The *Moria* may be according to the division, proposed by Rummel, classified as the “earlier” Erasmus. However, with the gradual penetration of the humanist method at the universities, the debate becomes more intense and so do the attacks on Erasmus' writings, including the *Moria*. The passages on the theologians and monks were actually added at the time when the debate centered on Reuchlin grew sharper. It is in the context of that debate that the humanists saw themselves attacked by the concerted efforts by the theologians for the first time. *The dialogue of the Bilinguals and the Trilinguals* is, like the *Vita*, product of the third stage, where the lines between the humanists and the reformers (labeled heretics) were blurred in the eyes of the scholastics. The tone is appropriately sharper and neither the scholastics nor the humanists, including Erasmus, shied away from singling out and trying to destroy individuals from the opposite camp.

⁹³De Vocht, *History of the Foundation and the Rise of the Collegium Trilingue Lovaniense, 1517-1550*. 407.

However hard it may be to talk of the influence of the satirical literature influence on the progress of the humanism and, later, the Reformation, it is clear that such literature and the ensuing polemics participated in drawing the boundaries of social circles, such as Eobanus and Reuchlin's circle in Erfurt, and Erasmus and More's Republic of Letters.⁹⁴

The camps, sides or whatever we choose to call them, seeing as they were not a coherent unit, were frequently centered around a visible person, such as Erasmus, Reuchlin or Luther. The case study, presented in the following chapter, expresses this tendency: the purpose of the studied satire/invective was, in addition to attach a person from the opposite camp, to Support Erasmus in his campaign against the theologians.

⁹⁴ See Furey, "Invective and Discernment in Martin Luther, D. Erasmus, and Thomas More."

Chapter 3 –*VITA S. NICOLAI SIVE STULTITIAE EXEMPLAR* (CASE STUDY)

The *Vita S. Nicolai sive stultitiae exemplar* (henceforth: *Vita*) is a satirical biography of Nicolaas Baechem of Egmond (henceforth: Egmondanus): Carmelite, theologian, great inquisitor, appointed by the Emperor Charles V, and *Magister noster*. It is an appendix to the *Epistola de Magistris nostris Louaniensibus, quot, et quales sint, quibus debemus magistralem illam damnationem Lutherianam* (henceforth: *Epistola de magistris nostris*), which Nesen sent to Ulrich Zwingli at the end of year 1519, to complain about the intolerable arrogance of some of the divines of Louvain. Although both texts merit a more detailed study (comparison of the two texts, and place in the larger corpus of similar texts of the period, etc.), I am only interested here in the strategies of invective, used against its target Egmondanus.

In the introduction we find out which trait best characterizes S. Nicholas:

In this one person Stupidity abundantly expressed whatever was in its power, so that if someone attentively observes him [sc. Egmondanus], they will see more than in the entire *Praise of Folly* by Erasmus or the *Ship of Fools* by Sebastian Brant, or anywhere else, where someone might have attempted to express the form of Stupidity.⁹⁵

The passage quoted is revealing, for we can infer three things from it: (1) this is not the first time that Stupidity (lat. *Stultitia*, or, for Erasmus, *Moria*) spoke; (2) the author is familiar with the past instances of *Moria*'s discourse and is probably favorably disposed towards them; (3) the author supposes that the potential reader knows the two works mentioned. These findings help the reader to place the *Vita* into the contexts, discussed in previous two chapters, and hint to the intended readership of the *Vita* and the aim of the text: the readership

⁹⁵ “n hoc uno quicquid suis dotibus potuit Moria cumulatissime expressit, ut si quis hunc attente contempletur, plus conspecturus sit, quam in tota ERASMI Moria, aut navi stultifera Sebastiani Branti aut si quis alius stultitiae formam conatus est exprimere.”

is the educated elite; the aim of the text is to present Egmondanus in an extremely bad light and destroy his public image.

This chapter should serve as a case study to the previous two chapters. I intend to demonstrate that the *Vita* is a fusion of the invective, exchanged during the humanist-scholastic debate, and of the specific kind of satirical literature that developed during the decade 1509–1519. The chapter is divided into three sections: the first one is introductory, presenting the author, the circumstances of its publication, and its main subject, Egmondanus. The second section is an attempt at an analysis in terms of the form, the author's intention, and the means by which the author attempts to establish himself as the authority, i.e. the possessor of the ultimate truth about Egmondanus. In the third section I analyze the strategies of invective and satire used in the *Vita*.

3.1 Context

3.1.1 Wilhelm Nesen's arrival to Louvain

According to Steitz,⁹⁶ Nesen was born in 1493 in Nastätten. We lack all information about his youth. He acquired his MA in Louvain. During the years 1511–1515, he studied in Basle, where he got promoted to the Master of Arts. At the same time, he was working as a corrector for printers, which allowed him to acquaint himself with many prominent intellectuals of his time, among which were Wolfgang Capito, Johannes Amerbach, Beatus Rhennanus, Johannes Oecolampadius, Ulrich Zwingli, Erasmus of Rotterdam, and others. In April 1515, he revised Erasmus edition of Seneca, printed by Froben, and Erasmus was apparently not pleased with the results.⁹⁷

⁹⁶Steitz, "Der Humanist Wilhelm Nesen." 37.

⁹⁷De Vocht, *History of the Foundation and the Rise of the Collegium Trilingue Lovaniense, 1517–1550*. 392.

Like many humanists of his time, he often changed residence, so in the spring of 1517 he went to Paris with some of his students, where he continued studying languages and making friends with the like-minded humanists, such as Jacques Lefèvre D'Étaples and Erasmus' friend Nicolas Bérault. Then follows the unfortunate episode in Louvain, where he moved in summer 1519, to be close to Erasmus. Nesen took up residence in Lily and was quickly admitted to Erasmus' circle.

3.1.2 Truce between Erasmus and the theologians and Nesen's interference

The situation that gave rise to the opportunity for the composition of the *Epistola de Magistris nostris* and the *Vita* is the long-standing debate between the humanists and the scholastics, described in the second chapter, which started in Italy and spread north of the Alps around the break of the century. While the Italian humanists did not face a strong opposition, the northern humanists, such as Erasmus, waged their part of the battle in very different circumstances. The universities, strongholds of the scholastic thought, especially faculties of theology, enjoyed such a prestige, that even the pope did not hesitate to ask them for advice. It was in such circumstances that the humanists, more and more vocal about the need for changes in the universities, waged a pamphlet war, as Matheson calls it,⁹⁸ against the well-entrenched institution of *Magistri nostri*.

It was soon after he entered the circle of Erasmus and his friends, reports De Vocht, that he started eagerly gathering scraps of information, either from Erasmus' complaints, or in conversations with his friends.⁹⁹ It was the time of the harshest controversy between Erasmus and Edward Lee and Nesen was probably wondering, how it was possible that

⁹⁸Matheson, Peter. *Rhetoric of the Reformation*. 32.

⁹⁹De Vocht, *History of the Foundation and the Rise of the Collegium Trilingue Lovaniense, 1517 –1550*. 395 and *passim*.

Erasmus tolerated all those unjustified attacks by the theologians in such a composed manner and feigned continuous friendship with them. It was probably because he was a new-comer to Louvain, speculates De Vocht, that he could not grasp the delicacy of the situation and the fragility of Erasmus' plans for the *Collegium Trilingue*.¹⁰⁰ He probably had best intentions in mind, when he composed the *Dialogus*, examined in the previous chapter, and subsequently caused great difficulties for Erasmus, who was, naturally, immediately accused of being the author.

Erasmus was, with some effort, able to prove that he was not the author and restore the peace. But the trouble did not end there, as Nesen found himself in a conflict with the theologians of Louvain. It seems that, by that time, he was close enough to Luther's cause that the authoritative condemnation of his doctrine by the faculty of theology of Louvain on 7 November 1519 prompted him to write the pamphlets *Epistola de magistris nostris* and *Vita*, by which he wanted to demonstrate how little right the theologians had to pronounce such a sentence. As De Vocht, openly biased against Nesen, puts it, he "made use of that wretched old mixing up of theology with linguistics, of literature with orthodoxy."¹⁰¹ Because of his failure to present the case before the Brabant council to be allowed to continue teaching in Louvain, he was most bitterly disposed against Egmondanus, who played a major role in his dismissal. Thus Egmondanus proceeded from playing an "accessory role" in the *Dialogus* to being a chief target first in the *Epistola de magistris nostris* and then in the *Vita*, the most biting invective that Nesen's vocabulary allowed him to produce. Before proceeding to the analysis of the *Vita*, it is worthwhile to review the biographical information that we have on Egmondanus.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 395.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 578.

3.1.3 The Subject of the Satire

Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle provides a condensed summary of what is known about his life and career as a theologian in *Contemporaries of Erasmus: A Biographical Register of the Renaissance and Reformation*.¹⁰² He matriculated in Louvain on 29 October 1487. He was promoted to the degree of MA in 1491 and became a doctor of divinity on 2 December 1505. The following year he entered the Carmelite order and took his vows on 1 March 1507. From 1510 he directed the Carmelite house of studies in Louvain.

Of all the Erasmus' adversaries Egmondanus proved to be the harshest opponent. The attacks started after the publication of the New Testament, when Egmondanus preached against it as a sign of the collapse of the Christian religion, even before Erasmus came to Louvain. They may have met in Brussels in 1518, where Erasmus reportedly asked Egmondanus to state clearly, what about the New Testament he finds problematic, only to find out, that the theologian has not seen nor read it.¹⁰³ Egmondanus often linked Erasmus name with Luther's in his preaching, for which Erasmus complained to the rector Godschalk Rosemond. The complaint resulted in the meeting, described in the introduction.

Egmondanus has left behind a collection of manuscripts, most of which were lost during the wars of religion in the Low Countries and none have reached us. This makes the study of Egmondanus' thought a nearly impossible task, as all we have are one-sided reports in the correspondence of Erasmus and his circle and a series of satires and invective letters. We have, however, a short catalogue of his works, among which are such titles as *Sermones de tempore et de sanctis, Bruxellis, Mechliniae et Lovanii habiti, Censurae in Novum Testamentum Desiderii Erasmi, in ejusdem Colloquia et Moriam*, and commentaries of some

¹⁰²Bietenholz and Deutscher, *Contemporaries of Erasmus: A Biographical Register of the Renaissance and Reformation*, Volumes 1–3, A–Z. 81–83.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, 81.

of the books of the New Testament.¹⁰⁴ De Jongh, perhaps justly, stated that a scan over the short catalogue of his known manuscripts makes one doubt whether he was really as uneducated about the Holy Scripture as Erasmus and his friends liked to report.¹⁰⁵

As is clear by now, Egmondanus was a popular target of the humanist invectives and satires. Beside the *Dialogus*, the *Epistola de magistris nostris* and the *Vita*, studied here, and the many angry letters, exchanged among the humanists, Erasmus frequently insulted him in his *Colloquies*, notably in the *Ichthiophagia* and *Apotheosis Capnionis*. In the *Apotheosis*, a praise of Reuchlin and his extraordinary linguistic skills, where he satirically described his apotheosis (*Capnio* is the grecisized form of his name), several lines are dedicated to Egmondanus. The two interlocutors, Brassicanus and Pompilius, talk about a preacher in Louvain, one Camelus, who is a staunch opponent of everything that is new. Erasmus enjoyed making puns on “Carmelita,” calling Egmondanus *Camelita*, *Camelus*, etc., perhaps because of his stubbornness, or, as O’Rourke speculates, “because of the Camel’s nasty habit of spitting in one’s eye.”¹⁰⁶ The pun appears several times in Nesen’s satirical writings as well.

After Egmondanus’ death on 23 or 24 August 1526, he was, in Erasmus’ words, still “mocked by all.”¹⁰⁷ there appeared a satirical epitaph which was, like many other lampoons of the time, attributed to Erasmus:

Here lies Egmondanus, useless burden of the Earth;
he favored wrath – let there be no rest for him.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ The entire extant catalogue is quoted in Bietenholz and Deutscher, *Contemporaries of Erasmus: A Biographical Register of the Renaissance and Reformation*, Volumes 1–3, A–Z. 83.

¹⁰⁵ De Jongh, *L’ancienne Faculté de Théologie de Louvain Au Premier Siècle de Son Existence: (1432-1540): Ses Débuts, Son Organisation, Son Enseignement, Sa Lutte Contre Erasme et Luther*. 154.

¹⁰⁶ Bietenholz and Deutscher, *Contemporaries of Erasmus: A Biographical Register of the Renaissance and Reformation*, Volumes 1–3, A–Z. 82.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 82, Ep. 1747.

3.2 Text Analysis

3.2.1 Structure

The narrative can be divided in the following way:¹⁰⁹

1. Introduction
2. Birth and birth-place
3. Education until the promotion to *magister noster*
4. Decision of entering an order
5. Head of the college for Carmelite students in Louvain
6. On the temperance of S. Nicholas
7. On the chastity of S. Nicholas
8. On the steadfastness of S. Nicholas
9. On the preaching of S. Nicholas
10. On the patience of S. Nicholas
11. On the authority of S. Nicholas
12. On the faith of S. Nicholas

Additionally, the biography should be thematically divided into three units. In the first one (1–5), we learn about Nicholas' life from birth until the time when he was appointed head of college for Carmelite students. The second unit (6–11) is dedicated to his character. It is divided into virtues: *temperantia*, *castitas*, *constantia*, and his theological views and practices: *doctrina*, *conciones*, and *autoritas*. Each one of them is explained by his habits, thoughts, and practice with mocking approval. The last section (12) is presented under the

¹⁰⁸“Hic iacet Egmondus, telluris inutile pondus
Dilexit rabiem, not habeat requiem.” Quoted in Bietenholz and Deutscher, *Contemporaries of Erasmus: A Biographical Register of the Renaissance and Reformation, Volumes 1–3, A–Z*. 82.

¹⁰⁹ In dividing the text into twelve sections I follow De Vocht, *History of the Foundation and the Rise of the Collegium Trilingue Lovaniense, 1517–1550*. 597–602. The division into three units is mine.

title *Fides S. Nicolai* and nominally belongs to the second unit. However, the last section of the second is so different in tone that it should be treated as a separate unit. I propose to see the development of the satire along the line from particular to the general. In the first unit, *biographical*, it is Egmondanus himself who is under attack. The second, a more systematic one, can be seen as satirizing the whole class of the theologians and seeing the circumstances, we may well suppose that the author had particularly the *magistri nostri* in mind. In the third unit, the author gives the impression that his ire towards Egmondanus has somewhat faded and now the whole institution of the Catholic Church is targeted. This unit is in fact a list of bullet points, reminiscent of another well-known list some two years earlier. They are introduced by “[Egmondanus] credit,” each bullet point starting with “quod.” It is almost a separate pamphlet, condemning the absolute power of the popes and the clergy, in particular their corruption, avarice, and efforts to establish themselves as having supreme authority over the temporal rulers.

3.2.2 Intention

The intention of the *Vita* has to be seen in connection to *Epistola de magistris nostris*. In the latter, the author attempts to defend Luther’s cause by presenting the *magistri nostri* as too incompetent to pronounce any judgment on Luther’s teachings. Out of 320 lines, 220 are dedicated exclusively to Egmondanus. The information in the *Epistola de magistris nostris* is then given a shape of a satirical hagiography, where Egmondanus is ridiculed for his stupidity, incompetence in theological matters, and for the fact that he has never read nor wanted to read any of the Luther’s teachings. Speaking about not being familiar with the matter at hand, it has to be mentioned that internal indications in the *Epistola de magistris nostris* show that Nesen was not much more familiar with Luther’s writings than Egmondanus: there is only one direct reference to them, and it seems to have been copied

almost literally from Erasmus' letter to the cardinal Albrecht of Mainz of 1 November 1519.¹¹⁰

De Vocht, who treats in detail Nesen's activity in Louvain and his relations with Erasmus, dismisses the two pamphlets as mere outbursts of anger by Nesen, who wanted to exact his last revenge to the theologians before leaving Louvain. While he reproduces and annotates the entire text of *Epistola de magistris nostris*, he does not do the same with the *Vita*, as he supposes that it is a mere repetition of what was said before.¹¹¹ This is certainly not true. The *Epistola de magistris nostris* is, indeed, a colorful collection of insults toward the divines of Louvain who were the most influential in the battle against Erasmus and played a considerable part in Nesen's dismissal from the university. It is also a valuable historical document, revealing much about Nesen's place in the controversies and his position between Erasmus and Luther. As for the *Vita*, what De Vocht in his open dislike for Nesen fails to notice is that the *Vita* goes into a slightly different direction. I believe that it is an attempt by Nesen – at the time still firmly in the camp of the humanists – to participate in the tradition of the satires against the conservative theologians, which became fashionable with the *Letters of obscure men* during the Reuchlin Affair. This is not to say, however, that Nesen strived for a literary achievement on the level of *Moria*. I believe that the form of the satire was for him principally a means of attracting a larger audience, which the satirists certainly attracted. The *Vita*, therefore, has to be seen not only in the context of the pamphlet wars between the scholastics and the theologians, but also as a part of the satirical tradition of the previous decade.

After Nesen's dismissal from the *Collegium Trilingue*, in the spirit very much reminiscent of the Reuchlin Affair, Erasmus tasked him with travelling to Germany to

¹¹⁰ For details see Steitz, "Der Humanist Wilhelm Nesen." 84.

¹¹¹ De Vocht, *History of the Foundation and the Rise of the Collegium Trilingue Lovaniense*. 547 and *passim*.

encourage the humanists of the Erfurt circle to write letters in support of his cause against Lee – *Epistolae Eruditorum Virorum* – and to have them published.¹¹²

3.2.3 Authority

The author does little to establish himself as the possessor of the true information about Egmondanus and *Magistri nostri* which he is revealing to the reader. It seems that the whole *ethos* of the *Vita* lies in the author's association with Erasmus and Erasmus' charisma, and not the author's own. In the introduction he mockingly places his satire into the company of the "world literature:"

The Greeks proposed their example of wisdom in the figure of Ulyses, the Latins in Aeneas, the Christians in many, but principally in Christ. But so far, none of the mortals presented the absolute exemplar of stupidity. [...] I will look for it not in antiquity, not among remote peoples, nor will I invent it, as did Homer; I will rather present the very thing [sc. Stupidity itself], as it is expressed in its own colors.¹¹³

The passage evokes the three supreme authorities for the Biblical humanist: Homer's Greek epics, Virgil's Latin epic, and the New Testament – obviously an excellent way of securing approval of the humanists implicated in the *Collegium Trilingue* Controversy. After placing his satire among the greatest in history, he associates his work with the authorities in the more immediate history:

In this one person Stupidity abundantly expressed whatever what in its power, so that if someone attentively observes him [sc. Egmondanus], they will see more than in the entire *Praise of Folly* by Erasmus or the *Ship of Fools* by Sebastian Brant, or

¹¹²De Vocht, *History of the Foundation and the Rise of the Collegium Trilingue Lovaniense, 1517–1550*. 597–602.

¹¹³"Sophiae exemplar graeci proposuerunt in Ulisse, Latini in Aenea, Christiani cum in allis multis, tum praecipue in Christo. Sed absolutum stultitiae exemplar nullus adhuc mortalium proposuit. [...] Id petam non ab antiquis, non a longe semotis gentibus, neque fingam, quemadmodum finxit Homerus, sed ipsissimum ut est suis expressum coloribus proponam."

anywhere else, where someone might have attempted to express the form of Stupidity.¹¹⁴

It was no secret in the author's time that he was an ardent follower of Erasmus and he did not want it to look otherwise in the satire. Surely, the name-dropping must have, if not added to the credibility of the satire, at least raised its profile. In the first place, because of the status that the great humanist enjoyed among fellow humanists, but also because of his long standing battles with the *magistri nostri* of the Louvain faculty of theology, with which his fellow humanists were more than familiar.

The other reason for numerous Erasmian references, for instance punning on the word Carmelita, and quoting Erasmus' Adages, must have been to pay homage to Erasmus. The author was in quite familiar terms with him and it is no secret that he greatly admired him. As stated above, the main reason for Nesen's installation in Louvain was to be close to the Erasmus.

What was Erasmus reaction to the Nesen's invectives? It seems that they were published after Nesen's departure for Germany and according to De Vocht, Erasmus was not informed about the publication. When he caught wind of them, probably in a letter by Wolfgang Capito,¹¹⁵ he replied on 6 December 1520:

Write to Nesen, that, if he published the Life of S. Nicholas – which the latter definitely deserves – he should add his name, lest the suspicion fall on someone else.¹¹⁶

While Erasmus openly criticized his opponents among his friends, and in an occasional reference in his writings, he was not inclined to publish libels without any other

¹¹⁴“In hoc uno quicquid suis dotibus potuit Moria cumulatissime expressit, ut si quis hunc attente contempletur, plus conspecturus sit, quam in tota ERASMI Moria, aut navi stultifera Sebastiani Branti, aut si quis alius stultitiae formam conatus est exprimere.”

¹¹⁵De Vocht, *History of the Foundation and the Rise of the Collegium Trilingue Lovaniense, 1517–1550*. 410.

¹¹⁶Allen, iv, 1165, 38-39. 1520 : 'Neseno scribe vt, si edat Vitam S. Nicolai, quod prorsus ille meretur, addat suum nomen ne quem alium grauet suspitione'

purpose than revenge. When in the last months of 1524 his friend Johannes Botzemus wished to send some work to a printer in Constance and have him reproduce Nesen's pamphlets, Erasmus quickly stopped him, and was, on 26 November 1524, assured that neither the *libellus S. Nicolai* nor *dialogus* – apparently the *Dialogue of the Bilinguals and Trilinguals* – would be published. Erasmus remained on familiar terms with Nesen, but no longer granted him his trust and started writing to other humanists to be careful when confiding in Nesen. He wrote to Goclenius on 6 February 1522:

If you write about anything to Nesen, write cautiously. To me he has surely proved as the most infelicitous friend. He does not hold anything back nor does he discern what should be said at what time. He does not do good to the literature, to Luther's cause nor to his disciples.¹¹⁷

After 1520, because of Nesen's injudicious character and because Nesen decided to completely switch to the Lutheran cause, the friendship between Erasmus and Nesen was broken. A decade later (2 March 1532), he complained in a letter to Martin Bucer:

Had I never got acquainted to Nesen, I would be spared many troubles into which he has implicated me. I will not even mention the savage letters, unless you by chance feel [that I am talking] about the Life of the Stupid Nicholas. For some suspect me of having produced it. But what does that [such letters] have to do with Bacchus, as they say?¹¹⁸

3.2.4 Strategies of Invective and the Humor

Despite the lack of the real definition of the invective and its impossibility to classify as a genre of literature, the researchers have nonetheless identified strategies, rhetorical approaches, and common tendencies, observable in most of the examples which we recognize as belonging to the invective discourse. In this section I try to isolate the different strategies,

¹¹⁷“Neseno si quid scribis, caute scribis. Ille sane mihi fuit amicus infelicissimus. Nihil continet; nec dispicit quid quando dicendum. Nec prodest bonis litteris, nec causae Lutheranae, nec suis discipulis.”

¹¹⁸“Si cum Neseno nunquam habuissem familiaritatem, multis molestiis caruissem in quas ille me coniecit. De trucibus epistolis prorsus non memini, nisi forte sentis de vita Stulti Nicolai. Nam quidam hoc libelli a me profectum suspi cabantur. Sed quid haec ad Bacchum, vt aiunt?”

upon which Nesen based his invective and humor in the *Vita*. For, as will be seen in the following paragraphs, although the text was clearly written to realize a symbolic murder of Egmondanus, to use Morini's words, the *Vita* is not a mere compilation of insults and the humor is reminiscent of the satires examined in the second chapter. To hurt Egmondanus' reputation, Nesen used three strategies: (1) degradation; (2) presenting him as a deviant in his profession as a Carmelite and a theologian; (3) presenting him as an anti-Erasmus.

(1) It is a common practice in invective discourse to degrade one's opponent by trying to present him as a grotesque human being. In Egmondanus, the author would have us believe, the mental deficiency was so extreme that it was discernible on his body, which caused him ridicule wherever he went. It is also important to notice frequent insertions of the phrase *magister noster*, echoing the well-established practice of ridiculing the arrogance of the doctors of theology among the contemporary humanists:

The face, gestures, the gait and the speech suggested stupidity to such an extent that you immediately recognize him as a moron and an insane man. The stupid *magister noster* was laughed at even by the young boys, and had fingers pointed at him.¹¹⁹

When Nicholas was, on a certain occasion, putting on his head a mitre from cartons and covered himself in a sheet, in order to see in front of the mirror how he would look like as an abbot, the author explains, that he disliked the "ears," hanging from the mitre and was "afraid that on the outside, he would not look like an abbot, but rather as a moron, especially since he could not do anything about his face."¹²⁰

A popular means of degradation is comparing the target to animals. In describing the avarice of the theologians of Louvain and their mutual jealousy in looting the population, Nesen compares them to the eagles:

¹¹⁹ "Adeo totus vultus, gestus, incessus, sermo stultitiam prae se fert, ut et procul et a tergo statim agnoscas fatuum ac dementem. Ridebatur etiam a pueris, monstrabatur digito, Stultissimus Magister noster."

¹²⁰ "[...] metuit ne palam non abbas, sed Morio videretur, praesertim cum vultum mutare non possit."

Just like the eagles measure between themselves definitively delineated stretches, where they prey, so the preachers and the Carmelites have fixed limits, in which they collect eggs and cheese.¹²¹

The friars, who went to collect gifts in nature, were also called *terminarii*, because they collected butter, eggs and chiefly cheese in houses and on farms within certain *termini*.¹²² There are other occasions, where Egmondanus is compared to a vulture, for instance in describing his constant “circling” around Louvain, the reason for which were apparently the copious feasts: “And just like vultures can smell a future corpse even from afar and fly over, so he could smell a future feast for months ahead.”¹²³

(2) The second chief strategy, intended for destroying Egmondanus’ public image is presenting his hypocrisy in ecclesiastical matters. It is chiefly in this sense that Nesen continues the tradition of ridicule, established with such satires as the *Letters of Obscure Men*.

The motifs exposed by the author very closely correspond to cardinal sins. First of all, despite the widespread opinion on his stupidity, Nicholas held himself in high regard: “And while everybody thought he was more stupid than Corebus, he was the only one who thought he was Salomon himself.”¹²⁴ And when his *patientia* in regard to such insults is praised, Nicholas is said to tolerate *omnia fortiter*:

He is laughed at by the others, from himself he gets only flattery; people whisper about him, he applauds himself; others hate him, he thinks the world about himself; to others he is a tree-trunk, to himself he is a god, to such an extent that he wonders why whatever he tramples upon does not immediately turn into roses.¹²⁵

¹²¹ “Quemadmodum Aquilae certos tractus inter se dimetiuntur, in quibus praedas agunt, ita praedicatores et Carmelitae certos habent limites, in quibus colligunt ova et caseos.”

¹²² Comp. the english equivalent *lymytour* and the Flemish general term for begging, *termynen*.

¹²³ “Et quemadmodum vultures procul etiam olfaciunt futurum cadaver et advolant, ita ille mensibus aliquot praesentiebat futurum convivium.”

¹²⁴ “Et interim cum omnibus videretur Corebo stultior, sibi uni videbatur Salomon ipse.”

¹²⁵ “Ridetur ab aliis, ipse sibi blanditur, exsibilatur, ipse sibi plaudit, invisus est aliis, ipse se deamat, aliis est stipes, ipse sibi deus, adeo ut admiretur non verti in rosam ilico quicquid calcaverit.”

The second one is gluttony, *gula*. The greatest pleasure for Nicholas, as it seems, are the lavish feasts that he gets to participate in his capacity as *Magister Noster*:

For he was often called to duty, as they say, that is copious feasts [...] Just like vultures, who even from afar smell the future corpse and immediately fly over, he was able to feel an upcoming feast for months ahead; for those he was preparing himself with a two-day fasting, so that even after two days he was full – that’s how much he was stuffing his spacious belly with free dinners.¹²⁶

The *convivia* also imply the sloth, *acedia*, as does the choice of the Carmelite habit itself: “[...] solus ordo Carmelitarum placuit, qui nunquam laboravit infamia immodicae sanctimoniae, et gignit obesos et rubicundos procos, verius quam monachos.”¹²⁷ Here we find the first hint of lust, *voluptas*, and of Nicholas’ willingness to sacrifice his body to other than Christ. Why else would the author need to point out that “[the Carmelites] gratissimi sunt foeminis, quibus placent bene mutoniati.”¹²⁸ Indeed, as it seems, *muto Carmelitus* seems to be quite a topic when talking about matters Carmelite:

There were some who said that praise should be sung to the Carmelite cock. But S. Nicolaas swore that it was not he who said it, although he wouldn’t dare to speak for the others, as in the matters human, much occurs between the chalice and the upper lip.¹²⁹

In terms of greed, *avaritia*, Nicolaas merely participates in widespread Catholic practices: “Ex veniis pontificiis, non parum pecuniae collegit a stultis [...]. With furious wrath, *ira*, he stands on the preaching podium and condemns the readings of Luther that he has never even

¹²⁶ “Nam crebro vocabatur ad actus, ut vocant, hoc est ad pingua convivia, [...] Et quemadmodum vultures procul etiam olfaciunt futurum cadaver et advolant, ita ille mensibus aliquot praesentebat futurum convivium, ad quod se preparabat biduano ieiunio, sic ut etiam post biduo satur esset, adeo gratuitis epulis saburabat capacem alvum.”

¹²⁷ “The order of the Carmelites was the only one to his taste, which was never notorious for being too holy, and which produces fat and red-faced ladies-men, rather than monks.”

¹²⁸ “[...] were immensely popular among women, who like men with big cocks.”

¹²⁹ “Erant qui dicerent agendas gratias mutoni Carmelitis. Sed S. Nicolaus iurat se non esse autorem, quamquam de allis non vult iurare, quod in rebus humanis multa inter calicem supremaque labra.”

read: “[vociferans] in Martinum Lutherum, cuius libros non legerat, sed audierat illum negligere venias pontificias.”¹³⁰

(4) The last category is the so called strategy of inversion. Erasmus of Rotterdam, as shown in the second chapter, represented for the humanists an ideal to be followed. Granted, much of this ideal was due to his undisputable learning; however, it is important to notice that it was partly self-cultivated, as can be observed in his *Colloquies*, as well as in different *apologiae* in the course of the decade examined in the second chapter. At this point we cannot but remember another great humanist, Petrarch, who consciously (and sometimes also openly) displayed his erudition. Parallel to the emblematic and much celebrated focus on man in the Renaissance, there was also an important focus on one’s ego. Nowhere is this better shown than in the beginning of the sixteenth century, with such personalities as Reuchlin, Erasmus, Luther, Egmondanus himself, and others. Luther’s quest for truth by faith would hardly work if he had not seen and fashioned himself as a leading authority. Such self-fashioning was followed by a kind of a cult of personality, which enabled the genesis of such collections of letters as *Epistolae clarorum virorum* in the case of Reuchlin and their satirical counterparts.

The cult of Erasmus, which was for the camp of the humanists *the ultimate exemplar of virtue*, as it were, provided for Nesen a measure for his invective. If the highest virtue was learning, what could be farther away from that than anti-learning, i. e. stupidity? There are several points, on which Nesen built his anti-Erasmus.

Then he took up literature, he studied Alexander, Floretus and Mammetrectus, and whatever there was egregiously stupid in literature, and he learned it with great ease, so that you might say he was born for stupid things.¹³¹

¹³⁰ “[Shouting] against Martin Luther, whose books he never read, but had only heard that he refuses the papal indulgences.”

Floretus was a poem on Christian morality by Johannes Garlandus (c. 1180–c. 1252), author of grammatical works, used in schools, who was frequently attacked by Erasmus, e. g. in the *Antibarbari*¹³² and Ep. 26, 1.89. Erasmus apparently criticized *Mammetrectus*, a guide for understanding the Bible by the Franciscan Johannes Marchesinus, already in 1515, but also later, in the symposiastic colloquy *Synod of Grammarians*. *Alexander* is probably the designation of an infamous attempt at a Greek grammar, the authorship of which is not completely clear, although some ascribe it to Alexander Hegius, Erasmus' teacher from Deventer.

Erasmus views on fasting are well known and he frequently made them clear in the Colloquies (see e. g. *Ichthiophagia*, *Convivium religiosum*, etc.). In the *Vita*, there are at least two places, where Nesen dedicated a curiously large amount of space to the description of Egmondanus' fasting. In the section (6), *On the temperance of S. Nicholas*, he writes: "On Wednesdays, he hardly ever eats meat, he stuffs himself exclusively with eggs and fish, until he vomits [...]." ¹³³

Finally, there are the views on the monastic life. While Erasmus, realizing that the rigid rules and practices have little to do with faith, spend years of his life to exit it, Nesen's Egmondanus first thought long and hard (*multis mensibus deliberatum est*) about which habit to accept. He found some fault with every order, until he decided on the Carmelites, because they were not "known to be overly sanctimonious."

¹³¹"Igitur dedit se in ludum literarium, didicit Alexandrum, Floretum, et Mammetrectum, et quicquid egregie stultum erat in litteris, id facillime didicit, ut dicere possis illum rebus stultis esse natum."

¹³²Kumaniecki et al., "Opera Omnia Desiderii Erasmi: Ordinis Quarti Tomus Tertius." 89.

¹³³"Diebus Mercurii vix unquam vescitur carnibus, tantum ovis et piscibus explet sese usque ad vomitum [...]."

As Nesen did not obtain the permission from the university to continue teaching, he had to leave Louvain. Through Erasmus, he was called by the patrician Hamman from Holzhausen to Frankfurt. In 1520 he became founding director of the first Latin school there. Since Martin Luther had twice stayed in Worms during his trip to the *Reichstag*, on 14 April 1521 and during the return trip to Frankfurt on 27 April, Nesen was in regular contact with him. Luther's disputation of February 1523 *Adversus armatum virum Cocleum* is dedicated to Nesen. In April 1523 Nesen moved to the University of Wittenberg, to visit Luther and he joined the camp of the Reformers.¹³⁴ At the same time he gave lectures on classical authors and geography. On 6 July 1524 he drowned in an accident on the Elbe near Wittenberg.

It is difficult to say conclusively whether the *Vita* had any effect, desired by Nesen. As stated above, its purpose was three-fold: to injure Egmondanus' public standing, to support Erasmus in his campaign against the theologians, and to win his approval in the process. What we know is that Egmondanus was ridiculed until his death in 1526 and even after it. By July 1524 he was reportedly stripped off his powers by the Emperor Charles V and the Pope Adrian VI (under whose presidency he had earned his doctorate in Louvain). We also know that Egmondanus continued his preaching after that and even after Erasmus had obtained diplomas to silence him by two different popes (Adrian VI and Clement VII).¹³⁵ As the above presented correspondence shows, he definitely did not win Erasmus approval, neither with the *Dialogus* nor with the *Vita*, as he inadvertently caused him more trouble than good.

I believe that the internal evidence in the *Vita* sufficiently confirms that it should be viewed first in the context of the humanist invective, as well as in the context of the satirical

¹³⁴De Vocht, *History of the Foundation and the Rise of the Collegium Trilingue Lovaniense, 1517-1550*. 468; Steitz, "Der Humanist Wilhelm Nesen." 125–127.

¹³⁵Bietenholz and Deutscher, *Contemporaries of Erasmus: A Biographical Register of the Renaissance and Reformation, Volumes 1–3, A–Z*. 82.

development in the decade 1509–1519. First of all, it uses most of the usual invective strategies, as outlined by Morini;¹³⁶ secondly, we can observe the continuity of the satirical *topoi*, not only in the studied decade, but also since the very first humanist invectives by Petrarch: arrogance of the theologians, their irrational insistence on rituals, such as fasting, the stupidity, which is, in the context of the humanist-scholastic debate, a kind of an umbrella term for their refusal of the philological method.

¹³⁶ See Morini. *L'invective*.

Conclusion

As shown in the chapter one, any investigation into the humanist invective would require a complex, multi-layered and multi-disciplinary research. First of all, it would have to be approached from the historical, literary, philological, and even sociological point of view. The period of humanism, additionally, poses a challenge of returning and reinventing past traditions, such as the case of Petrarch, who, in his invectives, as well as in other works, displays extreme erudition and inventiveness in choosing his models. The word codification for Erasmus' treatment of invective may be a slight overstatement, as it is only one of the attempts at its description, and we must not be tempted to take his authoritative word for granted. These attempts at a theory of invective, are, however, important, as they testify to the fact that the theoreticians, such as Erasmus, and probably the authors themselves saw it as distinct form of letter writing.

While the sample of the texts in the second chapter is much too small to be representative for any definite claim, I do believe that it offers useful indications for further study. My starting hypothesis was that the satire in the decade 1509–1519 shifted from the well-spirited Erasmian satire, criticizing the society in general, towards a form of satire which was profoundly personally oriented and was already announcing the era of Reformation pamphlets. The three satires investigated stand on the crucial points of the decade studied and they all offer hints on which to build further study. The *Praise of Folly*, while – advertently or not – serving as an example against which the other satires were measured, changed, first, with the progression of the humanist-scholastic debate, and second, in terms of Erasmus' defense of this work. In 1514, right around the time of the Reuchlin Affair, additional paragraphs were added, specifically targeting the theologians. As shown by Miller,¹³⁷ the

¹³⁷Miller, *Opera Omnia Desiderii Erasmi: Ordinis Quarti Tomus Tertius*. 68.

debate, surrounding the work, shifted from the literary sphere to the theological one after the publication of the New Testament.

The *Letters of Obscure Men* were a joint product of at least two authors in support of a humanist, facing a concerted attack of the conservative Dominicans. They were produced at the height of the Reuchlin Affair which, together with the Erasmus' publication of the New Testament, represent the point when the humanist-scholastic debate took a sharper turn and the two camps started to single out members of the opposite camps and tried to destroy their public standing with insults and slander. The *Dialogue of the Bilinguals and the Trilinguals* and the *Vita S. Nicolai* both embody this new tendency. Beside being written for the greater cause (Erasmus' *Collegium Trilingue*), they were both products of the new series of very personal battles between visible individuals.

The *Vita*, in my view, displays the characteristics of both humanist invective, which developed during the century and a half of the humanist-scholastic debate, and the satire, as it developed in the decade preceding the Reformation. It stands as the culmination of the development of the satire in the preceding decade and, just like its author, stands between the second and the third phase of the periodization of the humanist-scholastic debate, as proposed by Rummel.¹³⁸

An investigation into invective, additionally, provides an opportunity for research into the links between intellectual circles, usually considered separate disciplines of research. The above-mentioned comedies (*Mazaris* and *Katablattas*) are only two examples of mutual influence of the humanist and byzantine scholars. First of all, a study of the Kristeller's *Catalogus translationum*¹³⁹ and Mazzatinti's catalogues of manuscripts¹⁴⁰ may yield more

¹³⁸ Rummel. *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance and Reformation*.

¹³⁹ Kristeller, P.O., F.E. Cranz, V. Brown, and Union académique internationale. *Catalogus Translationum Et Commentariorum: Catalogus Translationum Et Commentariorum*. Catholic University of America Press, 1960.

examples, which could help to illuminate the transmission of trends and motifs in character assassinations or character attacks from Byzantium to Italy and vice versa, and more importantly, between the Italian and the so-called Northern Renaissance. The *Vita* displays enough characteristics of invective, as observed by Morini (who did not draw conclusions from the sources, written in the context of the humanist-scholastic debate!),¹⁴¹ that it may represent one of the lines of research into the under-investigated field of links between intellectuals of the two centers of the Renaissance.

¹⁴⁰Mazzatinti, G. *Inventari Dei Manoscritti Delle Biblioteche d'Italia*. L. S. Olschki, 1900.

¹⁴¹Morini. *L'invective. Passim*.

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Appendix –*VITA S. NICOLAI SIVE STULTITIAE EXEMPLAR* (TRANSLATION)

Wilhelm Nesen

The exemplar of Stupidity: The Life of S. Nicholas

There are some among the most important authors, who think that prescribing the right reason of the art pertains to the learning of the honest disciplines no less than to point out to the mistakes of those who are not versed in the art or who abuse it. Hence it follows that not only those who have with magnificent eloquence described for us that most beautiful wisdom benefit the lives of the mortals, but also those, who have put in front of our eyes Stupidity, its opposition. But the majority is less moved by the proposed idea, unless it is presented in the form of some known and familiar example. The Greeks proposed their example of wisdom in the figure of Ulysses, the Latins in Aeneas, The Christians in many, but principally in Christ. But so far, none of the mortals presented the absolute exemplar of stupidity. The praise of this task I will try to win for myself, if only the gods will inspire me in my wishes. I will look for it not in antique, not far removed peoples, nor will I invent it, as did Homer; I will rather propose the very thing, expressed in its own colors, as it were.

There lived then the Carmelite Nicolas of Egmond, soon to be abbot, unless the world suddenly wises up, which is not very probable. In this one man Stupidity abundantly expressed whatever its powers allowed it, so that if someone attentively observes him, he will see more than in the entire *Praise of Folly* by Erasmus or the *Ship of Fools* by Sebastian Brant, or if there is someone else who attempted to express the form of stupidity. But before I undertake such an arduous task, I shall do two things. First I will pray for help the Virgin,

equal to God, the purest of all women, so that I depict that filthy man, and his extremely shameful behavior, in a way as he deserves, for the Glory of Christ and salvation of the Christian people. Then I shall point out to the reader that every time he sees written S. Nicholas, he do not take it for Saint Nicholas – from which he is very far – but rather Stupid Nicholas. For S. can stand for both.

S. Nicholas was born in the year 1462, when the Sun was in Capricorn, the Moon in Scorpio, and looking at both of them was Silenus, who usually engenders stupid people who see themselves as very wise, except that Scorpio adds some venomous insanity. He was born in Egmond, a town in Holland, where only serious and prudent men are usually born. But you will immediately say, dear reader, if that is so, where does this exemplar of stupidity come from? In the same way as garlic and onions, mixed with roses, attract whatever is of bad flavor, and render the roses softer, so he with his attracts the stupidity of the whole fatherland, so that nothing is left for others but pure wisdom. For this whole breed is by some strike of fate guilty of stupidity, but in such a way, that S. Nicholas with his preeminence obscures all the rest, just like the stench of garlic obscures the stench of onions. There exists one, very much related to him – many think they are brothers – who does not have a human figure, and the mind is more like that of sheep. When he is asked, on which day falls this or that holiday, he indicates it by the instinct of nature, which also drives the beetles: not by speech – for his speech is not human – but by gestures and stuttering, and he does it with utmost precision. This, however, is not an argument of the mind, but of rage. He would take home the first prize of stupidity, if S. Nicholas had not snatched it away first. But even though he was extremely stupid, he was nevertheless not stupid to such an extent, that he would not fear that a habit with ears and bells and a multi-colored vest would be given to him. He could suffer even this, but he could not suffer wounds.

He immersed himself in the literary game, he learned his Alexander, Floretus and Mammetrectus, and whatever egregiously stupid there was in literature, he learnt with great ease, so that one could say that he was born for stupid things. As the Adage goes, the pot chooses its vegetables. But since at home he ate simple cabbage and bread, made of bran, he fled to Louvain for he heard that there everyone suddenly becomes wise.

He went through many things here, he was becoming proficient in all kinds of stupidity, until he started chasing the cloth of a *magister*, instead of the fool's hat and finally, his belly was facing a brighter future. For he was often called to duty, as they say, that is copious feasts, and those days pleased him much better than the holidays pleased the other one. Just like vultures, who even from afar smell the future corpse and immediately fly over, he was able to feel an upcoming feast for months ahead; for those he was preparing himself with a two-day fasting, so that even after two days he was full – that's how much he was stuffing his spacious belly with free dinners. He already saw himself as something that should be revered by young boys, whom he terrified no differently than ignorant guests, that Cuman ass. Need we say more? With Stupidity's help he succeeded in his endeavors, he became Bachelor of theology, soon Licentiate, and finally a *Magister noster*. However, he could not do it in a way that people would not consider him stupid. To such an extent the whole face, gestures, gait, and speech were betraying stupidity that you immediately recognized, front and back, an idiot and a madman. Even boys were laughing and pointing fingers at him. And while everybody thought he was stupider than Corebus, he was the only one who thought he was Salomon himself. Finally, while he was asking everybody all over the place why the blind world did not recognize his divine wisdom, he fell upon someone, who gave him this advice. "If you want," said he, "to escape every suspicion of stupidity, you should don a monastic habit. Nothing better conceals stupidity, madness, and other forms of wickedness. At this point he deliberated for many months, which form of life and cult it was best to

assume. In his mind, he was going through various kinds of monks – as if in an oval mirror, suspended in a busy market, various images were showing themselves to him, of women and men, birds and quadrupeds. With the black Benedictines and white Premonstratensians the possibility of becoming an abbot pleased him, but first of all, he was afraid of the wheel of fortune, rarely favorably disposed to the wise, for he thought of himself as extremely wise, and secondly, when he was putting on his head a mitre, made out of cardboard, and held a stick, used for laying out beds, for a shepherd's crook, he was bothered by the little ears, hanging from the mitre, and was afraid that on the outside he would not seem like an abbot, but rather like a moron, especially since he could not change his face. In the case of the Minorites, he was bothered by the excessive sanctity and nudity, for he always liked to be well covered. In Jacobites, he hated that they did not eat meat, and that instead of Scotus, they followed Aquinas, whom he had not yet read, but had the same amount of knowledge about him as about Scotus; in Augustinians he hated that the profit was bad and that sanctity was not included in the price. In short, when he went over all the blacks and whites in his mind, all the linen-wearing, wool-wearing, tightly clothed, loosely clothed, bearded, beardless, fish-eaters, and meat-eaters, the order of the Carmelites was the only one to his taste, which was never notorious for being too holy, and which produces fat and red-faced ladies-men, rather than monks. Therefore they were immensely popular among women, who like men with big cocks. The simple and stupid women notice the shiny coat, even if everything else is pitch black. Even their title is pleasing to women, for they are called friars of our Lady. They frequently paint her with her coat widely spread and a bunch of Carmelites under it. Oh what a picture, what an escort, for the purest of virgins is hiding under her coat such scoundrels, which no virtuous woman would want to have under her coat. And so S. Nicholas, future Carmelite, in order to improve his chances, fasted for three days in honor of the blessed virgin, in such a way that he ate nothing except eggs and meat soup twice per

day, and drank nothing except the Duplex, as they call beer there; in the meantime, he prayed that the thing he tried to accomplish, came about in praise and glory of the entire Catholic Church, for he, the stupidest of men, thought that the Church will be blessed by a great light, should he don the Carmelite habit. And it happened, from a camel he became a Carmelite of Mechelen, that is, not far from Louvain, lest he be too far away from the smell of the solemn feasts. And just look at how divinely he succeeded. In the same year, he was bestowed the three highest honors, he became *Magister noster*, a Carmelite, and the cheese-gatherer of Louvain. The latter office means the following. Just like the eagles measure between themselves definitively delineated stretches, where they prey, so the preachers and the Carmelites have fixed limits, in which they collect eggs and cheese. To this end they appoint someone especially shameless, who penetrates everything, who shies away from nothing, and is ready to snatch away the cheese even by force, if it is not given voluntarily. Immediately after they put on the habit, they usually take off all shame, otherwise they are not admitted under that virgin habit. But for S. Nicholas this was not necessary. In all his life, he never had an ounce of shame, he therefore could not take off the shame which he did not have, and yet, when he put on the habit, he added as much additional shame as he could. Thus, the moment he was dead to the world, he immediately flew back to Louvain, for he did not like the vegetables of the monastery and that sweet smell of feasts always tickled his nostrils and, moreover, his belly started deflating. For nowhere do they celebrate decernment of some new title of the Scholastic profession with a feast more sumptuous than in Louvain. In fact the *Magistri nostri* too have peculiar periods of feasts, lest any holiday pass without sacred drinking. S. Nicholas already thought himself a god and the people thought that he was by some metamorphosis, transformed into another man because of the white habit. For he did not trust enough the cloth of the *Magistri nostri*, fearing that some day asinine ears be added to it. But nobody would dare to add anything to his habit because of the Blessed Mary, to

whom those latrines are sacred. It seems a magnificent power to him, to be solemnly invited by kings, travelers, to be greeted by the title *Magister noster*, to sit in a higher place in the school, so that the clatter of the frankincense, and the filth from the feet, even mud, touches the heads of the bachelors and those who have yet to become *Magistri nostri*, to sit among the dignitaries at the feasts, and even foster hopes for the highest position, should someone leave or die. O what a profession of religion: he escaped poverty, after he took a vow poverty, he escaped obedience, after he took a vow of holy obedience, and he follows the vow of chastity in such a way, that he freely humps even the sacred virgins, and yet, with the help of the Virgin Mary they remain virgins. There are some who say that he might not be completely stupid, although some other say that that is not prudence, but a sense of nature, which can also be found in the old men and asses to protect their nature. Thus S. Nicholas renounced the world. He put on the habit, lest he starve in the world for being considered a moron, or be forced to do physical work, and soon he came back to Louvain to collect cheese and at the same time enjoy the smell of the feasts and reign among the simple and shy scholastics, who, although they saw his donkey ears, were afraid of getting their asses kicked. For an ass is more ready to kick than any mule. But once he started professing poverty, he started focusing his mind on all kinds of profit: from papal indulgences, more than a little money he obtained from the idiots, and also from made up pacts. Now they are doing with God, what they did not have the chance to do with an honest judge. Moreover, he was collecting copious booty from testaments and restitutions. He had his nets everywhere. Whatever fell into his hands in any way came from his snares. From these profits he started to build a guest-house in Louvain. And so from a monk he became an innkeeper, and was receiving all kinds of men, Carmelites, masters, boys, whom he read Salomon's proverbs instead of grammar. The blessed Virgin seemed in favor of these most sacred followers. For no woman entered that house and stayed a little without coming out pregnant. Many have tried this and it was found

that it was most certainly true, so much so, that there was danger that the divine Jodocus – to whom lazy men were sending their wives so that he returned them pregnant – might starve. S. Nicholas has at home fifteen or sixteen Carmelites, young, robust, and well-rested, who pray so devotedly, that a woman's uterus starts goring in a matter of days. When that happens, the bells are rung and thanks are said to the Blessed Virgin for the miracle. There were some who said that praise should be sung to the Carmelite cock. But S. Nicholas swore that it was not he who said it, although he wouldn't dare to speak for the others, as in the matters human, much occurs between the chalice and the upper lip. Some were saying that that Carmelite college was nothing other than a new whore-house, but S. Nicholas, waving his right hand, answered that that was not true, that it was rather a little garden of the Blessed Virgin, in which everything that happened, happened by miracle, after devoted prayers by the Carmelites. And so, while S. Nicholas was living quite comfortably in this garden, afraid that some day he might be called back to the monastery, he obtained an exemption by the Roman pope. Now that he could act safely, he was shoving others into the monastery, and if they resisted, he called them apostates, after he himself had made the arrangements, so that he could not be dragged to the monastery. He corrects and reforms other monasteries, in which the discipline of religion is said to have collapsed, while he lives comfortably and in a complete accordance with the Dutch manner. Meanwhile, he was chasing a position of an abbot and was wondering, how come that the pope had not sent a mitre his way on his own volition. This man, who deserves to be crowned by a sieve, recently dared to hope even for a cardinal's hat. HE was raging against Luther, whose works he had not read, and claimed that he was upholding the whole church of Christ and the majesty of the Roman pope. And yet his is nothing but a screaming raven. But ambition feeds the soul of men. This was, dear reader, a kind of a brief outline of the man's life, and now we will step by step touch upon some things, by which it will be clearer, how S. Nicholas is on the inside and on the outside.

ON TEMPERANCE OF S. NICHOLAS

On Wednesdays he hardly ever ate meat, he only stuffed himself with eggs and fish to the point of vomiting, and meat soup on special occasions. Before lunch, he was usually completely sober, unless he was excited by anger or if he had been drinking heavily the previous night. At lunch, he always got drunk, but the reasons for that can partly be ascribed to the character of those people [i.e. the Dutch], and partly to his stupidity. After all, as the philosophers say, the idiots are always thirsty. It was therefore in his nature and those things, which are inside us because of our nature we should neither scold nor praise. But even if he was the heaviest of drinkers, he was only blear-eyed, whereas many lost their sight because of drinking. He only drank with both hands and in that he was different from drunkard laity. He was a religious drunkard.

ON CHASTITY OF S. NICHOLAS

Before he became a Carmelite out of the camel, he rarely had intercourse because of his poverty, and that only with public harlots, but since he had taken up the holy life, he only copulated with the honest matrons or virgins, devoted to God, and he does this quite often because of the damaged eyes, as the intercourse assuages them.

ON CONSTANCE OF S. NICHOLAS

He has a peculiar propensity towards constance, for he has never undertaken anything so mischievous or so stupid that he would not persist in it. He never said anything absurd enough to be punished for it. If he happened to say, that stone is gold, he stubbornly defended this opinion. Nobody ever defeated him in scholastic disputations, and even if someone produced a whole wagon, full of arguments, he, like a cuckoo bird, repeated his version, swearing that it is exactly as he had said. Often everybody agreed with him, but they were

doing nothing but licking his ass. In all his sermons and lectures he condemned the new and praised the old, and what he was teaching, he was practicing himself: he was preserving old stupidity, old shamelessness, old gluttony, old brutishness, old barbarity, old drunkenness, old insanity. There is nothing new about that man. It would be easier to move a rock out of its place than to move him away from his convictions.

ON DOCTRINE OF S. NICHOLAS

His doctrine is completely monastic, what he once learned, he upholds, whatever the cost. After he had become a Carmelite, he did not read any author. He never comes prepared, when he has to hold a lecture, but teaches with great arrogance the first thing that comes to his mouth, and when he has nothing to say, he always repeated what he had previously said, declaring and swearing that it is so. Or else he expounds on the etymologies and the differences between the words.

ON THE SERMONS OF S. NICHOLAS

As others are preparing for an ecclesiastical preaching, not only by study, but also by sincere prayers to God, he always comes with dirty feet, thinking that he cannot say anything so unlearned, that it would not be taken as an oracle. From lunch he always comes moist of wine, staggering, babbling, moving his head here and there, and resting on his elbows, he frequently dozes off in the middle of a sermon. Whatever he says, he repeats ten times. When he runs out of things to say, he either praises himself or criticizes others, now he shouts against Greek literature, now against poetry (for that is how he calls *poetics*), against Martin Luther, whose books he had not read, but he heard that he denounces papal indulgences. He had absolutely nothing to say about how he accumulated so much money for the construction of his whorehouse, he only spoke of Anti-Christ, heresy, and schisms. And he accomplished it wonderfully. For Luther became famous and his books were selling better, to the great

profit of the booksellers, who were at first suspicious of him, but then they started getting better feeling, for they were convinced that he would not be so much disliked by S. Nicholas, unless he is a good and learned man.

ON PATIENCE

Because of these habits he was laughed at even by the young boys, and all the *Magistri nostri* openly hated him, although they frequently use his stupidity for their own gain and comfort. He is intolerable for the bachelors and for the entire school, who would prefer to hear an ass bray to him teaching or disputing. S. Nicholas bravely tolerates everything. He is laughed at by the others, from himself he gets only flattery; people whisper about him, he applauds himself; others hate him, he thinks the world about himself; to others he is a tree-trunk, to himself he is a god, to such an extent that he wonders why whatever he tramples upon does not immediately turn into roses. Oh brave spirit and invincible heart, he alone is able to confront everyone else with his shouting, and he is even prepared to fight if he does not achieve enough by shouting. He represents a public hatred of that Academy, they tried to shake him off, but he holds tight, like figs, dangling in front of one's eyes. Should anyone kill him, he hopes to be venerated as a martyr.

ON AUTHORITY

He is the only one to have the authority to condemn authors, which he never read, the only one to approve or disapprove of whatever, without providing reasons. It suffices to shake that stupid head of his, and after a gesture with his right hand to say: it is like this or it is wrong. He is the only one who can completely deny what he had said, even if he said it in front of sixty witnesses.

ON FAITH

It is worthwhile to know how he excels in Catholic faith, and in how much more he believes than the Christian people:

- That the Pope is the lord of all things celestial, terrestrial and subterrestrial, and that he has pure and mixed empire over all Christians.
- That all the Christian princes depend on the whims of the Roman Pope. And he can with a single word lower the greatest king or even the Emperor into a shoemaker or a peasant – and even without reason, as long as he fancies to use his absolute power.
- That he also has empire over all the Christians, but also Turks, and new lands and whatever riches may be found there belong to the Pope.
- That in the new lands no church can be built, which would not pay the Pope a couple of thousand, and no temple can exist in the world, which would not give its money to the Pontiff.
- That the Roman Pope rules the demons in such a way that he can order them not to go punish souls in the purgatory, but to throw them out.
- That he can order the angels of God that they should, under the threat of excommunication, transfer certain souls to heaven.
- Then that he can some of those, who are damned in eternity, save from punishment and immediately place among the choirs of angels – if a large sum of money is paid for them.
- That he can, on the other hand, pull souls from heaven and put them into hell, if their posterity has offended his papal sanctity.
- Additionally, that the Pope, even of the most vicious kind – who has no merits of his own, save for the bad ones – has in his hands the treasure of all good merits of the entire Church.

- He can distribute these to whomever he pleases – those who done these good deeds being robbed.
- That he has this power directly from Christ, so that even if the Christ wanted, he could not take it back, unless he wants to return there and sit in Rome, as he did when the Roman Bishop died and as he did before Peter sat in Rome.
- That the pope, while he can be heretic, poisoner, unchaste, etc., he cannot be wrong, even if he wanted to be, when he pronounces his opinion on the faith and mores, while some other bishops and cardinals can be blinder than moles. The reason is that the Holy Spirit, while he can turn a blind eye to many things, this is the only thing that he cannot tolerate.
- That if the Pope led all the peoples of the whole world in large numbers straight to hell with his pernicious life and doctrine, nobody should try to stand up to him nor scold him, he can only be gently asked about it, and only by the highest princes.
- If the whole world agrees in something and the Pope disagrees, everybody would go to hell, and he alone, without the others, would go to heaven.
- After that there will not be schools, nor councils, nor consistories, nor consultations. For what need will there be for them, if the Pope pronounces judgments on everything with the same certainty as did the Christ himself?
- That, however, the Pope will lose his power, if he offends the mendicant orders – if he orders them to abstain from begging and live off the labor of their own hands, not to meddle into the affairs of the priests, and not to live in cities, but outside the city walls. That if he wished to recall their privileges, they will, in turn, take away his power.

It is not necessary to write or speak ill about preachers and Carmelites. Nay, it is not necessary to name any one of them without the title of honor, even if they were of the worst kind, and that is because of the honor of the order.

Unless S. Nicholas had passed down to us and defended this faith, the whole world would soon perish. Say thanks to God, dear reader, and pray for a long life of S. Nicholas.

In the year 1520.