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The Reception of Aristotle's *Poetics* in the Italian Renaissance and Beyond

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Shedding light on the readings of Aristotle's *Poetics* developed within the Alterati of Florence (1569–c. 1630)

From manuscript studies to the social and political history of aesthetics*

Déborah Blocker

On a hot spring day of June 2008, I landed in Florence, having travelled for almost twenty-four hours, from Berkeley, California. I had come all this way to a town I had not visited since my adolescence with the hope of discovering new or at least understudied sources for the elaboration of a comparative history of early modern European aesthetics, which I had been working towards since the early 2000s. My plan for finding such sources was fairly simple but, because of how little I knew about the town, it felt uncertain.

I had mainly conducted research, until then, in the field of early modern French literature, with a focus on the social and political history of literary practices and institutions, and a special interest in both theatre and aesthetics. Yet, while finishing my first book (*Instituer un « art »: politiques du théâtre dans la France du premier XVII^e siècle*, Paris: Honoré Champion, 2009), I had begun to develop my enquiries into the social and political history of early modern conceptions of art in comparative directions. It had become obvious to me, while working on seventeenth-century French poetics and theatre, that many of the aesthetic concepts which had allowed for the rise of new understandings of the arts we now designate as the 'fine arts' came out of

* This chapter contains twenty-four images of archival materials, printed or manuscript, of which six (numbered 5.1 to 5.6) are published in this printed volume. The other images provided, referred to as E-Figures and numbered as E-Figure 1 to E-Figure 18, can be viewed – alongside this essay and images 5.1 to 5.6 – on the eScholarship repository, using this permanent URL : <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9133m8k5> or, alternatively, this Digital Object Identifier (DOI) : 10.25350/B51590. To avoid any confusion, references to figures 5.1 to 5.6 are in roman, while references to E-Figures 1 to 18 have been highlighted in bold. Please also note that, in what follows, all manuscript transcriptions are diplomatic transcriptions. The aim has been to make the annotations studied accessible to the reader in a form that is as close as possible to their original language and syntax. To enhance readability, abbreviated words have been spelled out and punctuation has occasionally been modernized for clarity. All other editorial interventions have been signaled by brackets ([...]).

the intense intellectual activity that the rediscovery of Aristotle's *Poetics* had generated in Italy between 1530 and 1600. I thus harboured a strong curiosity for this specific historical moment, first investigated by Bernard Weinberg in his two-volume *History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1961). I had in particular developed a desire to gain direct access to the sources that documented these developments, hoping that they could yield information about the social, economic, cultural, political and intellectual contexts in which these evolutions took place. These contexts were something to which Bernard Weinberg's extremely broad and erudite investigation into 'literary criticism' in the Italian Renaissance had, in my mind, paid too little attention. This major figure of the Chicago School of literary scholarship had chosen to focus rather on the reconstitution of aesthetic doctrines in isolation, according to the protocols of intellectual history. I was however convinced that any deeper understanding of how and why such theories had than been elaborated demanded both a wider and more precise historical perspective – that is, one that examined not only the history of ideas but also the social, economic and institutional settings in which these ideas were produced, as well as the kinds of relationships the individuals who produced them entertained with political power.

Yet, when searching the internet catalogues of Florentine libraries, in attempts to locate from afar materials that might furnish me with means to unlock this more comprehensive historical perspective, I worried: if I had no precise idea of what material I might be looking for, how could I possibly find sources of use to me? I had not yet experienced that the uncertainty generated by the lack of a preconceived understanding of what exactly is being searched for creates a form of open-endedness, in which objects that fall into none of the existing historiographical paradigms become more susceptible of attracting your attention. As a result, I clung to devising strategies for mastering the unknown. Among the many leads I could have chosen, I decided my best bet was to investigate the activities of the humanist Piero Vettori (1499–1585) who taught Greek at the *Studio Fiorentino* for over forty years, with the aim of researching the aesthetic writings of his numerous students, if they could be located. I was, in particular, hoping to trace how Vettori's hedonistic understanding of Aristotle's *Poetics* (as reflected in his 1560 and 1573 commentaries of the work) had been appropriated among the young patricians he had trained and mentored, during their adolescence, over so many decades. In this chapter, I reflect on the unexpected materials this initial research led me to unearth and on how I went about making sense of them, trying to highlight in what ways the open-endedness of my enquiry proved methodologically fruitful with respect to the history of early modern poetics and aesthetics.

On my first morning in Florentine libraries, I promptly registered as a new reader at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze (BNCF) and made my way up to the reading rooms. There, I searched the catalogues to identify books printed not only by Vettori but also by his entourage. I already knew many of the books in the catalogue, but there was, however, one book, under Vettori's own name, that I had never seen in any other collection. Furthermore, the contents of the book seemed to be exactly what I was looking for, as its title defined it as a rendering Vettori's Latin translation of the *Poetics*. Indeed, the book – which had originally been a part of the *fondo Magliabechiano*, as its shelf mark (BNCF Magl. 5.9.119) testified – was listed under the

title of *Aristotelis Poetica Petro Victorio Interprete*. I ordered it and was soon handed a small booklet in-8°, printed in Florence in 1617 by the Giunti press (Figure 5.1). The booklet's general appearance was shabby (poor printing, low quality paper, modest format, etc.). Yet, its binding, which was unstitched down the middle from what could only have been too much wear and tear, indicated that it had been well used, thereby suggesting a finding of some social and/or cultural importance.

The contents of the book were intriguing. The booklet included a dedication letter in Latin, in which a Florentine patrician I subsequently identified as Giovan Battista Strozzi Il Giovane (1551–1634) presented his young nephew of the same name, also known as the *Marchese di Forano* (1597–1636), with the printed booklet (**E-Figure 1**). This Latin dedication was elegantly written and sophisticated in its arguments. It was also structured like a *quaestio* developed in a university setting (with *pro* and *contra* positions being expressed, followed by a synthesis) – but its subject was not strictly a scholarly one. Rather, the dedication (effectively an academic *discorso* in disguise, as I was soon to understand) asked enticingly whether it was more pleasurable to teach or to learn. Two thirds into his *pro et contra* argument, Giovan Battista Strozzi Il Giovane, attempting the reconciliation of opposing opinions that would have been expected of him, affirmed that it was always best to teach and to learn all at once, wherever this delicate balance could be achieved. He then proceeded to give examples of moments when himself had experienced such a fulfilling experience, first by recalling the times during which, fifty years prior, he had listened to Piero Vettori elucidate Aristotle's *Poetics* (presumably during lessons offered at the *Studio Fiorentino*), also reminding his readers of how he himself had discussed the text of the *Poetics* in front of an academy

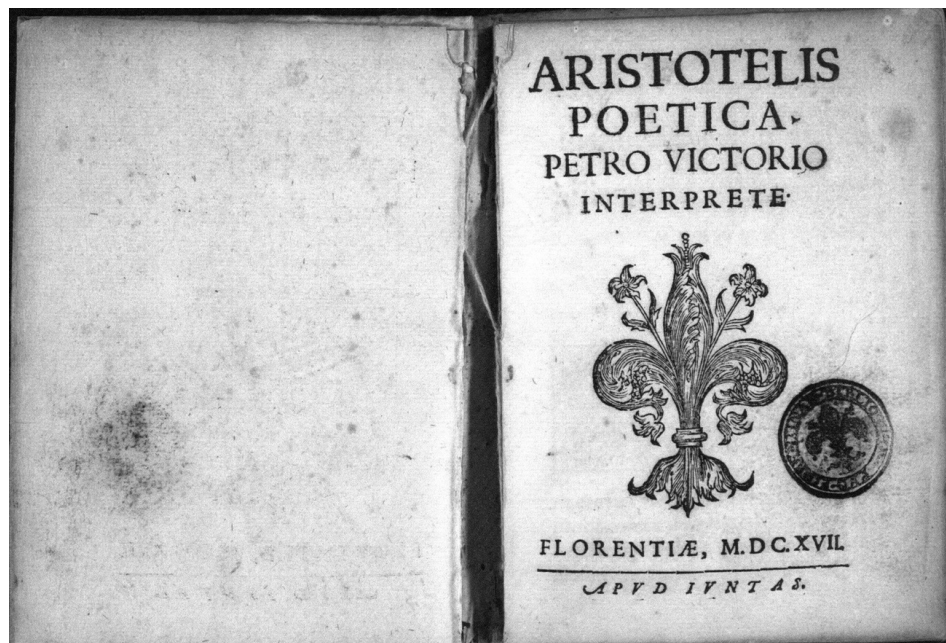


Figure 5.1 *Aristotelis Poetica Petro Victorio Interprete*, ed. by G.-B. Strozzi, Florence, Giunti, 1617, title page, BNCF Magl. 5.9.119.

he designated as the academy of the Alterati (in other words the academy of the Altered Ones), twenty years later:

But of what little importance it is to us to know whether it delights us more to learn or to teach, if it is certain that both give us an extraordinary amount of pleasure. What is certain is that I can testify to the pleasure experienced in both cases, most dear Giovan Battista. Often, I found it pleasing to learn many things, but I found greater pleasure in hearing, fifty years ago, Piero Vettori – the brightest luminary of his times, and of knowledge – as he explained with great erudition the *Poetics* of Aristotle. Then, twenty years later, I had the pleasure to see the academy of the Alterati put me in charge of presenting the same book in front of it; among the auditors sitting in the first rows, to whom I was proud to have brought intellectual assistance, was Filippo Strozzi, a man much sought after for his integrity and your father, whom I now would like to see serve as an example for you in your family.¹

The dedication then went on to describe the Alterati's arduous labour on the text of the *Poetics*, as translated by Piero Vettori, even seeming to allude between the lines to the existence of a systematically interfoliated and collectively annotated manuscript, as well as to its role as a reference tool in Giovan Battista Strozzi's entourage:

But Nature highlights excellence in difficulty only and Aristotle has not revealed the oracles of wisdom to those whom read his writings with their eyes closed. Must I tell you about all the evenings we spent working on the book? Even the little I have understood demanded long nightly working sessions. How could I describe the study of this little book? I am not unhappy to have often used my quill. It is befitting to an eminent Preceptor to transcribe words and to add to each folio of the text other blank pages on which I could transcribe – as I would on a blank board – my thoughts as well as those of others, found with a zeal that was anything but ordinary, so that, if the need to help my friends arose, I would have ready-made teachings on poetics on which to draw from on the spot, as if from a reserve. Today, with the intention of doing what can be profitable to you, to your entourage and to your friends, who come and join me when I discuss the *Poetics*, I have taken the trouble of having Aristotle's book printed and it is the translation given by Vettori which I chose among all the others. Indeed, I do not know it if it is possible that the majesty and concision of Aristotle's Greek owes more to a translator than to Vettori. I have given up on lengthy commentaries and have inserted only briefly

¹ Giovan Battista Strozzi, *Aristotelis Poetica Petro Victorio Interprete* (Florence: Giunti, 1617), dedication (no pagination):

[...] Sed nostra parvi referat, in discendo nè an in docendo potior sit oblectatio, dum constet utrumque plurimum delectare. Utriusque ego certè me tibi testem voluptatis exhibeo (Ioannes Baptista dilectissime). Sæpe non pauca suaviter didici: suavius autem cum quinquaginta ab hinc annos Petrum Victorium suæ aetatis ac literarum lumen clarissimum, Aristotelis Poeticam artem doctissimè explanantem audirem. Præteræ post viginti elapsos annos, magnam cœpi iucunditatem cum munus obirem mihi ab Academicis Alteratis eumdem librum exponendi delatum, ubi inter primarios auditores quibus me aliquam ingenii operam præstitisse gaudeo, Philippus Stroza vir integerrimis moribus Pater tuus frequentissimus adherat, quem hac in re tibi propositum velim domesticæ imitationis exemplum. [...]

remarks in the margins, out of fear that the weight of the volume might overwhelm the readers; as a consequence (in the same way Alexander did with the Homer's *Iliad*, we are told), you now have this small booklet of modest weight in your hands – may it nourish your mind and thoroughly delight you.²

Having reached that point in the dedication, I was fascinated by the seemingly unimpressive booklet I had been handed three hours prior. In particular, the prospect of possibly finding the manuscript that seemed to be alluded to in its dedication galvanized my curiosity. I asked for the small printed *libretto* be placed *in deposito* (on hold) and headed over the *sala manoscritti*. Assuming that the said manuscript, if it still existed, would probably also have entered the collections of the BNCF via the Magliabechi collections, in which the printed *libretto* itself had been housed, I asked the curator on duty where I might find the catalogue of the Magliabechiani manuscripts. She pointed me to a handwritten index of this *fondo*, in which I found nothing referenced under the name of the Alterati or under that of Giovan Battista Strozzi. However, when I checked under Aristotle, I suddenly spotted an *Aristotelis Poëtica cum notis Petro Victorio Interprete* (BNCF Magl. VII, 1199). I filled out the appropriate paperwork to order the book in all haste, ardently hoping that what whatever would soon come out of the BNCF's collections would indeed turn out to be a manuscript of Piero Vettori's Latin translation of Aristotle's *Poetics* collectively annotated by a Florentine sodality calling themselves the academy of the Altered Ones.

The manuscript appeared shortly thereafter, just as a major thunderstorm began to break. All the windows of the *sala* were immediately shut tight and hail soon started to fall heartily into the Arno, right in front of the Palazzo Torrigiani, which, I was to realize only several months later, had earlier belonged to Tommaso del Nero, one of the seven men who had founded the Alterati in the year 1569. As such, his sumptuous home had originally served as the academicians' primary meeting place.³ That day, however, I marvelled only at the shimmering white veils that the late spring hail, descending from

² Strozzi, *Aristotelis Poëtica Petro Victorio Interprete*:

[...]. Sed quæ præclara sunt, Natura ipsa difficultate commendat, nec sapientiæ oracula detegit iis Aristoteles qui conniventibus oculis, eius scripta percurrunt. Decet ne nostras tibi recensere vigilias? Quæ ego quantulumcumque percæpi, magnis constant lucubrationibus. Quid dicam de huiusce libelli studio? Non me pinguit manum calamo sæpius admovere: præstantissimi Præceptoris verba exscribere: singulis quibusque excripti textus membranis puras paginas inserere, in quas tum aliorum, tum meas interdum sententias non vulgari studio quæsitas velut in album referrem, ut si quando amicorum utilitas id postuleret, parata haberem quæ velut e penu depromerem poetica documenta. Nunc tuæ, affinium, amicorumque tuorum me de Poëtice differentem convenientium commoditati inserviens, Aristotelis librum hunc imprimendum curavi, eamque quam Victorius versionem fecerat, ex omnibus apprimè elegi; non enim scio an alii latino interpreti Græca Aristotelis maiestas & brevitatis magis debeat quam Victorio. Omissa sunt longiora commentaria, brevesque tantum notulæ margini adscriptæ, ne degravet legentes, voluminis sarcina, utque (quod Alexander de Homeri Iliade fecisse scribitur) vos hunc tenui mole libellum, in manu, in mente, & in deliciis habeatis. [...]

³ This is the palace now located at 5 Piazza de' Mozzi, on which see Leonardo Ginori Lisci, *I Palazzi di Firenze nella storia e nell'arte*, 2 vols. (Florence: Giunti, G. Barbèra, 1972), 2:675–82, which explains that Tommaso del Nero was the architect of a large part of the façade, as well as the man who redecorated the grand *salone* of the *piano nobile*, where the Alterati originally met. Tommaso

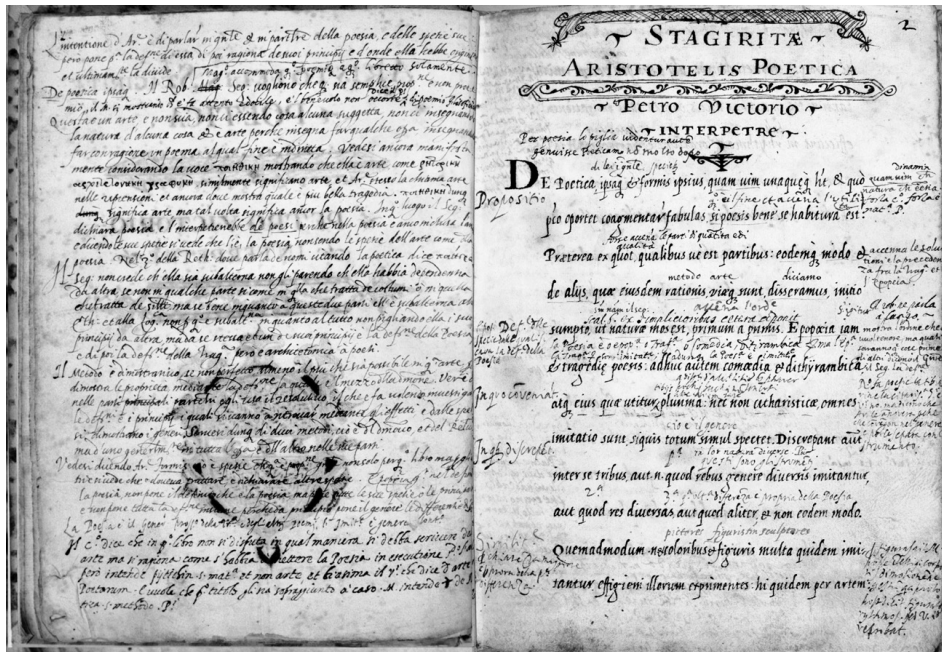


Figure 5.2 Aristotelis Stagiritae Poetica Petro Victorio Interpetre [sic], collectively annotated manuscript, Florence, 1573–1617, BNCf Magl. VII, 1199, fols. 1^{ver}-2^{rec}.

the heavens, created over the river. Soon the skies dried up, and the windows of the *sala* were reopened, letting in much cooler air. The elegant façades of the Oltrarno palazzi were once again clearly visible in the crisp white light that the storm had carried in with it. Suddenly, I remembered the manuscript I had been handed.

Unfortunately, because of a tight early-twentieth-century rebinding, the manuscript was a little difficult to open. Once I had become aware of the Alterati's collective taste for secrecy and the restricted manuscript circulation of their works, this characteristic would retrospectively strike me as befitting for a volume the use of which had always been exclusively restricted to the members of this secluded academy. But for now, I proceeded to position the codex – which was a little under of size of an in-4° – on one of the elegant wooden reading stands provided in the *sala manoscritti*. On folios 1^{ver}-2^{rec}, at the opening of the manuscript, I discovered a bewildering textual device, displaying simultaneously yet alternatively text and commentary, the latter being in a variety of hands (Figure 5.2). The codex did indeed contain a transcription of Piero Vettori's Latin translation of Aristotle's *Poetics*, as it appeared in the commentary of the text that the Florentine Hellenist published in 1560 and 1573. Vettori's translation of the *Poetics* (E-Figure 2) was edited in *particelle*: in it, brief passages of the Greek text are followed by a Latin translation and extensive commentary in the same tongue (E-Figure 3). But in the manuscript I was looking at, the fragmented Latin text had been copied out of the Vettori commentary into a continuous text by a scribe, with the aim of creating a text

del Nero (known in the academy as Il Sconcio) had dedicated this room to the Alterati with the inscription: « Erigitur ab Alteratis Academia/Scribendi Dicendique Studio Creata/A. MDLXVIII ».

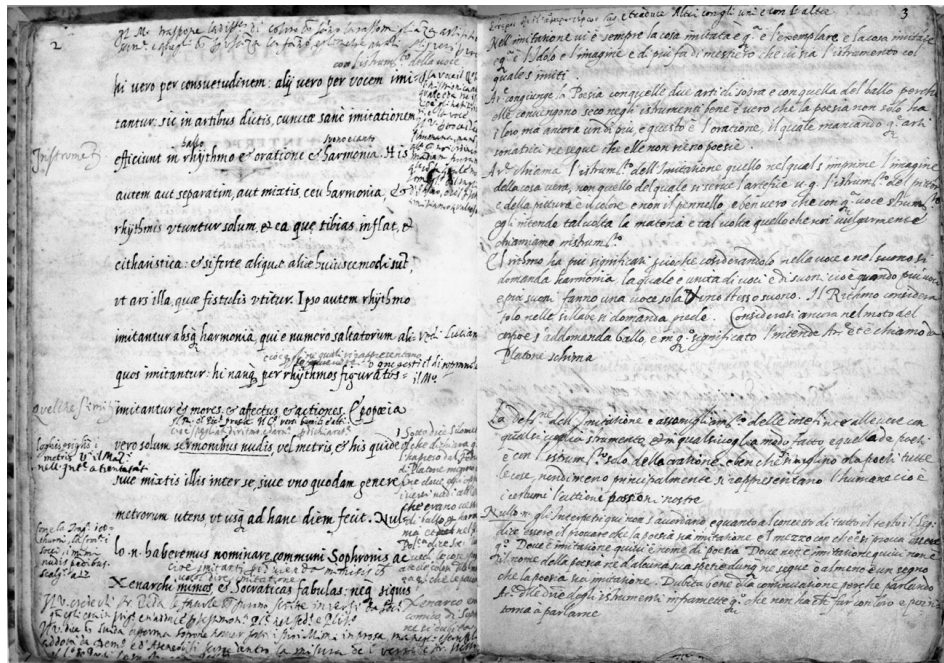


Figure 5.3 Aristotelis Stagiritae Poetica Petro Vettori Interprete, BNCF Magl. VII, 1199, fols. 2^{ver}–3^{rec}.

easier to follow for the owner of the manuscript, while making it possible for him to add personal annotations. As folios 2^{ver}–3^{rec} (Figure 5.3) illustrate, these annotations mostly tackled certain propositions that the annotators had underlined in the text. When I looked at the manuscript's quire structure more carefully, it also appeared to have been created to alternate one folio of Vettori's translation with one folio of annotations. In two instances (quires i and iv), interfoliation had also occurred – that is, one or two additional folios had been inserted into the quire, so as to make room for additional comments, just like Strozzi's dedication had suggested. The pages of transcribed text also contained annotations, some of which indicated divisions in the text. For instance, on folio 17^{rec} (E-Figure 4), a marginal annotation on the bottom left located Aristotle's definition of tragedy. Other annotations provided brief linguistic or philosophic clarifications of the Latin translation, as shown on the detail of folio 2^{rec} (E-Figure 5).

The manuscript bore the date of 1573 on its title page (Figure 5.4), which I assumed indicated both when the Latin translation of the *Poetics* was transcribed, and when the annotation process had begun. The annotators who laboured on the text were, however, not identified in the manuscript, on which I could spot no other name than that of Vettori, plus a number of abbreviations designating other contemporary commentators of the *Poetics* (Robortello, Maggi, Castelvetro, etc.) whose views were also discussed in the annotations. From the index of the Magliabechi collections that had led me to the codex, it was clear its compilers had themselves not been able to identify the authors of the manuscript – or it would not have been indexed and catalogued solely under Aristotle. Furthermore, from the title page added in 1679 by Luigi di Carlo Strozzi (E-Figure 6), it seemed that among the early cataloguers of

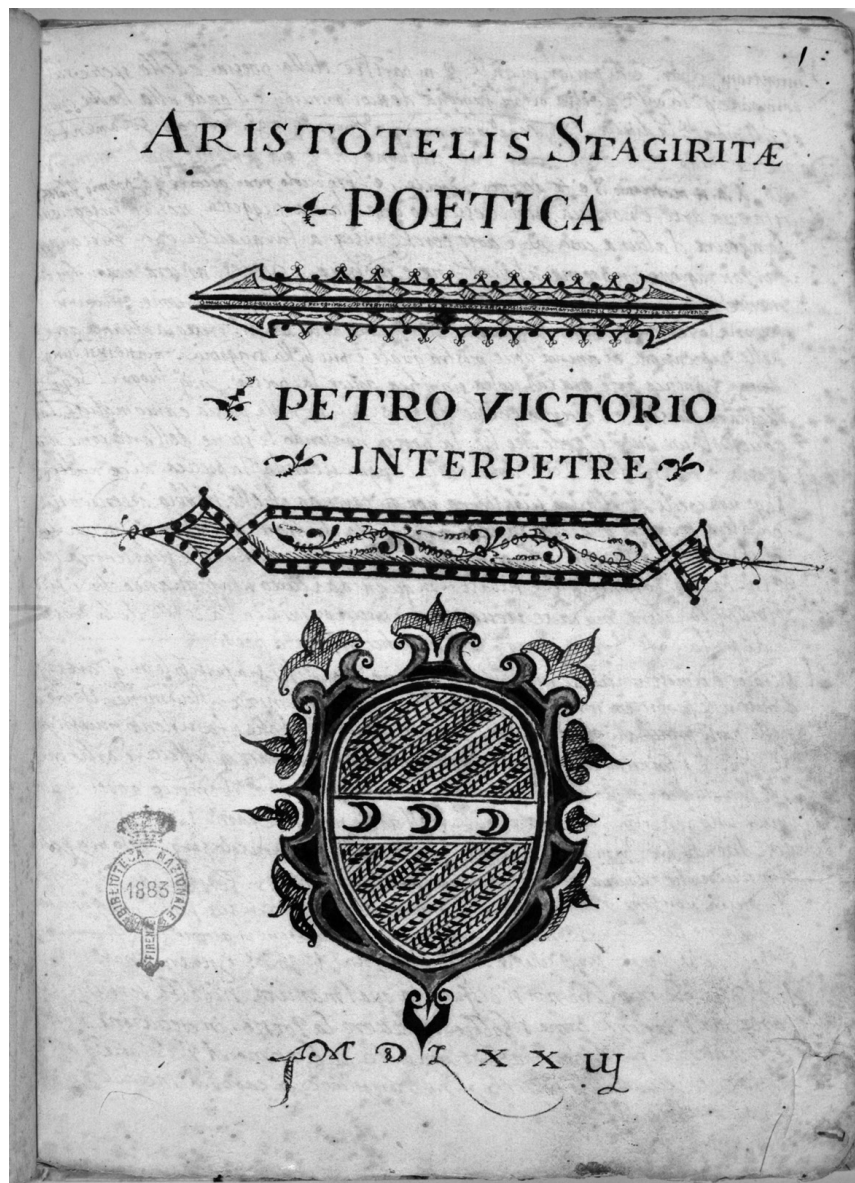


Figure 5.4 *Aristotelis Stagiritae Poetica Petro Victorio Interpetre*, BNCF Magl. VII, 1199, title page.

the Strozzi papers, in which the small manuscript volume had originally been held (as manuscript n° 805), neither Carlo Strozzi nor his son Luigi had known precisely who the authors of the codex were. I looked at the booklet from every angle, with the hope of finding some obvious indication that it had indeed belonged to the academy to which the author of the dedication of the printed volume I had earlier consulted had alluded in writing to his nephew – but could find none. Had the makers of such a complex textual object wanted to remain anonymous? If so, to what end?

My perplexity ended up attracting the attention of one of the BNCF's curators, Piero Scapecchi, then head of the *sala manoscritti*. 'What have you found there?', he asked

kindly, as he walked by me on his way to the reserves. 'I am not quite sure,' I answered, explaining that, in the booklet, I could find no explicit indication of who had copiously annotated this transcription of Vettori's translation of the *Poetics*. Scapecchi picked up the book and leafed through it, soon returning to the title page (Figure 5.4). 'True,' he said, 'the annotators do not seem to have identified themselves.' 'But, look,' he added, pointing to the elegant coat of arms that had been carefully drawn on the original title page, 'here are the arms of the Strozzi – namely, three crescents in reverse in a band. This book belonged to a distinguished and most probably wealthy member of the Strozzi family, that much we know for sure.' I smiled and thanked him, then mentioned the book I had found earlier in the rare-book section, in which a Giovan Battista Strozzi dedicated what appeared to be a printed version of Vettori's translation of the *Poetics* to a nephew of the same name, while omitting however to reproduce the extensive annotations present in the manuscript. I added that the dedication seemed to indicate that the manuscript had been collectively annotated among the *Accademia degli Alterati*. 'Really, the Alterati? And Giovan Battista Strozzi had a private edition made from this manuscript, for use among his friends, his family and members of the academy?', he said, intrigued. 'It looks like you have stumbled on something well worth looking into. We are closing in a few minutes, but tomorrow, if you show me that piece of printed matter, we can have a look at it together and compare it with this manuscript.' I accepted his offer, picked up my things, had the manuscript placed *in deposito* at the bank and proceeded to walk down the great internal marble staircase of the BNCF, past the stern bust of Antonio Magliabechi, who himself seemed to be wondering what I could possibly have found, by chance, in the library he had once headed.⁴

Nine years later, I know what I had found that day. But understanding the nature of this peculiar manuscript, in a way with which I could be satisfied, took examining thousands of pages of other manuscript materials. The effort also involved writing a 450-page book on the Alterati of Florence, scheduled to appear in French with *Les Belles Lettres* in Paris in 2020, under the title *Le Principe de plaisir: savoirs, esthétique et politique dans la Florence des Médicis (XVI^e-XVII^e siècles)*. In the next sections, I describe the work that was needed to contextualize the material object I found that day in the *sala manoscritti* of the BNCF, and explain why this research calls our understanding of early modern poetics into question, possibly even pointing to the need to reframe the history of early modern aesthetics more generally. I begin with reflexively analysing the various research procedures by which I managed to solve many (but surely not all) of the manuscript's mysteries. I then go on to explain how this painstaking enquiry helped me reconsider some of the larger questions I harboured about the history of early modern aesthetics, while allowing also me to frame a number of follow-up enquiries.

In all three of the next sections, I strive to point out how rare books and manuscripts can serve as fertile grounds for the development of innovative forms of intellectual and, more generally, cultural history, by allowing us to move back and forth from

⁴ On Antonio Magliabechi, see Caroline Callard, 'Diogène au service des princes: Antonio Magliabechi à la cour de Toscane (1633-1714)', *Histoire Economie Société XIX* (2000): 85–103 and Jean Boutier, Maria Pia Paoli and Corrado Viola, eds, *Antonio Magliabechi nell'Europa dei saperi*, 2 vols. (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2017), which includes an edition of the life of Magliabechi by Anton Francesco Marmi.

a restricted set of material objects to a larger group of historical questions. In the process, existing paradigms can come into question or be reformulated. In this respect, this essay owes much to the current renewal of philological investigations, in which book history and manuscript studies are mobilized to generate new understandings of the history of culture, thereby constantly oscillating – in the tradition of the research protocols set forth by nineteenth-century German philologists, such as August Boeckh – from small-scale material objects to large-scale cultural interrogations.⁵ My own approach pays particular attention to how book-historical approaches (be they based on rare books or on manuscripts) can support the inclusion of social, institutional and political perspectives that traditional histories of ideas – which are often based on modern editions of canonical texts – tend to ignore. I focus specifically in what follows on highlighting the ways in which our understanding of the history of the circulation of the *Poetics*, and of the development of early modern aesthetics more generally, can be enhanced and even transformed by the inclusion of these social, institutional and political perspectives, which the history of the book and of manuscript circulation can help document.

* * *

The Alterati's collective commentary of the *Poetics* had immediately appeared to me as a piece of meaningful evidence – even though its specific intellectual and/or cultural meanings were initially an enigma. The fact that this document did not belong to the known tradition of Italian Renaissance treatises on the *Poetics*, as documented by Bernard Weinberg,⁶ made it more appealing to me rather than less because it gave me hope that the information to be found in it might allow one to tell the story of Renaissance poetics somewhat differently. But before any intellectual or cultural meaningfulness could be inferred, the creation, purpose and uses of the manuscript needed to be clarified.

⁵ On August Boeckh's understanding of philology, conceived as a meta-knowledge of all things known, see August Boeckh, *On Interpretation & Criticism*, trans. and ed. John Paul Pritchard (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968). On the tension between 'hyperconcentration' and 'hyperdiffusion', which was built in to most philological enterprises developed in nineteenth-century Germany, see Constanze Güthenke, "'Enthusiasm Dwells Only in Specialization': Classical Philology and Disciplinarity in Nineteenth Century Germany", in *World Philology*, ed. Sheldon Pollock, Benjamin A. Ellman and Ku-ming Kevin Change (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2015), ch. 12, 264–84. On innovative ways to elaborate cultural and intellectual history using books and manuscripts, see Dinah Ribard and Nicolas Schapira, 'L'Histoire par le livre, XVI^e-XX^e siècle', *Revue de Synthèse* 128, no. 1–2, 6th series (2007): 19–25.

⁶ Bernard Weinberg had, however, written two seminal articles on the Alterati, as I soon discovered. See: 'The *Accademia degli Alterati* and Literary Taste from 1570 to 1600', *Italica* 31, no. 4 (1954): 207–14 and 'Argomenti di discussione letteraria nell'Accademia degli Alterati (1570-1600)', *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana* 131 (1954): 175–94. Weinberg also published several *discorsi* by Alterati members in his *Trattati di poetica e retorica del Cinquecento*, 4 vols. (Bari, Laterza, 1970-1974), v. 3 (Francesco Bonciani, 'Lezione sopra il comporre delle novelle', 137–74; Giulio del Bene, 'Due discorsi', 175–204 and Lorenzo Giacomini, 'De la purgazione de la tragedia', 345–74 and 'Del furor poetico', 421–54) and vol. 4 (Giovanni Battista Strozzi, (comma instead of semicolon) 'Dell'unità della favola', 333–44). Weinberg held the production of modern editions of important orations to be more important than the careful study of the materiality and circulation of the manuscripts by which they have been transmitted to us.

My progressive elucidation of the BNCF Magl. VII, 1199 manuscript began with an investigation of its authors, and particularly of Giovan Battista Strozzi Il Giovane, who, as the coat of arms on the title page of codex testifies, was the primary owner of the text. This involved researching the *Accademia degli Alterati* in all of the existing secondary literature, which turned out to provide only partial overviews of this institution's activities.⁷ From it, I did however manage to extract extensive references to much of the Alterati's surviving manuscript works, which comprise at least seventeen known codices of academic origin, many of which are in in-folio format and contain over 300–400 folios (or 600–800 pages) of manuscript materials (letters, *discorsi*, *abozzi*, poems, dialogues, detailed registries of daily academic activity, etc.). I realized later, however, that the Alterati's written productions were in fact even more plentiful than that, with the obvious and clearly identified materials preserved in the Florentine archives under their name often being less revealing than the materials they had originally hidden from sight or circulated discreetly, if not in secrecy – such precisely as the BNCF Magl. VII, 1199.

At first, the items contained in these previously documented codices seemed both fascinating and discouraging to me. How could I ever manage to situate these texts with respect to one another – and, more importantly, would I ever be able to reassemble the pieces of this gigantic textual puzzle to make some sort of greater picture appear? But this profusion of manuscript materials also proved a boon as I tried to identify the various hands which appeared on BNCF Magl. VII, 1199, because it not only provided me with the names of most of the members of the academy but also put a good number of samples of the hands of the most active Alterati members at my disposal. Thanks to such comparisons, I was able to identify Giovan Battista Strozzi's handwriting in the manuscript, where most of the indexical headings added in the transcription are in fact his, as well as a substantial amount of the explanatory notes. It appears for instance on folio 6^{ver} (Figure 5.5) where Strozzi's hand is the one which penned in the annotation starting with 'Delle Parodie non ci è molto notitia ...' However, the principal annotator, in terms of both the number and the sophistication of the remarks provided, turned out to be another of the distinguished members of the academy, Filippo Sassetti, whose

⁷ In 2008, the existing bibliography was as follows. Two early modern accounts of the academy were published in the eighteenth century: Salvino Salvini (1667-1751), *Fasti consolari dell'Accademia Fiorentina* (Florence: Gio. Gaetano Tartini and Santi Franchi, 1717), 202–8 and Domenico Maria Manni (1690-1788), *Memorie della famosa Accademia fiorentina degli Alterati* (Florence: G.-B. Stecchi, 1748), 25 p. Modern studies of the sodality included the two above-mentioned articles by Bernard Weinberg; Claude Palisca, 'The Alterati of Florence, Pioneers in the Theory of Dramatic Music' (1968), in *Studies in the History of Italian Music and Music Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 408–31; Eric Cochrane, *Florence in the Forgotten Centuries, 1527-1800* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973), 93–161; Michel Plaisance, *L'Accademia e il suo Principe: cultura e politica a Firenze al tempo di Cosimo I e di Francesco de' Medici. L'Académie et le Prince: Culture et politique à Florence au temps de Côme I^{er} et de François de Médicis* (Manziana (Rome): Vecchiarelli, 2004), 393–406; Anna Siekiera, 'Il volgare nell'Accademia degli Alterati', in *Italia linguistica: discorsi di scritto e di parlato, nuovi studi di linguistica italiana per Giovanni Nencioni*, ed. Marco Bifi, Omar Calabrese and Luciana Salibra (Siena: Protagon, 2005), 87–112; Gaspare de Caro, *Euridice. Momenti dell'umanesimo civile fiorentino* (Bologna: Ut Orpheus, 2006), 73–116 and Henk van Veen, 'The Accademia degli Alterati and Civic Virtue', in *The Reach of the Republic of Letters: Literary and Learned Societies in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Arian van Dixhoorn and Susie Speakman Sutch, 2 vols. (London and Boston: Brill, 2008), t. 2, 285–308.

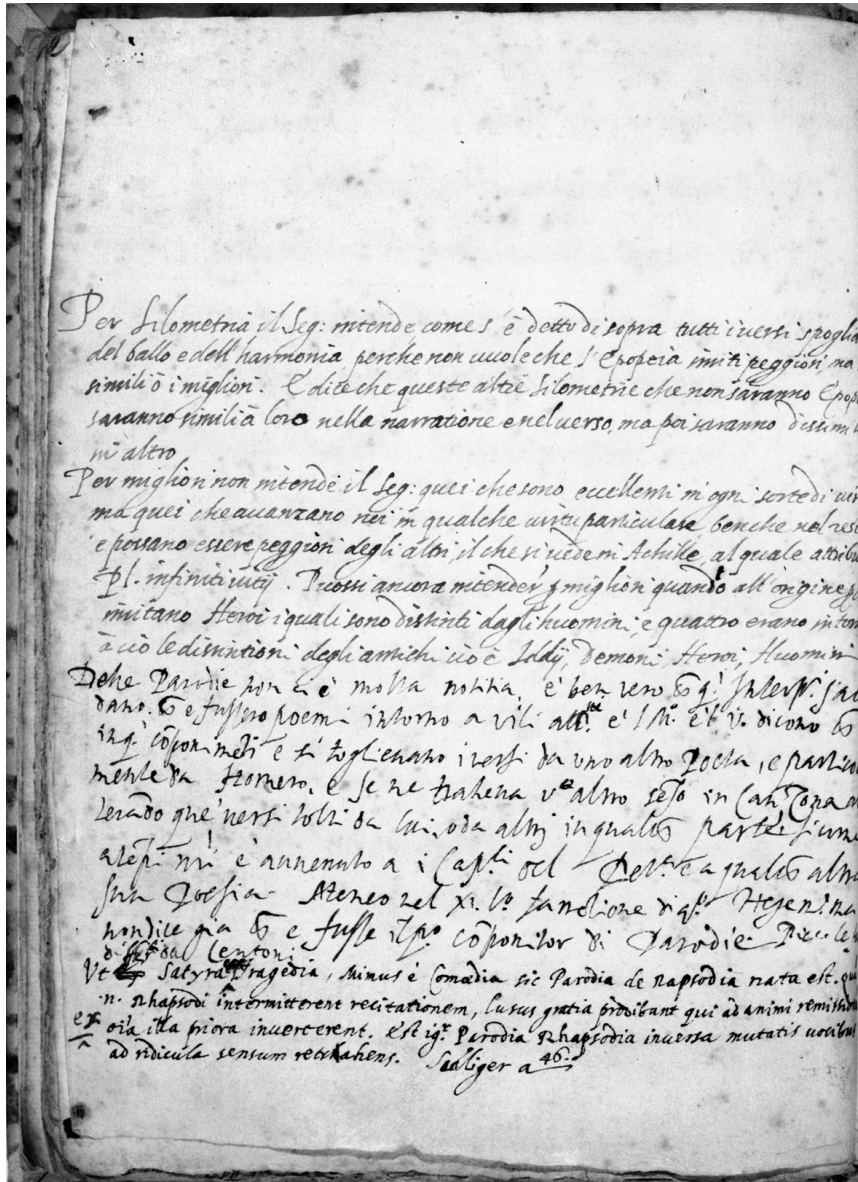


Figure 5.5 Aristotelis Stagiritae Poetica Petro Victorio Interpetre, BNCF Magl. VII, 1199, fol. 6^{ver}, on which the hand at the top of the page is that of F. Sassetti, while the hand directly below it is that of G.-B. Strozzi.

handwriting is also widely represented in Florentine archives and easily recognizable on the manuscript. On folio 6^{ver} (Figure 5.5), it appears directly above Strozzi's hand, in the annotations beginning with 'Per Silometria, il Seg. intende ...'⁸

Sassetti's correspondence, which Vanni Bramanti edited in 1970, also provided me with external evidence that he and Strozzi had originally worked on the manuscript

⁸ For further details on these identifications, please see the codicological description furnished in Annex 1.

together while studying at the University in Pisa. While a letter to another Alterati member, Lorenzo Giacomini, dated 2 December 1573, mentions that Strozzi and Sassetti were living and studying together in Pisa the year the commentary of the manuscript was begun, a second letter, dated 3 December 1575, shows a precise exchange between Sassetti and Strozzi concerning an annotation (*postilla*) to add to what is most probably the manuscript text of Vettori's translation.⁹ This second letter also gives us quite a bit of information about the spirit in which the Alterati laboured over the text. But for the moment, suffice it to point out that this exchange both confirms that Sassetti and Strozzi were the primary annotators of the manuscript and suggests that the bulk of their initial annotations were penned between 1573 and 1575. This last hypothesis is also confirmed by the fact that when printed commentaries of the *Poetics* are cited, none of the ones referred to postdate 1575–6.¹⁰ However, I found at least four other hands on the manuscript, some of which are clearly later additions, as they fill the spaces left blank by Sassetti and Strozzi. One of these hands is probably the hand of the prominent Alterati member mentioned earlier, that is, that of Lorenzo Giacomini, whose profusely annotated edition of Annibale Caro's translation of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is preserved at the University Library in Pisa, thereby documenting his hand, and his familiarity with such annotative processes.¹¹ For instance, on folio 80^{rec} (Figure 5.6), the last annotation to be added to the page, which starts with 'La maraviglia non par sempre dilettevole ...', appears to be in his hand. Furthermore, the date of the book printed by Strozzi – the dedication of which indicates that the manuscript served as a reference and study tool in the academy for several decades – suggest that the manuscript may have been annotated, albeit sporadically, up until 1617, when Strozzi dedicated the private edition he had had made to his nephew. The manuscript could even have been worked on up to the death of the *marchese* of Forano, in 1636, since it is unclear when the Alterati ceased to meet regularly, although they do not appear to have been very active after 1610 or so.

* * *

After having identified the main contributors to the manuscript, I realized everything this document might allow me to historicize, that is, not only what the Alterati, as students of Vettori, had read into the *Poetics* of Aristotle but also how, as members of a learned Florentine academy, they had laboured upon such a text in collaboration. The interplay of annotations in the margins of Vettori's translation seemed to document not only the trains of thought and major poetic/aesthetic concepts of interest within the academy but also the specific forms that intellectual exchanges took among them, that is, what they actually did, as a collective, with Aristotle's *Poetics*, both orally and in writing. In other words, the manuscript provided a window into the Alterati's scholarly

⁹ Filippo Sassetti, *Lettere da vari paesi, 1570-1588*, ed. Vanni Bramanti (Milan: Longanesi & Co., 1970): 120–2 and 171–6.

¹⁰ See Annex 2, which details the books the Alterati quote in the manuscript, as well as the ones which they left out.

¹¹ BUP Ms. 551 and 552 are two volumes of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (Venice: A la Salamandra, 1570) translated into Tuscan by Annibale Caro, with extensive annotations by Lorenzo Giacomini. I thank Anna Siekiera for having brought these two volumes to my attention.

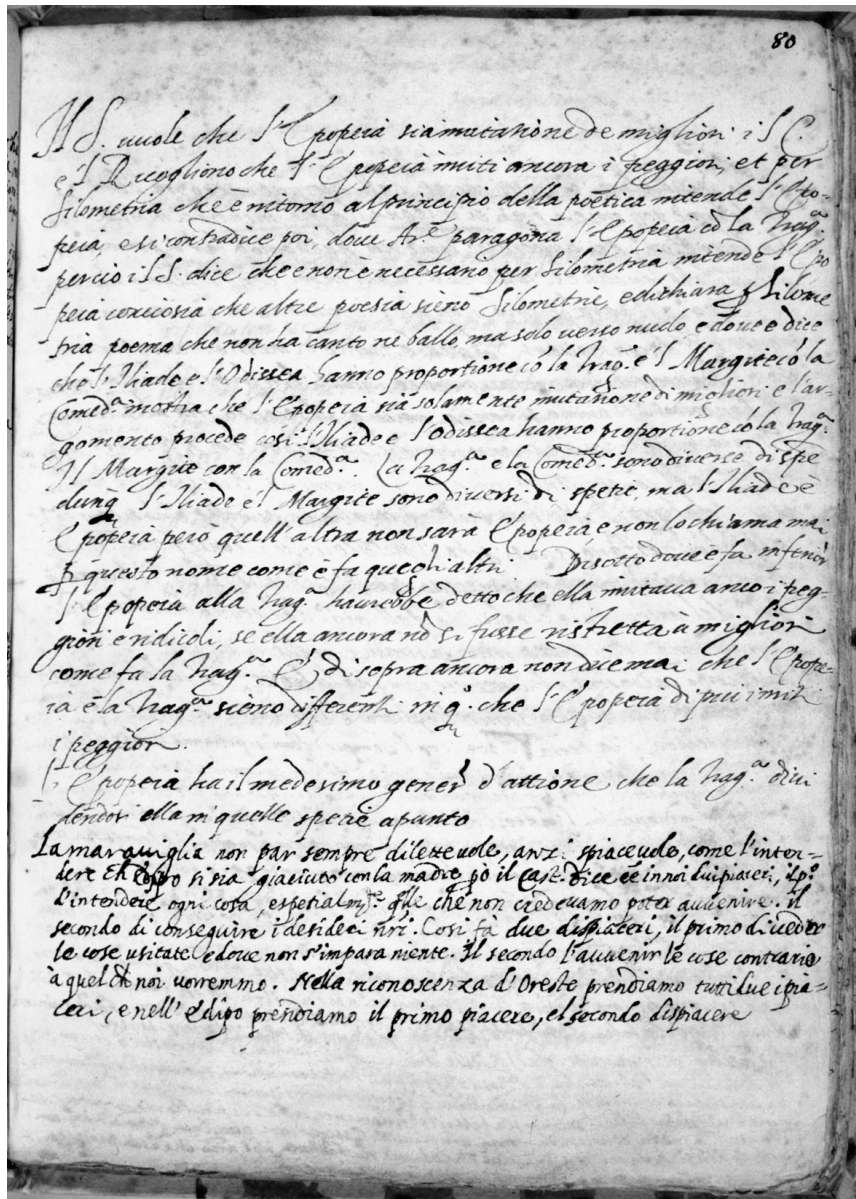


Figure 5.6 Aristotelis Stagiritae Poetica Petro Victorio Interpetre, BNCF Magl. VII, 1199, fol. 80^{rec}.

practices, both when they crafted the manuscript and when they subsequently used it, in the context of their academy. The present section details these practices and uses.

The manuscript was initially a product of the student culture that surrounded the *Studio Pisano*, the University of Pisa, one of Italy's oldest universities, which the Medici had reopened to students in 1543 after a long closure. There, the sons of Tuscany's upper classes could follow *lectiones*, but they also frequently studied on their own or with other students, outside of lectures, most notably because very few of them actually needed to receive a degree. Indeed, many of them would not enter a particular

profession in which the three main sciences taught at the University (law, medicine and theology) might be of use to them. Rather, most Florentine patricians, such as Giovan Battista Strozzi Il Giovane, would restrict themselves to the duty of fructifying their inherited wealth. As such, they mainly came to Pisa to get a smattering of philosophy and to share in the boisterous student culture that existed there. Given these circumstances, Strozzi's choice to spend time analysing and interpreting the *Poetics* while in Pisa may have been triggered simply by the fact that, at the time, no professor at the University covered this material, which Strozzi, who was a member of the Alterati since 1570, would have understood as central to his literary interests. In the dedication to his nephew, which Strozzi placed at the opening of the printed book, Strozzi also claims that he heard Piero Vettori explain the *Poetics* in Florence around 1567, when he was sixteen ('I found it pleasing to learn many things, but I found greater pleasure in hearing, fifty years ago, Piero Vettori – the brightest luminary of his times, and of knowledge – as he explained with great erudition the *Poetics* of Aristotle').¹² It is difficult to determine exactly in what precise circumstances Strozzi followed such lectures – these lessons may have taken place in the *Studio*, or at Vettori's home – but it is not impossible that Sassetti might have heard them too, as his correspondence testifies to the fact that he was one of Vettori's most dedicated students and sustained intellectual exchanges with him until the very last years of his life.¹³

It is possible that Strozzi and Sassetti, by choosing to work collaboratively on Vettori's translation of the *Poetics* in 1573, were attempting to reconstruct, in Pisa, the kind of intellectual labour and excitement they had shared while studying with Vettori in Florence, as adolescents. Their approach to the text, as it is reflected in the manuscript, appears to confirm this, as it seems very similar to the kind of approach they would find in an introductory lecture on the *Poetics*. They followed the text line by line, first elucidating Aristotle's vocabulary (the *verba*), as well as the historical references that appear in his text (the *res*), then attempting to reconstruct his reasoning in passages where it appears unclear. When striving to determine Aristotle's line of thought, they also often draw on the logical skills provided by their scholarly education. Sassetti in particular underlines the syllogistic nature of Aristotle's thought wherever he can, for instance on folio 21^{rec} (**E-Figure 7**) which glosses *Poetics*, 1450a 15–20 and attempts to demonstrate through a syllogism that plot (*favola*) is the end of tragedy.¹⁴ He also frequently draws charts to illustrate the many distinctions he understands Aristotle to be making, such as on folio 12^{rec} (**E-Figure 8**), where a distinction between Homer

¹² Latin text quoted in footnote 1.

¹³ See Sassetti's letters to Vettori, in Sassetti, *Lettere da vari paesi, 1570-1588*: letters 16, 19, 22, 23, 25, 26, 35, 37, 41, 50 and 103.

¹⁴ Filippo Sassetti's *postilla*, BNCF Magl. VII, 1199, fol. 21^{rec} can be transcribed as follows:

La Tragedia ha per fine il rappresentarci la felicità e l'infelicità. Ma la felicità e l'infelicità consiste nell'attione, dunque il suo fine è l'attione, ma l'attione non è altro che la favola, dunque la favola è il fine, ma il fine è principale dunque la favola è principale. Che la favola e non il costume sia fine si prova per mezzo della felicità, e che il costume non sia fine si prova per mezzo dell'habito, perciòche il costume è habito, l'habito non è fine, dunque il costume non è fine. E che la favola e 'l costume non sieno il medesimo ne segue perchè se il costume non è fine e la favola è fine necessariamente la favola non sarà costume. C[astelvetro] riduce in syllogismi tutto questo discorso.

and all other poets allows Sasseti to account for the existence of various poetic genres. Occasionally, Sasseti and Strozzi spend more energy on a specific problem that the linear commentary has brought to light – such is the case in the long annotation that Sasseti devotes to the question of the goal (*fine*) of tragedy at the very end of the commentary, on folio 92^{ver} (**E-Figure 9**).¹⁵ This note does not bear an immediate relationship to the text transcribed in the surrounding pages. Rather, it brings together several passages of the text and strives to reconcile Aristotle with himself when various affirmations throughout the *Poetics* seem at odds. But such attempts at synthesis are rare.

Initially, Strozzi and Sasseti mostly combed through the text together in a linear manner, summarizing the contents of their discussions on the page as they went along. On folio 8^{rec} (**E-Figure 10**) appears a very interesting example of their close collaboration: Sasseti begins a remark on the question of whether the poet who speaks in his own name can be deemed an imitator, but he interrupts himself in the middle of a phrase. Strozzi picks up where he left off, only to interrupt himself as well. Finally, Sasseti's hand completes the remark.¹⁶ Furthermore, the 1575 Sasseti

¹⁵ Filippo Sasseti's lengthy *postilla*, BNCf Magl. VII, 1199, fol. 92^{rec} can be transcribed as follows:

Pare che Aristotile voglia la Tragedia e l'Epopeia havere un fine medesimo cioè il muoverci a speranza e a terrore e mediante questi affetti purgarci dagli affetti contrarii e per conseguente il piacere, il quale è congiunto con questi due fini e dice Aristotile se la Tragedia adunque Avanza la Epopeia: in tutto quello et che io ho detto et oltre à quello artis opere cioè nel piacere e non in [uno] spiacere, ma nel suo proprio, cioè quello che nasce dalla misericordia e terrore e dal purgarene, manifestum – s – est – quod melior etc. E che ella più consegua il suo fine si può dire perchè ella mette davanti agli occhi sì come ei ci ha monstrato di sopra dove e provò che ella era più evidente e più dilettevole.

Il fine della Tragedia è stato diversamente mostrato da Aristotile et il fine similmente dell'Epopeia perciò che egli fa che l'una e l'altra habbia il medesimo : e pare che quattro d[e]va[no] esser i fini cioè la favola e l'attione, l'eccitar misericordia e terrore, il purgare delle passione & ultimamente un certo piacere. Quanto à che la favola sia fine si prova perchè la Tragedia è un tutto composto di più parti fra le quali una ve ne ha che è il fondamento e l'esser d'essa, e si chiama fine della Tragedia perche è fine di tutte le parti di lei, essendo l'altre ordinate e servendo à essa ò sieno qualitative ò sieno quantitative sì come il corpo serve all'anima la quale è fine. Perciò poco dopo la definitione disse Aristotile la favola essere fine. E nella definitione accennò la purgatione di certi affetti esser fine. E in un altro luogo mostra il terrore e con il terror intende anco la misericordia esser fine della Tragedia e dell'a Epopeia ma questi duoi sono fini perchè e' sono operatione della Tragedia il che apparirà dicendo che ogni cosa che ha la sua virtù e facultà è ordinata à qualche operatione et è in lei l'operatione e sì come nell'huomo l'anima è fine in un modo, così la favola nelle tragedia, e sì come in un altro l'operar virtuoso dell'anima è fine così l'operatione della Tragedia e da questo si cava che ella habbia dua altri fini cioè l'eccitare gli affetti et il purgare, etc. Ci dobbiamo ricordare che alcune operationi lasciano qualche opera dopo di loro e alcune no. Hora in quelle che lasciano qualcosa il fine è non solamente far quelle operationi ma ancora l'opera stessa, come del pittore, il dipigner è fine, e la pittura ancora, la quale è molto più da essere apprezzata. Così se la Tragedia ha per fine l'eccitare gli affetti e purgare, che sono suoi fini come sue operationi è necessario che gli affetti eccitati e la purgatione sieno ancor essi fini essendo che e' restano in noi e rimangono quando e' non è più l'operatione della Tragedia; pero altro è il muovere gli affetti, altro è gli affetti mossi, e il medesimo avviene della purgatione ch'è usata in noi e del purgare.

¹⁶ See BNCf Magl. VII, 1199, fol. 8^{rec}. I have distinguished each author according to his handwriting:

[Sasseti] Questo luogo dove Aristotile mostra il Modo dell'Imitare è variamente esposto perciòche sono alcuni, che volendo che solo si trovi imitatione in quei poemi ne' quali il poeta non parla in propria persona espongono eundem & non se immutatem che

letter mentioned earlier testifies to the continuation of such collaborative work from afar, once Sassetti had returned to Florence, while Strozzi remained in Pisa. Having been asked for a note on the passage beginning with 'Nullo non haberemus', Sassetti produces in his letter four pages of linear commentary of the said passage, which he then asks Strozzi – provided he approves of the reading proposed – to summarize into a *postilla* and insert into the manuscript, which, as this letter testifies, had remained in Strozzi's possession in Pisa.¹⁷ However, in the manuscript, the *postilla* is actually in Sassetti's hand, suggesting that Strozzi may actually have waited for Sassetti's return (Figure 5.3). Thus, both internal and external evidence suggests that the manuscript was initially the product of a collaborative extra-curricular student exercise, which probably involved note-taking only in as much as it was necessary to keep a trace of the conclusions which had emerged from the oral (or, when needed, epistolary) intellectual exchanges of Sassetti and Strozzi. Many other examples of collaboration appear on the manuscript, in a variety of different hands, some contemporaneous and some not, as is for instance visible on fol. 38^{ver} (E-Figure 11), where four different hands added comments over several years, if not decades. This suggests that intense collaboration in the annotative process remained a dominant feature of the use of the manuscript when it was subsequently mobilized among the Alterati.

However, over time, and as the academy of the Alterati developed, the manuscript seems also to have been endowed with other functions. This is particularly visible in the way scholarly references to the work of other commentators of Aristotle's *Poetics* appear in the annotations. Initially, the annotators took into account only the books published by Maggi, Robortello, Segni and Vettori, which constitute the first few scholarly publications published on the *Poetics*, as they all appeared between 1548 and 1560 – as in Sassetti's initial comments, in which he cites 'Mag^o', 'Seg', 'Vi' and 'Rob'. (Figure 5.2).¹⁸ But, as time went by, other references are frequently inserted, which point to later contributions on the *Poetics*. Among these, one finds Castelvetro's commentary on the *Poetics*, published in 1570, or Piccolomini's remarks on the same book, first published in 1575. For example, the last annotation to be penned into the first folio of the manuscript also includes references to 'C^o' and 'Pⁱ' in (Figure 5.2). On the bottom of folio 6^{ver} (Figure 5.5) a comment clearly penned in after the manuscript was first annotated adds a reference to Scaliger's treatise on poetics, published in 1561, with a precise page reference. A similar evolution is visible on folio 10^{rec} (E-Figure 12),

il poeta diventi [Strozzi] uno altro e da principio del Poema fino al fine parli sempre in persona di questo stesso, nel quale e' s'è trasformato, sì come fa Ovidio nelle [e]pistole e Licofrone nella Cassandra e allegano Ilacio [?] suo interprete. A me par' egli che e sia meglio far la divisione in questa maniera. Che il Poeta ò parli sempre in persona propria come è il Mureto di Virgilio e quasi tutte le poesie lyric[h] e [Sassetti] ò parli sempre in persona d'altri come fa la Tragedia e la Comedia e ci comprenderei di più que' poemi che in favore d'altri hò di sopra allegati, ò parli tal volta in persona sua propria e tal volta in persona d'altri come fa l'Epoepia, e così divide Platone nel 3^o della Republica questi tre modi, il perchè manifestamente si vede, che usando qui Aristotile le medesime parole che usa quivi Platone a questo proposito, che e'gli habbia tolti da lui. [...].

¹⁷ Sassetti, *Lettere da vari paesi, 1570-1588*, 171–6.

¹⁸ See Annex 2, listing which contemporary commentaries on the *Poetics* are mentioned by the Alterati and which are not.

where, at the end of the annotation located at the top of the folio, an unfavourable note about Piccolomini's text was inserted: 'Pⁱ s'avviluppa per voler salvare la sua prosa.'¹⁹ These additions signal that, in the decades after it was first annotated, the status of manuscript evolved somewhat. Originally produced in the framework of an extra-curricular student exercise, it later became a study tool and even a reference book for the Alterati. In it, members of the academy could familiarize themselves with the original work of two of the earliest and most respected members of the academy. But by perusing the references to all the most famous contemporary commentators of the *Poetics*, which had been inserted progressively by those who had used the manuscript over the years, they could also use the manuscript to explore, study and compare the main printed interpretations of Aristotle's text available to them.

This is precisely how Strozzi described the elaboration and subsequent use of the manuscript, when he dedicated the printed version of the transcription to his nephew:

How could I describe the study of this little book? I am not unhappy to have often used my quill. It is befitting to an eminent Preceptor to transcribe words and to add to each folio of the text other blank pages on which I could transcribe – as I would on a blank board – my thoughts as well as those of others, found with a zeal that was anything but ordinary, so that, if the need to help my friends arose, I would have ready-made teachings on poetics on which to draw from on the spot, as if from a reserve.²⁰

Strozzi depicts himself not only adding his remarks or those of his friends to the blank pages that had been inserted into the transcription but also penning in the excellent words of the best masters on the topic, so that should his academic colleagues ever require help understanding the *Poetics*, he could take the manuscript out of his stock of victuals (or 'goodies': 'ex penu') and present them with it. Thus, in the later years of the academy, the manuscript effectively became the central repository for the institution's collective knowledge on the topic of Aristotle's *Poetics*. It is for this reason that, in 1617, at a moment when the academy was in decline, Strozzi had its printed counterpart made by the Giunti presses, before presenting it to his nephew. As the end of the printed dedication indicates, Strozzi expresses the hope that the *marchese* and his own group of adolescent friends would, upon working on the manuscript, go on to take up poetics and poetry, and even embrace academic endeavours, just as he and the *marchese's* father, Filippo Strozzi, had done – thereby not only cultivating the reputation of this branch of the Strozzi family but also enhancing that of Florence itself. The manuscript was even so important to Giovan Battista Strozzi that, shortly before his death, he distributed all the remaining printed copies of the booklet he had printed in 1617 to younger members of the Strozzi family, in an effort to publicize, disseminate and perpetuate the work of the academy to which he had devoted so much of his life. This we know from Strozzi's will, dated 1631, in which he donated remaining copies of

¹⁹ This snappy notation is probably best translated as 'Piccolomini ties himself into knots as he attempts to salvage his argument'.

²⁰ Latin text quoted in footnote 2.

the book to several young family members or friends.²¹ His gesture suggests that the printed booklet, just as much as the annotated manuscript itself, had by then become, in his eyes, an emblem of the academy's collaborative learning practices as well as a testimony to the scope and sophistication of its intellectual endeavours.

As a material object, manuscript Magl. VII, 1199 thus allows for the reconstruction of many of the practices that shaped it as well as for a good understanding of the way it was subsequently used within the academy. We can, for instance, be sure that while in the academy's library, the manuscript was consulted for many of the intellectual enterprises to which the academicians devoted their energies, whether collectively or individually. For instance, when, in August 1575, Filippo Sassetti and Antonio degli Albizzi prepared a polemic response to Alessandro Piccolomini's *Annotationi* on the *Poetics* (Venice: Giovanni Guarisco, 1575), which was then circulated in manuscript under the academy's name, they most probably used it as a source.²² In the same way, when Sassetti attempted to produce a full commentary of the *Poetics* in the vulgar tongue, the first folios of which are now preserved in BRF Ricc. 1539, folios 81^{rec} to 126^{ver}, he drew quite heavily on the work he had originally done with Strozzi. **E-Figure 13** shows the first page of this manuscript (folio 81^{rec}) in Filippo Sassetti's hand. The commentary was left unfinished.

However, while reconstructing what the Alterati were doing with the manuscript was well within my reach, what they were thinking, individually or collectively, while labouring over Aristotle's *Poetics*, seemed to be far less easy to make out, though some of the Alterati's fragmented annotations did point to a specific perspective on the text of the *Poetics*. In the next section, I describe the interpretations that the Alterati's annotations suggested, while reflecting on why thoughts might be less accessible than practices in such a manuscript. In the final part of this essay, I discuss how book history and in particular manuscript studies can be used not only to recover the social, institutional and political contexts in which rare books and codices were produced but also to piece together the representations, values and ideas of those who produced them. In particular, understanding the collective musings of such a group of thinkers as the Alterati from their manuscript (and printed) productions often requires using the book-historical or manuscript sources to move beyond these very sources, into the social, institutional and political configurations, and representations, which these materials can however be used to document with some precision. Such enterprises are labour intensive and time-consuming. But the return on investment can be high.

²¹ ASF Notarile Moderno 9323, n° 42, fols 90^{ver} to 95^{ver}, in particular fol. 94^{rec}: 'A figliuoli del Senatore Signor Amerigo Strozzi et del Senatore Giovanni Dini trinepoti d'esso Signor Testatore, et a ciascuno d'essi una Poetica d'Aristotile dedicata da esso al sopradetto Signor Giovanni Battista Strozzi loro Zio'. Immediately afterward on the same folio: 'Al Signor Giovanni Battista di Lorenzo Strozzi, una Poetica d'Aristotile simile'. Finally, fol. 94^{ver}: 'Al Signor Francesco Rovai, La Difesa di Dante in dua tomi di Jacopo Mazzoni, una Poetica d'Aristotile fatta stampare da esso Signor Testatore, ragionamento d'Agnolo Segni appartenente a Poetica'.

²² The text appears in BNCF Magl. IX, 125, fols 229^{rec}-238^{ver} under the title of *Discorso degli Accademici Alterati sopra le Annotazioni della Poetica di Messer Alessandro Piccolomini All'Illustrissima Signora Leonora di Tolledo di Medici nella detta Accademia chiamata l'Ardente*. Other versions of the text are collected, under different titles, in BRF Ricc. 2435, fols 127^{rec}-134^{ver} and BNCF Magl. IX, 124, fols 153^{rec}-158^{rec}. See also BNCF Postillati 15, which contains an edition of Piccolomini's remarks on the *Poetics* entirely annotated by Filippo Sassetti.

For the elucidation of these configurations makes it possible to understand how the intellectual positions of a set of individuals relate to a social and political world view, thereby providing us with a much deeper grasp of not only how these ideas originally came into existence but also to what specific ends they were mobilized by groups and individuals alike.

* * *

The first element that makes it difficult to extract thoughts from the notes that were inserted in the manuscript is a direct consequence of the oral and occasionally written exchanges in which the annotations were originally produced. In particular, many of Sassetti and Strozzi's annotations bear the stylistic traces of their verbal interactions, as they discussed Vettori's translation: their syntax is often chaotic, their phrases lack punctuation and, even in the lengthier annotations, they tend to transcribe oral exchanges in the form of notes (*appunti*) rather than search for elegant formulations. But even greater difficulties arise because of the fragmentary, discontinuous and generally allusive nature of the entire annotation process. This is a general feature of *marginalia*, but it is worth underscoring that this characteristic persists even when a text is extensively and meticulously annotated. Abundant and attentive annotations are not necessarily clearer than elliptic or scarcer ones, and things obviously get far more complicated when more than one hand is involved. Folio 45^{ver} (numbered 44) furnishes a good example of the difficulties one encounters when trying make sense of the abbreviated comments of several annotators. In a marginal remark at the top of the page, Sassetti comments upon an element of Vettori's translation which begins with the words, 'De constitutione quidem igitur rerum & quales quasdam esse oportet fabulas, dictum est satis'. In this passage, Aristotle appears to abandon the subject of the plot (*favola*) and prepares to go on to the topic of *mores*. Sassetti enters a brief note (**E-Figure 14**), which can be transcribed as follows: 'Qui lascia Aristotile la favola alla bellezza e perfettione della quale ha assegnate piu condizioni delle quali ne soggiunera di sotto dall' altre come che e non vi debbe essere Macchine. Ma vedi il Castelvetro che le riduce a otto bellezze e ve ne lascia molte altre.'²³ In his annotation, Sassetti underlines that Aristotle abandons the topic of *favola*, although he has already suggested many conditions necessary to ensure its beauty and perfection, and will add more conditions further on in his text, such as the necessity to avoid machinery on stage. He then refers the reader to Castelvetro, who, according to him, reduces all of these beauties to a list of eight and leaves no room for others.²⁴ The literal meaning of the note is obvious enough, but the author's intention (if indeed he harboured a specific

²³ BNCF Magl.,VII, 1199 bears three foliations, two of them complete. See the codicological description in Annex 1 for details. On this folio (numbered 44 on the top left), the numbering is on the *verso* of the folio and refers to page 44 of Vettori's translation. Under the other foliation, it would be fol. 45^{ver}.

²⁴ Castelvetro's comments on this section of the *Poetics* can be found in Lodovico Castelvetro, *Poetica d'Aristotele vulgarizzata, et sposta* (Vienna: Gaspar Stainhofer, 1570), 167–77. However, in this part of his commentary, there is no mention of eight beauties specific to tragedy. Sassetti is likely mentioning these beauties from memory and importing them from another part of the commentary.

intention) in making such a remark is not. Is he trying to stress that Aristotle's text is disorderly and has thus confused commentators? Or is he underlining the importance of *favola* and the beauties Aristotle associates with it in his philosophical reasoning? And does he approve of Castelvetro's reduction of the beauties of tragedy to eight or not? Obviously, an author's intentions are never transparent, and continuous texts can be even more difficult to make out than fragmentary notes in this respect. But the discontinuous quality of annotative remarks poses specific challenges. In particular, these fragmentary texts require that the reader accepts that he is dealing with the elaboration of thoughts rather than with a finished product and that he keep in mind that works-in-progress are probably best deciphered for what they are – that is, without attempting to artificially fill in the blanks that their mode of composition has created.

Provided careful attention is paid to its fragmentary form, the collectively annotated transcription found in BNCF Magl. VII, 1199 can actually tell us a great deal about the interests and curiosities of some of the Alterati as they pored over the *Poetics*. But in order to bring this information to the surface, the interpreter will do best to approach these annotations as if they were giving him access to the annotators' workshop, rather than with the idea that they are offering him a polished commentary on the *Poetics*. This can be done by focussing on how, in the experimental intellectual *locus* the manuscript provided for the group, certain concepts emerge, are tested and begin to be articulated to one another. From this perspective, a number of key terms recur in the marginalia, and, in the places where the annotation is especially lavish and extensive, several problems or questions have clearly attracted the annotators' attention more than others. For instance, reading the manuscript with an eye for the concepts that the Alterati pondered at length repeatedly brings to the fore the annotators' interest in the idea of action, their fascination for the concept of plot or *favola*, their perplexity in front of the notion of tragic purgation (otherwise known as *catharsis*) and, above all, their attraction to the concept of pleasure, which some of them are tempted to declare the true end of dramatic activity. Paying attention to these traces of intellectual elaboration also allows one to get a sense of how these concepts are put into relation with one another. By bringing together a few of the passages, the main preoccupations of the Alterati become discernible and some of the voices of their most active members can be heard with greater clarity.

On folio 21^{rec} (E-Figure 7), which we considered earlier as an example of syllogistic reasoning, Sassetti glosses Aristotle's reflections on the importance of action in the crafting of a tragedy (1450a 1–30).²⁵ At first sight, Sassetti appears to have attempted to summarize Aristotle's thinking, but a closer look at the annotation seems to indicate that he was also particularly interested in establishing the primacy of the *favola* (μῦθος) over the *costumi* (τά ἥθη). Indeed, Sassetti insists that tragedy's main goal (*fine*) is the plot (i.e. the fact of providing the imitation of an action) rather than the *mores* of the characters (i.e. the fact of providing an imitation of their habits and moral traits). The last lines of the note even suggest that he holds the latter (*mores*) to be entirely distinct from the *plot* ('la favola non è costume', that is, 'the plot is not the habits') and, as such, somewhat unessential to the creation of an effective tragedy. Sassetti is not misreading

²⁵ This annotation is transcribed earlier, in footnote 15.

Aristotle's text here, but he is certainly tweaking it so as to make morality appear a secondary preoccupation when crafting plays, while placing plot and action at the centre of the art of tragedy. However, this note, because of its allusiveness, would not in itself suffice to document such a bias, which can only be ascertained by articulating this remark to a number of other annotations Sassetti pens into the manuscript. Among these is the one he produces about the passage where Aristotle declares that in order for tragic poems to produce the pleasure that is proper to them, they must be composed of a single, whole and complete action (1459a 15–20). On folio 74^{rec} (**E-Figure 15**), Sassetti rephrases this assertion in a way that indicates that, here too, he is interested in stressing the importance of action in the creation of tragic pleasure and in distinguishing this pleasure from the question of morality.²⁶ In particular, in this remark, Sassetti underlines that the pleasure that arises from the adequate type of tragic action is the pleasure of the play's own beauty, not that which arises from the purgation of the passions. He also stresses that poetry and history are different because history does not aim at the beauty (*bellezza*) that poetry hopes to attain when imitating truth. The distinction between the beauty of the plot and the effect of the purgation of the passions is not part of Aristotle's text per se. Rather it is something that Sassetti is reading into it, and it is a telling interpretation, given that, since the mid-sixteenth century, the clause in which Aristotle defines tragedy as an action which provokes a type of catharsis (1449b 23–29) had played such a central role in those readings of the *Poetics* which had attempted to attribute to tragedy a moral aim. By stressing the importance of action and the specific beauty it generates, Sassetti is clearly trying to distance himself from such moralizing interpretations. In their place, he is interested in defining a poetics of tragedy based on pleasure rather than ethics or moral utility.

However, establishing pleasure as the central goal of tragedy in Aristotle's treaty is not easily accomplished, and Sassetti can often be seen struggling with the tensions of Aristotle's text on this issue, for instance on folio 92^{ver}, also previously mentioned (**E-Figure 9**).²⁷ In this substantial remark, Sassetti lists four goals for tragedy, designating 'un certo piacere' ('a certain kind of pleasure') as the last or *ultimate* one, after having enumerated among these four goals 'plot and action', the excitement of pity and terror and the purgation of the passions. If, in the annotation, 'ultimately' (*ultimamente*) refers not only to the place of 'pleasure' in the enumeration but also to its importance (or status) within it, the phrase ('è pare che quattro d[e]va[no] esser i fini cioè la favola e l'attione, l'èccitar misericordia e terrore, il purgare delle passione & *ultimamente* un certo piacere') could mean that tragedy's *ultimate* goal is a 'un certo piacer'. Yet the adverb *ultimamente* could also have the opposite meaning. Indeed, the first edition

²⁶ BNCF Magl. VII, 1199, fol. 74^{rec}:

Mostra [Aristotile] perchè conto l'attione per esser bella debba avere l'unità con l'esempio delle cose naturali belle, le quali hanno unità e integrità le quali dua cose fanno la bellezza dalla quale nasce il piacere; però è da avvertire che egli [Aristotile] intende qui il piacere della sua propria bellezza e non quello che nasce dalla purgatione. Se uno dirà che all'istoria ancora fa di mestier questa bellezza, gli risponderemo esser vero che ell' è una e intiera ma non ricerca la bellezza della poesia che consiste [i]n'imitare, ma verità.

²⁷ This annotation is transcribed above, in footnote 15.

of the *Vocabolario degli accademici della Crusca* (1612) defines *ultimamente* as 'in ultimo, alla fine, nell'ultimo luogo. Lat. *postremò, ultimo*'. This could make 'pleasure' the last (and thus least important) item on Sassetti's list, or it could make 'pleasure' the ultimate and even all-encompassing goal of tragedy. Both meanings appear possible in this remark and, though the second seems more coherent with things Sassetti has said elsewhere in his annotations, it is difficult to be sure of what he meant specifically here. This is especially true since, in the following remarks of this *postilla*, Sassetti's thoughts meander quite a bit, as if he were unsure of which goal should (or even could) be declared most central to tragedy. In particular, in his attempt to synthesize his understanding of what Aristotle might have been saying regarding the central goals of tragedy, Sassetti mentions the pleasure to be found in the purgation of the passions, as well as Aristotle's claim that plot is the central goal of tragedy. It is fair to suppose that both of these elements relate to his interest in tragic pleasure. However, towards the end of his remark, Sassetti insistently investigates the moral effects of tragedy, as well as of epics, stressing that if the rousing of affects and the resulting 'purgation' are the main takeaways of spectators, then one would also need to suppose that the said stirring of the passions and ensuing purgation are the (primary) goals of tragedy.

To a reader looking for a clear and definitive interpretation of the *Poetics*, Sassetti's hesitations may come as a disappointment, especially as they pop up on the last page of the manuscript, seeming to indicate that a central problem in the *Poetics* was in fact left unsolved amid the Alterati. But it is probably more useful to view these hesitations as telling traces of the initial interpretative struggles with which some of the Alterati wrestled when trying to establish a poetics centred on pleasure and beauty, rather than on utility and morality. Indeed, such hesitations can be seen in many other instances throughout the annotations. For while it is clear that Sassetti and most of the other annotators of the manuscript have a particular interest for the intricacies of tragic action and the pleasures they create, as the concentration of their remarks on topics such as reversal, recognition, and wonder (*meraviglia*) indicates, most of them also attempt to articulate pleasure and utility. From this point of view, some of the annotations on folios 82^{ver} to 84^{rec} are revealing. They show how Sassetti and one of the other main annotators of the manuscript – who is most probably Lorenzo Giacomini – work both to distinguish poetic goals from political ones and to pinpoint how tragic pleasure and the wonder it produces can serve moral ends. In the first annotation (**E-Figure 16**), Sassetti stresses that, according to Aristotle, poetry and politics concur, as both aim at making the body politic happy (*felice*).²⁸ He is thus trying once again to find a middle ground between poetry's own means and ends, and the moral and political necessities of the body politic. Yet in the following annotation (**E-Figure 17**), in response to Sassetti's

²⁸ BNCF Magl. VII, 1199, fol. 82^{ver}:

[...] [Sassetti] Hora è da sapere che di queste due poesie in fino sono duoi, un prossimo, et uno ultimo, il prossimo eccita misericordia e terrore, l'ultimo il purgare. I mez[z]i loro sono le cose terribili e compassionevoli. Hora la rettitudine dell'arte poetica consiste nel conseguire questo fine mediante questi mezzi. Aristotile fece mentione dell'arte Politica perche ella concorre con la Poetica: in trattare attioni humane & il suo fine è il fare tutta la citta felice et i suoi mezzi sono le buone leggi, però la sua rettitudine consisterà in conseguire questo fine mediante i suoi mezzi.

remark, the Alterati member whom I believe is Lorenzo Giacomini seems to stress solely the importance of pleasure, insisting that tragic poetry must delight by the novelty of the events it stages.²⁹ Finally, in the very last quotation, taken from folio 84^{rec} (**E-Figure 18**), the same annotator, directly adding a note to a remark previously penned in by Sasseti, designates wonder (*meraviglia*) as tragedy's main goal, which is not a common reading among sixteenth-century glossators of the *Poetics*. Yet in the very next clause, the same hand stresses that it is precisely because poetry delights that it generates good *costumi* in its spectators, as 'it is not unbecoming that one end [pleasure] concurs to the other [utility]'.³⁰ Once again, the pleasure that appears to be promoted here is one that is not at odds with utility, with the Alterati ultimately appearing as particularly curious, in this exchange as well as in Sasseti's previously analysed remark, of the ways in which both and utility could work in association in tragic spectacle. If this complex stance was 'hedonism', it was a nuanced and sophisticated form of 'hedonism', one which was in fact equally preoccupied with morality – or perhaps more accurately a 'hedonism' centrally concerned with something one could call an *ethics of pleasure*.

* * *

When I first deciphered the Alterati's collectively annotated manuscript of Aristotle's *Poetics*, I was both very much intrigued by what appeared to me as the Alterati's hedonistic aesthetics and quite frustrated that my minute examination of the codex did not furnish me with a clearer and a better articulated understanding of the Alterati's overarching reading of Aristotle's *Poetics*. The manuscript certainly manifested how the Alterati, as a group, had laboured together on the *Poetics*. It also documented the specificity of their training, the creativity of their speculations and, more generally, the originality of their intellectual activity. Yet, not only were their annotations elusive and their ideas hard to pinpoint but the manuscript which contained them also told me little, at least at first, about the specific reasons for which the members of this academy might be upholding such a convoluted hedonistic understanding of poetry. Why would the ethics of pleasure which seemed such a central element of their annotations in BNCF Magl. VII, 1199 be important to them as a collective? What could such a position signify in late Renaissance Florence, when compared to other (possibly) competing aesthetic viewpoints? And what social and/or political stakes

²⁹ BNCF Magl. VII, 1199, fol. 83^{rec}: '[Giacomini] Ma la dirittura della Poetica consiste in rassomigliar con parole armonizzate una attione humana possibile ad avvenire, dilettevole per la novità dello accidente.'

³⁰ BNCF Magl. VII, 1199, fol 84^{rec}:

[Sasseti] *Si quæ adversus, ipsam artem*: qui congiunge l'impossibile e'l peccar in un arte e dice così se il poeta fa cose impossibili e pecca ancora in qualche arte egli ha peccato, ma non dimeno ha fatto bene perché e' l'ha fatto per conseguire il suo fine, e se bene ha tolto mezzi non buoni è da salvarlo perchè così l'ha conseguito maggiormente. [Giacomini] Il M[aggi] pon per fine della Poesia *homines virtutibus exornare*, ma non è inconveniente che un fine riguardi l'altro, come nella medicina la sanità è il fine, e questo per potere operare, così la meraviglia è il fine della Poesia, e questa per poter in altrui generar buon costumi.

might have been associated with defining and selectively circulating such a standpoint for the Florentine patricians who populated this secretive academy?

I was also aware that the Alterati's collectively annotated manuscript did not provide me with what theoreticians of literature and aesthetics would, in today's world, consider to be a full-blown set of aesthetic 'theories'. Many historians of early modern poetics have strived to articulate fully developed theories of poetics when their sources do not furnish them with such totalizing perspectives. This was something that Bernard Weinberg was prone to do in his *History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, where he wove texts of many different natures and purposes (treatises, letters, academic discourses, polemical attacks, *abbozzi*, *appunti*, *libri postillati* or annotated books, etc.) into an all-encompassing history of poetic and aesthetic ideas, mostly without investigating the reasons for which each text was originally circulated, and often contextualizing each of them only in terms of how the ideas set forth within in it might enter into dialogue (whether intentionally or unintentionally) with the other texts assembled in his *corpus*. In doing so, Weinberg and those who followed in his footsteps conformed to the main understanding of 'theory' accepted in mid-twentieth-century literary discourse, particularly as practised by the Chicago School – that is one in which normativity, completeness and coherence (or non-contradiction) are believed to be central features of proper theoretical enunciations. However, Renaissance scholars did not necessarily adhere to such an understanding of theory. Nor did they believe that learned discourses on the arts needed to be isolated from moral or political considerations to be true to the essence of these very arts, which is a representation to which Weinberg, as a central figure of New Criticism, also seems to have generally adhered.³¹ In fact, many probably did not even believe in the existence of the types of discourses we now understand to be 'theory': early modern representations of science or knowledge were quite different from those we now harbour and made much more room for craft and experimentation than we normally tend to do.³² In particular, Renaissance thought on poetics did not carry with it a strict binary distinction between theory and practice, as is suggested by Weinberg's category of 'practical criticism'. The Chicago School critic devotes the second volume of his book (in which he deals with major literary polemics) to this form of 'practice', after having dealt with 'poetic theory' in the first volume.

With these considerations in mind, I concluded that it would be best to hold the elusiveness, incompleteness and even what I perceived, at times, to be the opacity of the Alterati's reflections on poetry, theatre and the arts – both in BNCf Magl. VII, 1199 and in their other writings, such as their academic *discorsi*, which I had been investigating in parallel – as characteristics worth exploring in and of themselves.³³ I

³¹ On the Chicago School, Neo-Aristotelianism and Bernard Weinberg's approach to the history of poetics, see Ravindra Nath Shrivastava, *Literary Criticism in Theory and Practice* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2004), especially 77–102, as well as Eufemia Baldassarre, Paul F. Gehl and Lia Markey's article on 'A Scholar-Collector in Mid-Century Chicago: The Books of Bernard Weinberg', in this volume.

³² See Pamela H. Smith, Amy R. W. Meyers and Harold J. Cook, *Ways of Making and Knowing: the Material Culture of Empirical Knowledge* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2014).

³³ On aesthetic knowledge as 'elusive', see the work of Ulrike Schneider and her research group ('Theorie und Ästhetik elusiven Wissens in der Frühen Neuzeit: Transfer und Institutionalisierung',

also came to think of them as traces of an understanding of poetics and poetry that considered them more as a craft, to be dealt with via an unending trial and error process, than as a definite and stable body of knowledge. Finally, I decided to take the main social practice that the Alterati's collectively annotated manuscript offered to me as evidence – that is, the Alterati's secretiveness (as producers of anonymous manuscripts and printed matter apparently designed for internal use only) and their elliptical evasiveness (when expressing their thoughts and the principles which founded them) – as my point of departure into the investigation of the ethos and, more generally, the social and political positioning of their academy.

From this last point of view, two material characteristics of the manuscript and its printed companion clearly demanded further investigation. First, the existence of such luxury objects as a carefully calligraphed manuscript and a printed booklet made for private use by one of the most famous printers in Florence begged the question of the wealth, social status and possible political clout of the academicians who had annotated the manuscript. Second, the intensive collaborative work displayed on the manuscript, as well as the forms of academic discursiveness that found themselves replicated in the dedication of the printed booklet, seemed to require that the values, social practices, institutional habits and even political viewpoints of these men be investigated. For what could be their goal in privileging parity, collaboration and *pro et contra* discursive exchanges when discussing Aristotle in their academy – as subjects of the Medicean regime, which had precisely worked so hard to detach Florence's institutions and social structures from the oligarchic ideals and practices of the former Republic, even while appearing to preserve them? These questions led me to momentarily abandon the Florentine libraries whose holdings are centred on belles-lettres – such as the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, the Biblioteca Riccardiana and the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, where most Alterati manuscripts are now held – to make my way to the Florence's central archival institution, the Archivio di Stato di Firenze. There I looked for genealogical records, official and domestic correspondence, and family papers for the most prominent members of the academy. I also carefully scrutinized some of their tax records, the number and importance of the civil offices they held in Florence's urban governance, and even the contents of their wills, with the goal of gaining a detailed understanding of their social, institutional and political positioning, both individually and as a group.

The results of this investigation, in which Strozzi, Sassetti and Giacomini – the major annotators of the transcription of Vettori's translation of the *Poetics* – were given pride of place, form the material of my forthcoming book. They are somewhat surprising, not only with respect to what we thought we knew about the Florentine patriciate in late Renaissance Florence but also with regard to Florence's academic culture more generally, and even in view of our current understanding of the history of early modern aesthetics. On the one hand, these findings invite a reevaluation of Florentine academic culture in the late sixteenth century and of the place of the Alterati within it. On the

SFB 980, group Episteme in Bewegung, project B05), as reflected, for instance, in Ulrike Schneider, 'Vom Wissen um *gratia*. Strategien der Diskursivierung elusiven Wissens in der Frühen Neuzeit', in Anne Eusterschulte and Ulrike Schneider, *Gratia. Mediale und diskursive Konzeptualisierungen ästhetischer Erfahrung in der Vormoderne* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2018), 89–105.

other hand, they suggest that our understanding of the social and political history of early modern aesthetics needs some reconfiguring.

The question of the place of the Alterati in Florence's academic culture can serve as a good point of entry into the many mysteries of this elitist institution. The Alterati have sometimes been described as a pro-Medicean academy.³⁴ However, my research shows that this private academy was in fact initially created to rival and contest the intellectual legitimacy of the academy the Medici had taken over since 1547: the Accademia Fiorentina. Moreover, the Alterati's academy initially constituted a secretive space of cultural resistance, which, contrary to the Accademia Fiorentina, brought together nothing but members of the Florentine patriciate, stemming quasi-exclusively not only from wealthy and well-established patrician households but also from lineages that had fought, in one way or another, to uphold the late Florentine Republic before 1537. In Cosimo I's Florence, these men and their families were silently kept out of both civil charges and courtly positions because of their prior political commitments. To counter the forms of social marginalization that could result from such a situation, they developed the academy they founded in 1569 both as a space for discreet political contestation and as a locus that could help facilitate a form of (individual and/or collective) social reintegration. In the unlikely middle ground that the academy offered, the patrician members of this institution both worked through their residual political resentment and developed the intellectual and social skills they needed to find a new place for themselves within the Medici regime. For the most part, they were successful in both their intellectual and their social endeavours. Indeed, having proven their literary capacities and leadership abilities within the setting of an academy, many moved on to occupy positions of consequence as cultural intermediaries (diplomatic envoys on special missions, preceptors of a Medici offspring, orchestrators of elaborate *divertimenti*, etc.) at the Medici court, after 1600.

The role of intellectual activity among these academicians is also telling. For collectively developing philosophical, rhetorical and literary skills among themselves was absolutely essential to their progressive social integration, which was based first and foremost on the belief – sometimes actively mobilized and spread in their social entourage – that the Alterati mastered a variety of important 'arts' (to be understood here mainly in the terms of the French call 'savoir faire'). It is possible to reconstitute how the Alterati acquired the skills they needed to make themselves desirable to the Medici princes by carefully examining the activities in which they engaged in their academy, when they met twice a week to exchange *pro* and *contra* orations, have improvised discussions and evaluate each other's poetry. These collaborative exchanges, through which the ideals and practices of the academy were elaborated and refined, can be studied across their printed and manuscript works (which contain no complete or finalized treatises, but include countless academic discourses, as well as letters, polemical interventions, *abbozzi*, *appunti*, annotated poems and *libri postillati*) whose mode of circulation and conservation in early modern Florence is of great interest. Indeed, the Alterati privileged manuscript circulation of their works over publication in printed form. Scribal diffusion allowed these academicians to circulate

³⁴ See in particular, Cochrane, *Florence in the Forgotten Centuries*, 93–161 and Plaisance, *L'Académie et le Prince*, 363–404.

their academic *discorsi* in forms that preserved a link to the orality of their academic exchanges. Manuscript publication was also somewhat easier to control. It allowed the Alterati to keep their debates accessible only to a handful of people, while also generating widespread curiosity for them in Florence.

By studying a number of collective manuscripts and/or projects the Alterati developed together, I was also able to reconstitute how collective understandings of literary issues and, in some cases, common intellectual horizons were worked out among these academicians on a variety of subjects. In this respect, it soon became clear that the academy generally valued *dissensus* over consensus. For this reason, in order to discern the Alterati's collective voice, it is of crucial importance to pay attention to the structural role of discussion among them. Indeed, parity, debate and the expression of judgement in the academy constituted ways for these academicians to re-enact, within the seclusion of their academy, the Republican *mores* that they could no longer fully and openly mobilize in Florence's civic life. This means that the format of their collaborative exchanges – of which BNCF Magl. VII, 1199 constitutes a striking written incarnation – is, in and of itself, a social and political statement. For in them, all voices theoretically bore equal weight and no position of enunciation was ever *a priori* privileged, not even that of their regent (or chair). Interestingly enough, this oligarchic institution, with its corresponding parity-oriented statutes, by-laws and debate practices, simultaneously developed a distinctive relationship to literature and the arts, defined by a specific kind of shared, and even socialized, intellectual pleasure.

To begin with, the Alterati centrally defined their academy as an institutional *locus* in which learning, art and artistic practices could be elaborated into worthy activities for men of their status. Within this *locus*, the various ways in which they practised and discussed art helped them refashion themselves to exercise new kinds of social functions. In particular, these academicians valorized art and knowledge by transferring onto these practices and discourses the values that had defined their families as patricians for centuries, in Florence's civic culture. These values, which the Alterati transferred from late Florentine Republican civic life to the realm of art and aesthetics, as elaborated in the academy, oppose academic leisure to servile political service (in the Medicean bureaucracy or at court), while extolling nobility, freedom, parity and judgement in the pursuit of art and knowledge. But first and foremost, these values claim a form of pleasure that the Alterati envisage as the central principle bringing together the members of their sodality, often asserting it as the basis for all their gatherings and activities. This pleasure is defined by Giovan Battista Strozzi – in notes he prepared late in life, with the aim of assisting with the writing of a history of the academy – as a 'praiseworthy pleasure' (*lodevole diletto*). Such a concept not only aimed to distinguish intellectual pleasures from purely sensuous ones but also tied the pleasure of common activities of learning, conducted in parity and reciprocity, with the civic notoriety and reputation to be collectively gained in these pursuits.³⁵ In

³⁵ In a series of *appunti* contained in BNCF Magl. IX, 124, Giovan Battista Strozzi highlights this notion of 'praiseworthy pleasure', defining it as central to the academy's ethos and practices. See in particular fol. 74^{bis}: 'Noi però comprendo tutti diremo che l'Accademia è adunanza d'amici [con] leggi proprie, desiderosi mediante l'esercitarsi nelle scienze e nell'arti [non] senza lodevole diletto, di migliorar vicendevolmente se stessi et essere [ad] altri di giovamento cagione'. On fol. 78^{ver},

claiming these values in the context of academic life, the Alterati were attempting to create a new social identity for themselves as Florentine patricians, one in which art, the practices by which it is made to exist, and the laudable pleasures it generates were mobilized to uphold their threatened primacy in Florentine society, as members of the patriciate, without subjecting them to any form of professionalization.

The ways in which the Alterati understood the sophisticated hedonistic relationship they established with the arts is probably best captured through an analysis of how these views are expounded, in allegorical fashion, in a court opera to which a few Alterati members contributed heavily: Ottavio Rinuccini's and Jacopo Peri's *Euridice*, created at the Medici court in October 1600, during the celebration of the in absentia marriage of Maria de' Medici and Henry IV of France. This opera makes clear that the Alterati's conceptions of pleasure and of its importance in social and even political life were linked both to materialism and Neoplatonism, while also owing a great deal to Torquato Tasso. A pragmatic and contextualized analysis of the *libretto* also suggests that, in this work, the Alterati – of which Ottavio Rinuccini was a central member – were both producing an allegorical representation of their understanding of the role of pleasure in art (as well as in love and life) and indirectly staging their own social position within the court, in which they aspired to become insiders, even though they often continued to claim for themselves the status of outsiders. With the production of this *divertimento*, the Alterati, by asserting pleasure as their ethos and art as their central skill, did not just distinguish themselves, thanks to their academy, from Florentine court practices. They simultaneously publicized an ethical as well as intellectual set of competences from which to lobby the Medici regarding their reintegration into the social and political economy of the court.

This *praiseworthy pleasure* – which not only is at the heart of the intellectual dynamic of BNCF Magl. VII, 1199 but also forms the basis of the Alterati's overarching ethical, social and aesthetic understanding – begs to be put into comparative perspective. For in early modern Europe, it was in fact not rare for aristocratic writers or groups of writers operating under an authoritarian regime to claim for themselves a space of freedom and distinction by (re)fashioning themselves socially and culturally via a hedonistic aesthetic. Sir Philip Sidney and his entourage are a case in point, but so is the circle of M^{me} de Rambouillet in France, and, later in the seventeenth century, the group of authors surrounding M^{lle} de Scudéry and her 'tender friend' Paul Pellisson. These groups (and others) have in common with the Alterati the fact that they created a social identity for themselves around a hedonistic aesthetics of social distinction, in

Giovan Battista Strozzi further glosses the previous definition, underscoring the link between praiseworthiness and reputation:

Non senza lodevole diletto: Ecco lo stimolo, ecco l'incitatione ch'è ha possanza di muovere ogn'uno ad operare. A lui attribuirono tanto alcuni, che affermarono in lui consistere la stessa felicità. E veramente egl' è un suo conseguente, e una proprietà che mai non si disgiunge da lei. Noi l'habbiamo congiunto con lodevole per distinguerlo da['] piaceri inimici di virtù, la qual del ben oprar diletandosi e con la contemplatione più in alto surgendo, i sensuali diletti disprezza, ò solamente quant' è di necessità ci se ne vale. Nelle Accademie l'insegnar, l'imparare, il sentirsi liberar da ignoranza, il vedere che nelle scienze s'acquista, e che ne risulta gran lode, è dilettevole sì che niente più.

I thank Dr Francesco Martelli, the curator of the Medicean collections at the *Archivio di Stato* in Florence, for his help in the transcription of these two notes.

a gesture that was just as much about voicing freedom and opposition to monarchical power, as it was a form of courtship destined to ingratiate them with the very power they were simultaneously distancing themselves from. In this respect, the pragmatic tension between courtship and defiance, which manifested itself in the European circulations of this politics of praiseworthy aesthetic pleasure, seems to have played a crucial role, historically, in the definition of early modern understandings of art.

Even more interestingly, a very similar kind of tension was at work during the rise of aesthetics as an academic discipline in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Prussia. For, strikingly enough, the 'autonomy' of art, as it was defined by Immanuel Kant and Karl Philip Moritz, at the turn of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, was defined through an antagonistic relationship with absolutism, which nonetheless mimicked authoritarian control in the extraordinary powers it attributed to art.³⁶ In this respect, it is clear that modern aesthetics have a social and political history that goes back far beyond the 1780s – the moment that is generally considered to have witnessed the birth of modern aesthetics – and that this history cannot not be recaptured solely in intellectual terms, but rather calls for a structural investigation of how certain kinds of social groups related to power via the theorization and practice of learning and/or the arts. Understanding how these structural tensions played out in early modern Europe is not only important for recovering why and how early modern understandings of poetry and more generally art developed and spread but also central in view of developing a contextualized understanding of what was actually at stake in the aesthetics articulated within German idealism, which in more ways than one reproduced pre-existing structural tensions between poetry, art and power, while attempting to reconfigure or even supersede them. Such a historicized perspective would be especially important to develop because the aesthetics defined in nineteenth-century Prussia tended to claim for itself a form of a-historicity, which, in today's world, has often led to its essentialization as a doctrine.

My study of the social and political underpinnings of the Alterati's understanding of poetry and the pleasures it provides is a step towards elaborating a *longue durée* understanding of the rise of modern-day aesthetics. It also attempts to develop an understanding of aesthetics that does not shy away from material, social, institutional and/or political realities, but rather makes them the central terrain of its investigation. For such an enterprise, manuscripts such as the BNCF Magl. VII, 1199 constitute invaluable documents in that they make it possible to articulate the history of ideas with social, institutional and political history. Thanks to them, existing paradigms can be questioned and reframed, provided one tracks the meaning of singular documents without losing sight of the larger frameworks in which they might fit. In this way, the very materiality of a document, when analysed in micro-historical terms, can serve as a way to bridge the gap between intellectual history and its social and political contexts, shedding new light on the history of poetics and aesthetics alike.

³⁶ See Jonathan M. Hess, *Reconstituting the Body Politic: Enlightenment, Public Culture and the Invention of Aesthetic Autonomy* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), in particular 155–79. On page 175, Hess writes: 'Autonomous art may indeed be conceived of as a negation of 'the dominant idea of utility' embodied by the absolutist body politic and its economy of bodily pleasure, but ultimately it too turns against its creators, perpetuating in its functionings the working of the dominant political order it aspired to oppose.'

ANNEX 1

Codicological description of BNCF Magl. VII, 1199³⁷

SHELF MARK: Florence: Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, MS. Magl. VII, 1199, *olim* Strozzi 4°, 805.

SHORT TITLE, PLACE AND DATE: *Aristotelis Stagiritae Poetica cum notis Petro Victorio Interprete*, Pisa and Florence, 1573[–1617].

DESCRIPTION OF CONTENTS: Titled *Aristotelis Stagiritae Poetica Petro Victorio Interprete* [sic] on fol. 1. This title page imitates that of a printed book. Collectively annotated transcription of Piero Vettori's Latin translation of Aristotle's *Poetics* (taken from *Petri Victorii Commentarii in primum librum Aristotelis de Arte poetarum [...]*, Florence, Giunti, 1560), with extended glosses in Italian by Giovan Battista Strozzi, Filippo Sassetti et al., produced and circulated within the *Accademia degli Alterati* (Florence and Pisa, 1569–ca 1625).

NUMBER OF LEAVES: [i]+ vii + 93 + viii + [i] (one flyleaf added in the front with s. xx binding, and one in the back).

FOLIATION: Folios 1–93 of text and commentary. One continuous and exact s. xvi foliation numbering, on the *recto* of all the fol. from the title page (numbered fol. 1). One other previous continuous s. xvi foliation numbering only the fol. of Vettori's Latin translation of the *Poetics* and appearing both on the *recto* and the *verso* of each fol. of his text. The numbers of this previous foliation which appear on the *recto* of the fol. of Vettori's translation were crossed out when the second foliation, covering both text and commentary, was added. Current fol. 3, 7 and 9 also bear numbering (2, 3 and 4) appearing to signal a third attempt to foliate the manuscript. But this last foliation is not continuous.

MATERIAL: Paper. Watermark visible on flyleaves (fol. vi in front and fol. ii in back): heart with a M inside, surmounted by a cross similar to Briquet, vol. 3, 4269 and 4273. No watermarks on the folios of the manuscript per se.

DIMENSIONS OF PAGE: 210 x 150 mm.

DIMENSIONS OF WRITTEN TEXT: 170 × 110 mm. 15 lines per page in the transcription. Annotations in the transcription appear in the margins, both left and right of the text, as well as above the first line and under the last one. In the pages bearing exclusively annotations, the dimensions of the written text vary widely. In

³⁷ I am loosely following the template proposed by N. R. Ker, *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries*, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969–2002), vii–xiii.

some folios the whole page is utilized. In others, just a small portion of it is used. The annotations usually stretch out over the whole width of the page, leaving room vertically for other possible additions. Some pages have also been left blank.

RULING: Light dry ruling in the transcription.

QUIRING: i⁶ (including one bi-folio added at the end of the quire as fol. 6), ii-iii⁴, iv⁸ (including two bi-folios added in the middle of the quire as fol. 19 and 20), v-xxiii⁴ (last folio is blank).

SCRIPTS: Italic calligraphic script used for the Latin transcription. Annotations are in current hands, some with calligraphic efforts, others writing more hastily.

MARGINALIA: The manuscript was structured to alternate one fol. of transcribed text with one fol. of commentary (from selected *lemmata*), which means that the annotations were thought of as central part of the manuscript. This alternate structure is respected except from fol. 4 to 7, where an extra fol. of commentary appears (fol. 6), and from fols. 17 to 23 where 2 fols. of text are followed by 3 fols. of commentary then 2 fols. of text. These disruptions to the structure appear to signal that folios were added to allow for more commentary. The pages of transcribed text also contain annotations (some indicate divisions in the text, some provide brief linguistic or philosophic clarification of the Latin translation). At least six different annotators can be isolated. The two dominant hands are that of Giovan Battista Strozzi Il Giovane (1551–1634) and that of Filippo Sassetti (1540–1588), both of whom were prominent members of the *Accademia degli Alterati*. But the hand of Lorenzo Giacomini (1552–1598) also seems present. Sassetti's hand is the one that appears with the greatest frequency, though the manuscript belonged to Strozzi, who also annotated it widely. The following manuscripts, among many others, allow for the identification of these three hands by comparison: (1) for Giovan Battista Strozzi, Florence: Bibliotheca Medicea Laurenziana, Ashburnham 558, vol. 1, 2nd part, fol. 48^{ver} (where Strozzi's hand appear as he identifies himself by his academic name and initials) and Florence: Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, Ginori Conti 27, cc. 19, doc. 3, fol. 4; doc. 8, fol. 1 and doc. 10 in its entirety; (2) for Filippo Sassetti: Florence: Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, Postillati 15, as well as Florence: Bibliotheca Riccardiana, Ricc. 1539 and Ricc. 2438^{bis}, III; (3) for Lorenzo Giacomini: Bibliotheca Universitaria di Pisa, Mss 551 and 552. The hand which is most likely that of Lorenzo Giacomini, intervenes principally towards the end of the manuscript, fols. 73, 74, 75^{rec}, 77, 78^{ver}, 79^{rec}, 80^{rec}, 81^{ver}, 83^{rec}, 84^{rec}, 85^{ver}, 86^{rec}, 92^{ver}. Three other hands can be isolated: one appears on fols. 8^{rec}, 9^{ver}, 10^{ver}, 11^{rec}, 13^{rec}, 19^{ver}, 44^{ver}, 54^{rec}, another one on fol. 12^{rec} and yet another hand is visible on fol. 13^{rec}.

BINDING: Modern binding (s. xx). Earlier and possibly original white skin binding preserved in manuscript section of the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze. No provenance marks on the previous binding.

HISTORY AND PROVENANCE: The manuscript is anonymous, but the title page bears the coat of arms of the Strozzi (a shield in the shape of a roundel with a bar containing three crescents on a background of diagonal hatching designed to represent gold). A printed book also allows for a better understanding of the status of the manuscript: Florence: Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, *Aristotelis Poetica Petro Victorio Interprete*, Florence, Giunti, 1617, Magl. 5.9.119 (possibly the only surviving copy). It contains the transcription of Vettori's translation, but without the *Alterati* annotations (except for some of the brief divisions that the manuscript suggests for the reading of the text). The dedication letter, addressed by Giovan Battista Strozzi to his nephew, Giovan Battista Strozzi, *marchese* of Forano (1597–1636), discreetly alludes to the manuscript, hinting that it served as a reference book within the academy, while encouraging the younger Strozzi and his entourage to use it to study the text and pursue academic endeavours. This book and the coat arms clearly indicate that the manuscript belonged to Giovan Battista Strozzi. The letters of Filippo Sassetti, which show consistent interest in Aristotle's *Poetics*, also point to the existence of the manuscript and suggest in what conditions it was originally produced. See Filippo Sassetti, *Lettere da vari paesi*, 1570–1588, Vanni Bramanti (ed.), Milan, Longanesi & C°, 1970, letter 32, dated 2 December 1573, p. 120 (which mentions that Strozzi and Sassetti were living and studying together in Pisa the year the commentary of the manuscript was begun) and letter 45, dated 3 December 1575, p. 171 (which shows a precise exchange between Sassetti and Strozzi concerning an annotation to add to this commented manuscript of the *Poetics*). It is likely that both the manuscript and the printed book (for which we have no indication of provenance) entered the manuscript collections of Carlo Strozzi (1587–1670) after the death of the *marchese* of Forano. The manuscript bears a secondary title page with the Strozzi shelf mark and this note: 'Di Luigi del Senatore Carlo di Tommaso Strozzi. 1679,' signalling that it was catalogued by Luigi Strozzi, Carlo's son. In 1786, many of the elements of the Strozzi collections which concerned belles-lettres (including presumably this manuscript and the printed book meant to accompany it) entered the grand duke's *Libreria Magliabechiana*, while most of what partook to the history of Florence was sent to the *Archivio di Stato*, where this material now forms the *Carte Strozziiane*.³⁸

³⁸ On the history of the constitution of the Strozzi archive and their current dispersion in Florentine repositories, see Cesare Guasti, *Le Carte Strozziiane del R. Archivio di Stato: Inventario*, serie prima, 2 vols. (Florence: Tipographia Galileiana, 1884–1891), 1:V–XXXIX.

ANNEX 2

The Alterati's readings in and around the *Poetics*³⁹**A) Works mentioned in BNCF Magl. VII, 1199
(in chronological order):**

Robortello, Francesco. *In librum Aristotelis De Arte poetica explicationes. Qui ab eodem authore ex manuscriptis libris, multis in locis emendatus fuit, ut iam difficillimus, ac obscurissimus liber a nullo antedecaratus facile ab omnibus possit intelligi*. Florence: Lorenzo Torrentino, 1548.

Maggi, Vincenzo and Lombardi, Bartholomeo. *In Aristotelis Librum De Poetica communes explantiones ; Madii vero in eundem librum propriæ annotationes, eiusdem de Ridiculis ; et in Horatii librum De arte Poetica interpretatio. In fronte præterea operis apposita est Lombardi in Aristotelis Poeticam præfatio*, Venice: Vincenzo Valgrisi, 1550.

Segni, Bernardo. *Rettorica et Poetica d'Aristotele tradotte di greco in lingua vulgare Fiorentina*. Florence: Lorenzo Torrentino, 1549, republished in Venice in 1551.

Vettori, Pietro. *Petri Victorii Commentarii in primum librum Aristotelis de Arte poetarum [...]*. Florence: Sons of Bernardo Giunti, 1560, reprinted in 1573.

Scaliger, Julius Cesar, *Poetices libri septem [...] ad Sylvium Filium*, Lyon?: Vincent Antoine, 1561.

Castelvetro, Lodovico. *Poetica d'Aristotele vulgarizzata, et sposta*. Vienna: Gaspar Stainhofer, 1570.

Piccolomini, Alessandro. *Il libro della Poetica d'Aristotele tradotto di greca in lingua volgare*. Siena: Luca Bonetti, 1572.

Piccolomini, Alessandro. *Annotationi nel libro del Poetica d'Aristotile con la traduzione del medesimo libro, in lingua volgare*. Venice: Giovanni Guarisco, 1575.

Castelvetro, Ludovico. *Poetica d'Aristotele vulgarizzata e sposta, riveduta & ammendata secondo l'originale, & la mente dell'autore. Aggiuntovi nella fine un racconto delle cose piu notabili, che nella spositione si contengono*. Basel: Peter Perna and Piero de Sedaonis, 1576.

**B) Works not mentioned in BNCF Magl. VII, 1199
(in chronological order):**

Segni, Agnolo. *Ragionamento fiorentino sopra le cose pertinenti alla poetica: dove in quattro lezioni lette da lui nell'Accademia fiorentina si tratta dell'imitazione poetica, della favola, della purgazione procedente dalla poesia*. Florence: Giorgio Marescotti, 1581.

Riccoboni, Antonio. *Poetica Aristotelis latine conversa, Eiusdem Riccoboni Paraphrasis in Poeticam Aristotelis, Eiusdem Ars Comica ex Aristotele*. Padova: Paulo Meieto, 1587.

³⁹ These works are alluded to in the BNCF Magl. VII, 1199 through the first letters of the author's last name (for instance: Rob., P.V. or Vⁱ., Mag^o., Scal., Pic.). It is not always possible to distinguish Bernardo Segni from Agnolo Segni (possibly both referred to as Seg.), but most references appear to be to Bernardo Segni, given that Agnolo Segni did not publish a selection of his 1573 lectures on the *Poetics* until 1581 and they did not constitute a linear commentary of the text.

Riccoboni, Antonio. *Compendium Artis poeticæ Aristotelis ad usum conficiendorum poematum ab Antonio Riccobono ordinatum, & quisdam Scholiis explanatu*. Padova: Lorenzo Pasquato, 1591.

Patrizi, Francesco. *Della Poetica. La Deca Istoriale, Nella quale, con dilettevole antica novità, oltre à Poeti, e lor poemi innumerabili, che vi si contano: si fan palesi, tutte le cose compagne, e seguaci dell'antiche poesie. E con maravigliosa varietà, e notizia di cose, maraviglioso piacere, ed utile, si pone avanti à Leggitori. E si gittano i veri fondamenti all'arte del poetare alla Serenissima Madama Lucrezia da Este duchessa d'Urbino*. Ferrare: Vittorio Baldini, 1586.

Heinsius, Daniel. *Q. Horatii Flacci Opera Omnia cum Notis Danielis Heinsii, accedit Horatii ad Pisonem epistola, Aristotelis de poetica libellus; ordini suo nunc demum ab eodem restitute*. Leiden: Franciscus Raphelengius, 1610.

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BNCF Magl. IX, 125: *Varia*.

BNCF Postillati 15: *Annotationi di Alessandro Piccolomini nel libro de la Poetica*

d'Aristotele, con la traductione del medesimo libro, in lingua volgare (Venice: Giovanni Guarisco, 1575), with annotations by Filippo Sassetti.

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