

CHAPTER I

THE HUMANIST BACKGROUND OF THE QUARREL

A. The Quarrel and Defenses of Poetry

The longest sustained argument of defense of the Roman in the Quarrel is Pierre Col's letter in reply to Gerson's Visio.¹ Chief among Pierre's arguments is the contention that Jean de Meun's poem must be read as poetic fiction:

Aussy veult monstreer Meung qu'il estoit naturel et crestien en parlant de nature, et sy estoit poete comme j'ay dit, pourquoy li plaissoit de tout parler par ficcion. . . . L'en ne doit pas prendre ainssy les mos a la lettre, mais selons les mos precedans et l'entendement de l'auteur. (ll. 336-9; 361-3).

Pierre proceeds to give a little lesson on literary interpretation. He points out that the speech of characters in a poem must be interpreted according to their personalities:

. . . maistre Jehan de Meung en son liure introduisy personaiges, et fait chascun personaige parler selonc qui luy appartient, c'est assavoir, le Jaloux comme Jaloux, la Vielle comme la Vielle, et pareillement des autres. (ll. 404-6).

Pierre reiterates his claim that the Roman is essentially moral:

¹Ward, pp. 56-76.

Je dy que qui bien lit se liure, et souuent pour le mieux entendre, il y trouuera ensaignemans pour fouir tous vices et ensuir toutes vertus. (ll. 472-4)

He claims that Jean de Meun's story of one lover's successful seduction (his "assault on the castle" in the Roman) is told in order to help defend chastity:

Et presuppose, se Jalousie a fait faire ung fort chastel et y a mis bonnes gardes pour le garder, et ce chastel a este pris par une certaingne maniere d'assault, se maistre Jehan de Meung a escripte la maniere comment il fu pris, ne fait il plus grant auentaige aus gardes du chastel de leur auoir enseingne par ou il fu pris, pour eulx en garder dorenauent pour estouper le trou par ou ce fu, ou y mettre meilleurs gardes qu'il ne fait a cerlx qui le vouldreoint assaillir? (ll. 555-563)

Pierre compares Jean de Meun with the Roman poet Ovid, whose works were widely read in the Middle Ages as warnings against false love:

OUIDE, quant il escript l'Art d'Amours, il escript en latin le quel n'entendent fannes; et ne le bailla qu'aux assaillans pour aprandre a asaillir le chastel--c'estoit la fin de son liure sans parler par personaiges. Mais il, comme Ouide, bailla tous ses anseingnemans. Pour ce, moyennant la tres enorme jalousie des maris Romains, fut il exillie . . . Et le liure pour lequel Ouide fu exillie dure, dura et a dure en toute crestiente. (ll. 567-572; 586-587)

He even declares that, in practice, the Roman teaches good behavior:

En verite, je cognois homme fol amoureux le quel pour soy oster de fole amour a emprunte de moy le Rommant de la Rose, et luy ay oy jurer par sa foy que c'est la chose qui plus li a aidie a s'en oster. (ll. 604-07)

In short, Jean de Meun "generalment dit qu'il ne dist onques riens qui ne dist onques riens qui ne fust pour ensaignment, c'est assavoir, pour ung chascun auoir congnoissance de luy meismes et d'autres." (ll. 771-72)

Outside of this letter the defenders of the Roman have little to say directly about how they feel it should be read. In fact, as it has come down to us, the Quarrel mainly consists of attacks against the Roman by Christine and Gerson with little real attempt at defense. However, Jean de Montreuil's few remarks on the Roman are consistent with Pierre Col's, and show us that the humanist defenders read Jean de Meun's work as a moral allegory.

Jean mainly confines himself to repeating that the attackers of the Roman have not read it carefully enough.² In "Ut sunt" (No. 154), he repeats Pierre's remark about the need to respect the personages who speak in the Roman, and calls Jean de Meun a "satirist":

Qui de personatum varietate non discernunt [i.e. the attackers], seu notant quibus passionibus moveantur aut induantur affectibus et quem ad finem quave dependentia aut quamobrem sint loquuti, nec quot demum satirici is instructor fungitur officio, quo respectu

²Ornato, ed., No. 154, p. 221, ll. 20-39; No. 120, "Scis me, consideratissime magister," p. 179, ll. 12-14; No. 122, "Etsi facundissimus," p. 182, ll. 16-19.

plura licent, que aliis actoribus prohibentur. (ll. 19-24)

Jean de Montreuil calls Meun "philosophum et poetam ingeniosissimum" (ll. 45-46); "doctorem istum morum optimum" (ll. 48-49). He terms the Roman itself a "romantium . . . quod potius vite humane speculum dici debet aut discursus" (ll. 33-34). In "Etsi facundissimus" (No. 122) he calls Meun "satiricum illum perseverum magistrum Johannem de Magduno" (ll. 3-4).

The opinion of the defenders is clear. The poem is a moral allegory which must be read with great care, not understood literally.

Students of the Quarrel have regarded this view as a kind of "special pleading" on the defenders' part. Coville, Combes, and, most recently, Gilbert Ouy all agree in this: that the work of Jean de Meun is not an allegorical elaboration of orthodox Christian values. All refer to a certain kind of "cynicism," if not a proto-paganism or "naturalism," that is said to pervade the Roman of Jean de Meun and, in fact, to account for the otherwise puzzling interest of our humanist enthusiasts for the poem.

The great advances in Roman scholarship of the past decade or so force us to abandon this view. The work of Fleming, Dahlberg and others, although not greeted with anything like universal acceptance, has nevertheless established

that the Roman was written in an allegorical tradition and read, both in its day and long afterward, as a sophisticated work of traditional Christian morality. Pierre Col and Jean de Montreuil were defending the Roman in traditional terms familiar to educated Frenchmen of the time.

But even if it be conceded that recent research on the Roman has solved one apparent problem--that of why the defenders had recourse to the theory of allegory to defend the Roman--another problem is immediately set in place of the old. For if the Roman stands, as Fleming, Dahlberg, and others, together with the humanist defenders of the Roman, contend, in a familiar and traditional Christian context, why is it that Christine and Gerson appear to be ignorant of this fact?

Pierre Col's remarks on how the Roman should be read are the most extensive of the debate. Col appears to have asked himself the same question. He never bothers to outline his theory of allegorical interpretation of poetry in detail, nor to spell out fully how it is to be applied to the Roman. When, from time to time, he alludes to certain principles of interpretation, he does so as though he were discussing ideas which he assumed to be familiar. This makes sense only if it was essentially impossible for Pierre to believe that Gerson and Christine

could have been ignorant of how to read the Roman as an allegory.

This is probably the case. Gerson was, after all, a student of classical literature and a poet in Latin as well. He must have been familiar with the commentaries upon the Latin poets through which they were studied. Virtually all of these commentaries, such as Fulgentius or Bernardus Sylvester on Vergil, allegorize and moralize the poems and make the poets themselves out to be moral philosophers. We cannot make the same assumption about Christine. There is little evidence that she knew the classical poets in the original. But even if she relied upon translations for her acquaintance with classical myth, she would have little reason to regard these myths as other than moral stories told in allegory. All the translations of the classics and mythologies of the day treated them as such. In addition, Christine was a poet herself, composer of allegorical poetry where classical myths are used to represent Christian concepts.

No doubt it is their inability to see how Gerson and Christine can possibly so misunderstand the Roman that calls forth from the defenders the repeated plea to "read the poem more carefully." Pierre Col urges that it be read four times so that it may be understood better! This plea

makes sense only if Pierre and Jean de Montreuil believed that Gerson and Christine were familiar with, and able to apply, the same principles of allegorical interpretation to the Roman that they themselves elaborated.

Christine clearly foresees the arguments of Jean de Montreuil and Pierre that the speeches must be interpreted "in character." But she rejects this argument. She admits that the Roman consists in "ficcions," but, because they are literally impious, they are "deshonnestes."³ It is wrong to set forth, she feels, in whatever form, "ce que honte et raison doit reffraindre aux bien ordenez seulement le penser" (ll. 262-63). To read aloud such things as the conclusion of the Roman would cause shame even to "les goliars" before virtuous people.

Therefore, Jean de Meun must have been a carnal man to have been able to write such things, though he was no doubt "moult grant clerc soubtil et bien parlant" (ll. 286-87). The good parts of the Roman serve only to disguise the falsities hidden among them (ll. 292-98). She rejects the arguments of the defenders, that proclaim it

³Christine de Pisan, letter to Jean de Montreuil, Ward, No. IV, p. 25, l. 261.

miroir de bien viure, exemple de tous estaz de soy
politiquement gouverner et viure religieusement et
sagement. (ll. 315-17)

In conclusion, Christine consigns the Roman to the flames.

Her response to Pierre Col's and Jean de Montreuil's
concept of reading the Roman in context, taking what is
said as revealing the nature of the speakers, is that the
readers of the Roman are incapable of doing this, of learn-
ing virtue by irony. Human nature, always too prone to
vice, will seize on any argument which even suggests a
justification for vice:

Mais ie scay bien que sur ce en l'excusant vous me
respondrez que le bien y est enorte pour le faire et
le mal pour l'eschiuer. Si vous puis souldre par
meilleur raison que nature humaine, qui de soy est
encline a mal, n'a nul besoing que on lui ramentoie
le pie dont elle cloche pour plus droit aler. (ll.
322-27)

That is to say, readers should not be present with
such "subtle" material lest they be misled by it. Any virtue
taught by the Roman can be taught more clearly and plainly
in explicitly religious writings:

Et quant a parler de tout le bien qui ou dit liure
puet estre note; certes trop plus de vertueuses choses
mieulx dictes, plus autentiques et plus proffitables
mesmes en politiquement viure et moralment son trouuees
en mains autres volumes, fais de philosophes et docteurs
de nostre foy comme Aristote, Seneque, Saint Pol, Saint
Augustin, et d'aultres (ce sauez vous) qui plus val-
ablement et plainement tesmoignent et enseignent [suir]
vertus et fuir vices que maistre Jehan de Meun n'eust
sceu faire. (ll. 327-35)

This is a rejection of more than just the Roman. It is essentially a rejection of any writing which is not clearly moral in a literal sense. Christine reiterates this argument in her first letter to Pierre Col:

. . . le dit intitule Roman de la Rose, nonobstant y ait de bonnes choses (et de tant est le peril plus grant comme le bien y est plus autentique, comme autrefois [i.e. in the letter to Jean de Montreuil examined above] ay dit) mais, pour ce que nature humaine est plus descendent au mal, je dis qu'il puet estre cause de mauuaise et peruerse exortacion en tresabominables meurs, confortant vie dissolue, doctrine pleine de deceuance,⁴

In her final reply to Pierre Col Christine elaborates some of these points.⁵ In discussing Jean de Meun's intention in writing the Roman, and particularly in putting false ideas in the mouth of Fol Amoureux, she still adheres to her opinion that Jean de Meun meant no good by it (despite Pierre's and the other defenders' protestations), but then says

Au moins quelque entencion qu'il eust, scay ie bien qu'il sonne mal a ceux qui ne se delictent en telle charnalite. (ll. 185-87)

This is a direct attack upon the defenders, who do take delight in the poem, and who must do so therefore for the

⁴Christine de Pisan, letter to Pierre Col, Ward, No. VII, p. 33, ll. 52-58.

⁵Christine de Pisan, letter to Pierre Col, Ward, No. XIII, pp. 83-111.

"plus grant atisement aux luxurieux" (l. 185 - cf. also ll. 951-62).

In conclusion Christine reveals that she does in fact understand Pierre Col's method of interpreting the Roman, and consciously rejects it. She repeats Pierre's defense of Jean de Meun's technique of putting impious passages in the mouths of Jaloux and La Vielle, and again repeats that "la plus grant partie des gens" will misinterpret them. Rather than inciting to virtue, they will stimulate vicious human nature, and teach sin (ll. 560-80). This is a direct attack on the defenders, who do take delight in the poem.

Christine accepts that the Fathers of the Church and Christ spoke in two senses (i.e. allegorically), but will not admit that Jean de Meun does so (ll. 640-53). It is wrong to take what St. Ambrose says about women literally, this they can both agree ("Nous sauons bien que cest faulx a le prendre a la letre"). Christine also rejects the argument that Ovid attacked the wrong kind of love. In fact, she says, he was exiled for his false doctrine of love (ll. 725-62).

For teaching morality, Christine prefers Dante. Although she does not explicitly mention her reason, we must assume this is because Dante is moral even in a literal

sense (ll. 852-60).

Gerson's views are almost identical with those of Christine. In his "Contre le Roman de la Rose" Gerson shows that he is familiar with the defense of the Roman's advocates, that the speeches must be taken in character.⁶ He approved of Ovid's punishment.⁷ He accuses Jean de Meun of being too subtle; what Fol Amoureux says seems to be what Jean advocates:

Tout semble estre dit en sa personne, tout semble estre vray comme euangille, en especial aux nices fols amoureux aux quelx il parle. . . .⁸

This is the same point which Christine had already raised, even though Gerson is clearer than Christine. Both essentially state that other "false lovers" will not recognize the irony (if any--and neither really admits this) in Fol Amoureux's speeches, but instead will take them for real advice.

The Song of Songs should be read only by older, more experienced men because it is literally about carnal love.⁹

⁶Glorieux ed., VII, p. 304.

⁷Ibid., p. 305.

⁸Ibid., p. 309.

⁹Ibid.

But to expose young people to shameless talk is to deprive them of all sense of shame. And shame is the greatest guarantee of virtue in the young:

. . . mauvaises paroles et escriptures corrompent bonnes meurs et fon devenir les pechiez sans honte, et ostent toute bonne vergoigne qui est en jeunes gens la principal garde de toutes leurs bonnes condicions contre tous maulx. Jeune personne sans honte est toute perdue.

Ovid, again, asked to be misunderstood, since he did not speak "par songe ou personnages."¹⁰

Gerson's major argument, that is, is like Christine's. The Roman will be understood as advocating vice because of the nature of the audience. He admits (as Christine does not) that, had Reason addressed himself to a wise man, rather than to a "Fol Amoureux," there would be no misunderstanding:

Encore se Raison eust parle a un saige cleric et entendant la nature des choses ou a un grant theologien qui scet comment, se ne feust pechie originel, riens ne nous tournast a honte. il eust excusacion telle quelle. . . .

Mais je reprens mon propos et dis que se le personnage de Raison eust parle a saige cleric et raissis, aucune chose feust; mais non; il parle a Fol Amoureux. Et yci garda mal l'acteur les regles de mon escole, les regles de rethorique qui sont de regarder cil parle et a qui on parle et pour quel temps on parle.¹¹

¹⁰Ibid., p. 310.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 313-14; 314.

Their objections are aimed both at the work and at its effect on the audience. But essentially it is the effect upon the audience which concerns them most.

Second, this concern with the audience, and therefore with the literal sense of the Roman, means that the arguments of Gerson and Christine have certain implications for the study of poetry aside from the Roman itself. Gerson criticizes a classical poet in this context: Ovid. Pierre Col had used Ovid as an example of an essentially moral poet whose works were not moral on the surface--a poet writing in an ironic style. Gerson's remarks are revealing.

Pour quoy fut Ovide, grand clerc et tres ingenieux poete gette en dur exil sans retourner? Il mesme tesmoingne que ce fu pour son Art d'Amour miserable la quelle il avoit escripte ou temps Octovien l'empereur. Non pour quant fist il un livre a l'encontre dit Remede d'Amours. Ovide eust bien sceu parler par songe ou personnages se excusacion en eust attendu par ce.

. . . Entre les paiens un juge paien et incredible condempne un paien qui escript doctrine attraiant a fole amour et entre les crestiens et par les crestiens telle et pieur euvre est soustenue, alosee et deffendue.

. . . Ovide par expres protesta qu il ne vouloit parler des bonnes matrones et dames mariees, ne de celles qui ne seroient loisiblement a amer. Et vostre livre fait il anisi? Il reprent toutes, blasme toutes, mesprise toutes, sans aucune exception.¹²

Gerson's remarks show several things:

1. Gerson understands medieval literary conventions

¹²Ibid., p. 310.

perfectly well. He says Ovide should have written "par songe ou personnages" if he had expected not to be misunderstood. The Dream-Vision was a common allegorical device, used to clearly indicate that what is being asserted by the narrator is not to be taken as asserted by the author. "Par personnages" can only mean that Gerson holds Ovide would not have been misunderstood had he put his Ars Amatoria in the mouth of clearly-recognizable characters, so that the doctrine espoused there would not be mistaken as his own. But this is precisely the chief defense of the defenders of the Roman, as we have seen, and one rejected by Christine and Gerson in that regard.

Gerson sounds illogical in asserting two sides of a contradiction here. It is this lack of logic which so puzzles the defenders of the Roman. But we may now discern the unity of purpose behind this apparent contradiction. Gerson is really concerned with how the audience will interpret a work. Had Ovid written "par songe ou personnages" Augustus would not have misunderstood him (at least he would have had a better case, and his assertion in the Remedia that he had meant the Ars ironically would have been more credible).

However, it is also clear that Gerson does not think Jean de Meun's writing "par personnages" is enough to

guarantee that his work will not rather spread immorality than the opposite. This could only be due to a fear that the reading public of Gerson's time might lack the ability to recognize the irony of the Roman where it exists.

2. In concentrating upon the effect of a work may be expected to have upon the audience rather than upon whether or not it may be said to be Christian and moral in a certain technical sense, Gerson is calling into question the concept of justifying the study of any work which is not moral on the literal level. He clearly applies the same standard to Ovid as he does to the Roman.

In fact, both Gerson and Christine go somewhat further than this, because of their view of history. Neither seems capable of believing that Jean de Meun really intended his work to be moral. That is, it seems inconceivable to them that a writer of the mid-thirteenth century could have expected such radically different responses from his audience at that time as they can expect themselves in the beginning of the fifteenth century. I shall argue later that their estimation of audience response was probably accurate.

What are we to make of the results of our study of the Quarrel to this point? Are the arguments of the Roman's attackers and defenders unprecedented, and thus the Quarrel

a unique literary event? If so, we shall never learn much more about the Quarrel than what is now known, what can be deduced from a close reading of the documents of the Quarrel itself--not unless new documents bearing directly upon the Quarrel itself are discovered. This has been the main conclusion of modern students of the Quarrel.

Or--a possibility more reassuring to the historical mind, which is distrustful of "leaps" in history and accustomed to a certain continuity--do these arguments stand in a tradition of literary opinion? And, if so, can that tradition be traced? To put this another way, can we find historical precedents for the Quarrel of the Roman which show very close similarities to it? Can we locate the Quarrel of the Roman within a medieval literary tradition with enough detail and precision? If we can do this, can we learn more about the Quarrel indirectly, by studying the historical conditions for certain closely similar quarrels or debates? If so, we might be able to add a great deal to our understanding of the Quarrel itself, despite the apparent blank in the historical record concerning the specific circumstances surrounding the Quarrel of the Roman.

One main purpose of this dissertation will be to argue for this second possibility. The history of fourteenth

century European humanism reveals many controversies which have these similarities with the Quarrel of the Roman: (a) an attack upon the study of poetry as immoral; and (b) a defense of the study of poetry by appeal to the theory of allegory. This chapter and the one following it will examine earlier Humanist debates concerning poetry and examine elements in these debates--often much better known and more easily understood than the Quarrel of the Roman--which show similarities and parallels with the latter. Chapter III will examine the question of the relationship of Humanism as a movement to the Quarrel of the Roman, a question which is raised by the nature of the great similarities between earlier and contemporaneous Humanist literary debates and the Quarrel. The purpose of both the present and the following chapters will be to summarize the results of my examination of earlier and contemporaneous humanist Defenses of Poetry. I say "summarize," because a close analysis of each "Defense," almost always only one part of a longer literary debate, is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

The methodological danger in bringing forth this summary apart from a full discussion of each Defense is that secondary aspects of the Defenses and debates might be made to seem primary, and hence the similarity of these

earlier and contemporaneous documents to elements of the Quarrel of the Roman could be artificially played up or forced. After all, any "defense of poetry" written at any time is apt to have certain similarities, formal ones at least, with almost any other. Therefore a list of similarities by itself doesn't prove anything.

I shall argue, however, that the similarities between these Defenses and the French humanists' positions in the Quarrel will show that the Quarrel is in fact one of a large number of fourteenth-century defenses of humanist literary activity. In fact, I shall argue that the Quarrel of the Roman cannot be properly understood at all outside this context.

I have examined every fourteenth-century Defense of Poetry I have found record of, including those of around the year 1400. I have stopped with the death of Salutati in 1406, since Salutati's debate with Johannes Dominici began years earlier. No doubt I have missed some. But the close similarities among them, the close dependence of the later Defenses upon the "classic" Defenses of Boccaccio and Petrarch, and the dependence of those in turn upon Albertino Mussato, the earliest "humanist" to be renowned as such,¹³

¹³Giuseppe Billanovich calls 15 December 1315, the date of Mussato's coronation by the University of Padua,

demonstrate that we are dealing with what is essentially one humanist tradition. The similarities among these Defenses shows that new debates and quarrels discovered would probably add only marginally to our understanding of this phenomenon.¹⁴ Further, the similarities between these Defenses and both (1) the literary debates of our French humanists, and (2) the contributions of these same men to the Quarrel of the Roman, shows clearly that they, too,

" . . . la data di nascita del primo umanesimo italiano," "Tra Dante e Petrarca: Umanesimo a Padova e a Verona e umanesimo a Avignone," Congresso Internazionale di Studi Danteschi (Florence: Societa Dantesca Italiana, 1965-66), p. 356.

¹⁴For example, Billanovich's study and publication of Pietro Piccolo da Monteforte's letter to Boccaccio, "In defensione et laude poesis," in 1955, and Igino Tau's study and edition of Francesco da Fiano's "Contra Oblocutores et Detractores Poetarum," in 1963, both serve to confirm that all the known defenses of poetry remain firmly in one tradition of influence. See Giuseppe Billanovich, "Pietro Piccolo da Monteforte tra il Petrarca e il Boccaccio," in Medioevo e Rinascimento: Studi in Onore di Bruno Nardi (Florence: Sansoni, 1955), pp. 1-76; Igino Tau, "Il 'Contra Oblocutores et Detractores Poetarum' di Francesco da Fiano," Archivio Italiano per la Storia della Pietà, IV (1965), pp. 253-350.

Although Giuseppe Di Stefano has yet to edit Nicolas de Gonesse's defense of poetry, his summary of his results only confirms its dependence, primarily upon Boccaccio, secondarily upon Salutati and Petrarch. See Giuseppe Di Stefano, "Nicolas de Gonesse et la Culture Italienne," Cahiers de l'Association Internationale des Etudes Françaises, No. 27 (1970), 27-44.

belong to the same Humanist tradition.¹⁵

Our study of these debates shows a preoccupation on the part of all fourteenth-century humanists with "defending" the study of classical literature, principally poetry, against genuine attacks. A list of the defenses of poetry undertaken by fourteenth-century humanists reveals that every humanist of any significance in this century was engaged in the justification of his study of classical literature and especially of poetry.

The study of classical literature in the humanist fashion was constantly under attack. In fact, the advance and spread of humanism might be measured by the growth of sophisticated and authoritative arguments "defending" the study of poetry almost as accurately as by the progressive rediscovery and spread of classical works, one of the most common ways of determining the mileposts of the spread of humanist activity.

The present chapter will attempt to show several things. First, it will establish that (a) all the Defenses of Poetry enumerated above and studied here are in one single tradition of humanist activity; and (b) the writings of the French humanists involved in the Quarrel of the Roman

¹⁵For the literary debates among the French humanists, see Appendixes 1 through 3, below.

de la Rose comprise part of this tradition. Second, a study of these earlier Defenses of Poetry will reveal that each one was occasioned by an attack on the study of poetry as immoral.

B. The Fourteenth-Century Tradition of Defenses of Poetry by Humanists

Giuseppe Billanovich has shown that the earliest of Petrarch's "defenses of poetry," that contained in the letter Fam. X, 4 to his brother Gherardo explaining the allegory of his first poem in Bucolicum Carmen, depends directly upon Albertino Mussato's letter to Fra Giovannino da Mantova, where Mussato equates poetry and theology. Billanovich shows that Petrarch read these works or at least a commentary upon the letters.¹⁶ Billanovich has also shown that Boccaccio's defenses, in the Trattatello in laude di Dante, in the Genealogia Deorum Gentilium, and in the Commento alla Commedia, derive in turn from Petrarch.¹⁷

In addition to the sources already known for Boccaccio's Genealogia defense (Books XIV and XV),¹⁸

¹⁶Billanovich, "Pietro Piccolo da Monteforte," p. 19, n. 41, and the articles cited there.

¹⁷Ibid., n. 42.

¹⁸See note 16 above.

Billanovich adds the important verbatim passages taken from Pietro Piccolo da Monteforte's letter. Pietro himself, however, was stimulated to write by the cenacle of humanists around Petrarch who were helping him in his campaign to spread the influence of the new humanistic style of letters and research.

Boccaccio's defense in Genealogia XIV-XV became the classical statement of the humanist position for the rest of the century. Every defense of poetry composed after it, including those most important for our consideration, the ones by our French humanists engaged in the Quarrel, derives largely from it. Coluccio Salutati's defenses from his earliest letter to Zonarini in 1378 to his final one to Joannes Dominici in 1405-06, including the summary defense in Book One of his de laboribus Herculis (final and unfinished edition 1383-91) draw their major arguments from "gli argomenti communi al Petrarca e al Boccaccio,"¹⁹ and especially from Boccaccio's Genealogia.²⁰

¹⁹Francesco da Fiano, "Il 'Contra Oblocutores'," ed. Tau, p. 261, no. 2.

²⁰Coluccio Salutati, Colucii Salutati de laboribus Herculis, ed. B. L. Ullman (Zuerich: Thesaurus Mundi, 1951), I, xi.

As Tau has shown, Francesco da Fiano's defense of poetry of about the year 1400 draws most heavily upon Boccaccio. Nicolas de Gonesse's defense, as yet unpublished, is said by Giuseppe Di Stefano to be basically a literal plagiarism of Boccaccio.²¹ Though both Gonesse and Jean de Montreuil refer to Petrarch's Invectiva contra Medicum (itself one of the sources of Boccaccio's Genealogia defense), both Gonesse's "Collatio" (his defense) and Jean de Montreuil's "defense of poetry" in No. 102, "Auffugienti michi," also rely mainly upon Boccaccio.²²

²¹"Après avoir comparé la Défense avec la Généalogia et avec la De casibus, on en vient à la conclusion que les trois quarts de l'opuscule sont empruntés littéralement aux pages de Boccace," Di Stefano, "Nicolas de Gonesse," p. 40. Di Stefano rules out any mediation of Boccaccio's text through Salutati's de laboribus Herculis.

²²Di Stefano, "Nicolas de Gonesse," pp. 40-41. Ornato, Jean Muret, notes the mention of a letter of Salutati's which Jean refers to as an authority on the defense of poetry. On this letter see also Ezio Ornato, "Per la fortuna del Boccaccio in Francia: una lettera inedita di Jean de Montreuil," Studi Francesi, 4 (1960), 260-67; Dario Cecchetti, "L'elogio delle arti liberali nel primo umanesimo francese," Studi Francesi, 10 (1966), 1-14, esp. pp. 11-12.

The other "defenses of poetry" listed above appear also to depend directly upon the same tradition. In any event, they are all composed by individuals in close contact with the major humanists or our French humanists. Stefano Colonna was, of course, a correspondent of Petrarch's. His letter to Simone de Brossano is dated by Coville between 1371-75, well after Petrarch's major defenses of poetry

What does this show? Firstly, that a tradition of fourteenth-century humanist defenses of poetry exists. Secondly, that a few of the circle of French humanists who were involved in defending the Roman de la Rose were acquainted with this tradition and composed documents which may be said to comprise a part of it. In view of the known enthusiasm for the Italian humanists, especially Petrarch and Salutati, among these French humanists, and their friendships with Italian humanists, this is hardly surprising.

A whole genre such as this does not spring out of thin air, however. The literary form of the "defense of poetry" arose and was continued precisely because, from the time of the earliest humanists until the end of our period, humanist study of poetry--the main component, for various

(Coville, Recherches, p. 32). Giovanni Moccia was a frequent correspondent of our French humanists. Leonardo Bruni, a student of Salutati's, is very possibly referring to Salutati's debate with Johannes Dominici and his supporters in his dedication to his translation of St. Basil's letter advocating classical studies. See Hans Baron, Leonardo Bruni Aretino: Humanistisch-Philosophische Schriften. Mit einer Chronologie seiner Leben und Briefe (Leipzig/Berlin: Teubner, 1928; repr. Stuttgart: Teubner, 1969), pp. 160-61. Baron credits Francesco Novati with having first suggested this.

reasons, of the humanist cultivation of classical literature and style--was consistently under attack.

This point is very important. It accounts not only for the similarities among the various defenses of poetry, but also for the changes and differences among them. On the one hand, any humanist would be eager to reach for the most persuasive and authoritative arguments to defeat an attacker. The writings of earlier and greater humanists were an obvious source of clever argument and a mine for erudite quotations. On the other hand, the defense of poetry was not a sterile rhetorical exercise. Conditions of humanist activity changed, both with the passage of time and with the spread of that activity to more and more people and to new areas. The attackers of poetry, moreover, did not form a "school" or draw from each other's writings. They responded, as we shall see, to the concrete dangers of humanist activity as they saw them in their own time and place. Of course there are certain similarities among these attackers and their arguments, as we shall point out. But changing circumstances constantly provoked somewhat different attacks, new arguments against humanist activity and against poetry. There in turn forced the humanists to reformulate their defenses to meet changing attacks. Thus their defenses--however large a part of them was

traditional or repetitive of earlier defenses--show change and innovation as well. In this chapter, however, we will be primarily concerned with the similarities, the repetitive and traditional elements in the various defenses.

C. Attacks Upon Poetry On Grounds of Immorality

The chief humanist defenders of the Roman, Jean de Montreuil and Gontier Col, seem nonplussed at the obtuseness of the arguments of their attackers. Again and again they conclude that these opponents--Christine, Gerson, and others--have simply not really read the Roman, or have done so only carelessly.²³ And, as we have seen, both Gerson's and Christine's arguments reveal that they reject the allegorical interpretation of the Roman consciously, not out of ignorance of it, but from a concern about the practical moral effect upon the audience.

A study of earlier defenses of poetry shows that attacks on the study of poetry as immoral were very commonplace. They emanated from "educated" men as well as from

²³Pierre Col's letter to Christine de Pisan and Jean Gerson, Ward, No. XI, pp. 56-76, is basically an exposition of certain allegorical points of Jean de Meun's poem. Pierre Col makes the point--one which the defenders thought obvious--that Jean de Meun speaks in fiction, like a poet (Ward, p. 64).

the perhaps more parochially learned Dominicans and scholastics.

a. Albertino Mussato

Albertino Mussato inaugurated the tradition of the humanist "defense of poetry" because of criticism. In Ep. IV, Mussato replies to the question of a certain Johannes "Grammaticae Professore[m] docentem Venetiis" as to how to refute an argument the latter has met with, that poetic fictions hold no truth:

Quodque aliquis sacrae laceret figmenta Poesis,
Abroget ut vero, littera questa tua est.²⁴

(Mussato proceeds to outline his views that poetry is akin to philosophy and is from God.) This argument that poetry is lying and false is, in one form or another, the major criticism leveled at the humanists throughout the rest of the century.²⁵

In Ep. VII Mussato responds to a certain "D. Joannes de Viguntia" who, according to the rubric in

²⁴Albertino Mussato, Epistola IV, in Thesaurus Antiquitatum et Historiarum Italiae . . . Digeri olim coeptus Cura & Studio Joannis Georgii Graevii . . . Tomi Sexti Pars Secunda (Leiden: Petrus Vander Aa), col. 40 F.

²⁵Since Ep. IV begins with a description of Mussato's coronation in Padua which took place on 15 December 1315, the letter must be dated after that time.

Graevius' edition, "simulantem se abhorruisse seria Priapeiae,"--that is, no doubt, set forth certain moral objections which might be used to criticize Mussato's pornographic classical verse, though "Joannes de Viguntia" may not have held these views himself (if this is not reading too much into the word simulantem, and if there is any justification at all in taking Graevius' rubrics seriously). "Joannes de Viguntia" may even have been an enthusiast of classical letters like "Joannem Grammaticae Professorem docentem Venetiis" no doubt was. In this case, Ep. VII takes on the air of the kind of literary debate our French humanists engaged in eighty years later--one among friends, but in which real questions are raised (see Appendices 1 through 3). This seems all the more likely since Mussato never really defends his "priapeian" poems, but instead launches into a panegyric on the glories of poetry in general--surely no way to engage in debate with a serious opponent!²⁶

²⁶Mussato's "priapeian" poems are printed in Ferro Giuseppe and editors eds., "Poesie inedite di Albertino Mussato," Giornale degli Eruditi e dei Curiosi, 5, No. 4 (1885-85), 125-28. Graevius omitted them from his edition "in gratiam aurum honestarum" (Graevius ed., cols. 61-62). One of them is translated in Manlio Dazzi, Il Mussato preumanista (1261-1329); L'ambiente e l'opera (Venice: Neri Pozza, 1964), pp. 178-80.

A serious opponent is exactly what Mussato encounters later in the person of a Dominican friar, a certain Giovannino di Mantova. Giovannino's letter to Mussato is reprinted in Graevius' edition.²⁷ As Ernst Robert Curtius has pointed out, Giovannino does not object to poetry itself, but--at least on the face of it--only to Mussato's claims that poetry is an ars divina and akin to Theology.²⁸ However, Curtius does not notice the more fundamental implications of Giovannino's attack. For in attempting to prove that poetry is less noble than theology, Giovannino concentrates upon showing that it is a lying art, one that deals with falsehoods. Mussato could not have admitted this without leaving himself vulnerable to the further charge that the study of poetic falsehood is immoral. In short, Giovannino's attack strikes at the very study of poetry itself.

The friar states that the earliest poets wrote of false gods:

Constat autem, quod non de vero; sed de falso,
seu fictis Diis tractatum fecerunt.²⁹

²⁷ Graevius ed., cols. 54-57.

²⁸ Ernest Robert Curtius, Europäische Literatur und Lateinisches Mittelalter, fourth edition (Munich and Bern: Francke, 1963), pp. 223-27.

²⁹ Graevius, ed., col. 55 E.

Quia ergo non de vero Deo, sed de falsis Diis tractaverunt, idea veram Theologiam non tradiderunt, nec veri Theologi appellari potuerunt.³⁰

He states that poetry deals with fiction, rather than providing true delight to the reader by its truthful content:

Delectabilis etiam est [Poesis], non ratione contentae veritatis, sed ratione dicta fictionis, & ornatus verborum exterioris.³¹

Finally, in a passage which must have been especially galling to Mussato, vain as he was over his coronation, Giovannino compares the poets' laurels to the nature of poetry itself:

Erat autem de Lauro, quae habet viriditatem, & odorem exterius; amaritudinem autem continet interius, sicut patet ex ejus fructu, qui est amarissimus. Sic Poetica exterius habet quendam decorem verborum; interius autem amaritudinem vanitatum, propter quod forte Boethius Poeticas Musas Scenicas meretriculas appellavit. . . .³²

Poetry, that is, is pleasant on the surface, but bitter with falsehood in content.

b. Petrarch

Petrarch's earliest real exposition of the "Defense"

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid., col. 56 D.

³²Ibid., col. 57 C-D.

of the study of poetry occurs in Fam. X, 4 to his brother Gherardo, in which he explicates his first Bucolic, originally contained with this letter. Petrarch uses an expected or anticipated, rather than a real, objection as the occasion for his exposition. As mentioned above, Bilanovich has shown that Petrarch's arguments are strongly influenced here by Mussato.

The nature of the anticipated objections is interesting, however. They show that humanists such as Petrarch were constantly aware of opposition to poetry on the grounds of immorality. Petrarch aims to show Gherardo that the life of a monk is not inconsistent with the reading or study of poetry:

Si fervorem animi tui novi, iam hinc annexum huic epystole carmen horrueris, quasi professioni tue dissonum adversumque proposito.³³

Halfway through his exposition, Petrarch reiterates his brother's possible objections:

Sed occures et: 'Possum' dices, 'sancto saltem doctori credere tamen rigori meo carminis tui dulcedo non convenit.'³⁴

³³F. Petrarca: Le familiari: edizione critica per cura di Vittorio Rossi..., II (Florence, 1933-42), p. 301, ll. 4-6.

³⁴Ibid., p. 302, ll. 46-48.

Petrarch's whole thesis in this letter and elsewhere, of course, is that poetic fictions reveal truth allegorically. Since this is so, poetry is fit for study by all men.

Petrarch's letter to Gherardo is really just a foretaste of the defenses he later wrote in response to real attacks against poetic activity. His longest, best known, and most influential is in the Invectiva contra quendam medicum.³⁵ Here he assembles what Osgood calls the stock objections to poetry.³⁶ The doctor attacks poets as liars, Boethius' "scenicas meretriculas";³⁷ poets deceive by blandishment:

Que sit poetice utilitas et quis finis interrogas . . . Poteram, si non tibi, saltem vero satisfacere, et pauca tibi, non ut intelligeres, sed quia quesieras, verba proicere; sed non sinis, et . . . questionem ipse tuam precipitanter absolvis, . . . finem poetice stauens valde mirabilem: mulcendo fallere. (III, ll. 48-55)

Poets are immoral and irreligious:

³⁵Petrarch, Invective Contra Medicum, ed. Pier Giorgio Ricci (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1950).

³⁶Giovanni Boccaccio, Boccaccio on Poetry. Being the Preface and the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Books of Boccaccio's 'Genealogia Deorum Gentilium', introd. and tr. Charles C. Osgood. Second ed. (Indianapolis and New York: Library of Liberal Arts, 1956), p. xli.

³⁷Petrarch, "Invective," I, ll. 348 ff., ed. Ricci, pp. 35-36.

Illud primum quero, cum lingua illa temeraria et pigra et viscosa et farmacis delibuta multa ructaveris in poetas, quasi vere fidei adversos vitandosque fidelibus et ab Ecclesia relegatos. . . . (III, ll. 23-26)

Though the doctor makes other criticisms of poetry and poets as well, he seems to have concentrated (if we can judge from Petrarch's response) on making poetry secondary in nobility to medicine, rather than condemning it altogether. Still, it is significant that he included these arguments concerning poetic immorality. They must have been common knowledge by this time.

Petrarch's letter Sen. I, 5 to Boccaccio (written 28 May 1362, according to Giovanni Ponte, or about ten years after the composition of the first edition of the Invectiva, and at least thirteen years after Fam. X, 4)³⁸ records a remarkable incident in Boccaccio's life. A well-known holy man named Pietro di Siena had sent a messenger to Boccaccio with a prophecy. Claiming he had been given the ability to see the future before his death, Pietro told Boccaccio that only a few years of life remained to him, and that therefore

³⁸Francesco Petrarca: Opere, ed. Giovanni Ponte (Milan: Mursia, 1968), p. 1098; text of the letter is on pp. 800-23. For the date of Fam. X,4, see Petrarch's 'Bucolicum Carmen,' tr. Thomas G. Bergin (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974), p. 217, and the works cited there.

he ought to renounce the study of poetry. Pietro did not blush to claim that Christ himself had told him this.

We are not informed of the details of the arguments used by this Pietro. Petrarch summarizes it thus:

. . . tu, quod ad statum tuum attinet, duo hec (nam cetera sub primis) audisti: vite tue terminum instare, paucorumque tibi iam tempus annorum superesse: hoc primum tibi; preterea poetice studium interdici: hoc secundum, ultimumque. (p. 804)

However, we may infer from the content of Petrarch's letter that Pietro's criticism of the study of poetry was that it was immoral.

After a long passage filled with quotations from classical and Christian authors in which Petrarch reminds Boccaccio that he ought not to fear death, Petrarch argues that Pietro is mistaken. The study of poetry has positive benefits for one who, like himself or Boccaccio, has engaged in it for a long time:

Non sumus aut exhortatione virtutis aut vicine mortis obtentu a litteris deterrendi, que, si in bonam animam sint recepte, et virtutis excitant amorem, et aut tollunt metum mortis aut minuunt. (p. 816)

The study of poetry is only improper in an old man who, already advanced in age, is about to commence them. To such a one these studies might be a distraction from his spiritual concerns:

Nam si id seni, ut aiunt, elementario diceretur, equo animo pati possem: 'Senuisti; iam vicina est mors; age res anime; intempestivum senibus amarumque negotium literarum, si novum atque insolitum, proponatur (sin una senuerint, nil dulcius). (p. 814)

One can be a saint without being learned; but learning does not hinder one in spiritual pursuits (p. 820).

At the end of his letter, Petrarch pushes this argument further:

Quorum quidem omnium peregrinatio [i.e. 'iter per ignorantiam ad virtutem'] est beata; sed ea certe gloriosior, que clarior, que altior, unde fit ut literate devotioni comparabilis non sit quamvis devota rusticitas. Nec tu michi tam sanctum aliquem ex illo grege literatum inopem dabis, cui non ex hoc altero sanctiorem numero obiiciam. (p. 820)

Not content with defending the study of poetry, Petrarch really advocates it as a positive good preferable to ignorance. In practice, the Church Fathers such as Jerome and Gregory never left off their studies, and knew poetry well. Far from being merely tolerated, then, the study of poetry and letters should be advocated, except in certain special limiting circumstances, such as the already cited case of an old man who has been previously unlettered.

The main content of Pietro da Siena's attack (at least in Petrarch's mind) was clearly that the study of poetry was a distraction from more important concerns, with the state of one's soul, at least when death is near (since it is Boccaccio's supposed nearness to death which prompted

Pietro's advice). Thus Pietro attacked the study of poetry as immoral at least in this limited sense.

c. Boccaccio

Boccaccio's famous defense of poetry in his Genealogica Deorum Gentilium XIV and XV, the most extensive and the foremost source for all subsequent fourteenth-century humanists, includes a detailed outline of the various kinds of detractors of poetry. Boccaccio divides them into four types and deals with them separately. There are the outright devotees of the flesh, who despise any kind of spiritual exercise.³⁹ Boccaccio has little to say about them; their objections are no serious threat. There are also wealthy men, especially the jurists, who despise poetry as leading only to poverty. To these Boccaccio is proud to respond that honest poverty is honorable, and much preferable to the "spiritual poverty" of the rich.⁴⁰

The last group is somewhat more formidable. It is made up of men devoted to the pursuit of Theology in some fashion. Boccaccio again divides them into two camps.

³⁹Giovanni Boccaccio, Genealogie Deorum Gentilium Libri, ed. Vincenzo Romano, II (Bari: Laterza, 1951), pp. 682-83; Osgood, pp. 18-19.

⁴⁰Romano ed., II, 685-94; Osgood, pp. 21-32.

The first, the more ignorant, are those whose superficial acquaintance with philosophy have led them to prematurely condemn anything and everything else out of hand:

They refer also with peevish sneer to Priscian, Aristotle, Cicero, Aristarchus, Euclid, Ptolemy, and such, to show that they have neglected them for the sweet attraction of Theology to higher things. . . . But if ever the talk falls upon poetry and poets, then as if they enjoyed supreme knowledge and discrimination, they condemn, revile, and vilify both poets and poetry with such scorn, and make such a display of spurning them, that even the unsophisticated can hardly stand their outburst.⁴¹

These men, though they clearly criticize poetry for being inferior to Theology, do so from ignorance, and deserve no lengthy reply.

The fourth and most formidable group of detractors of poetry may be easily identified with the friars.⁴² Boccaccio's contempt for these men does not prevent him from enumerating their moral objections to poetry very carefully, and devoting essentially the rest of Book XIV to answering them.

These attacks on poetry are clearly morally directed:

⁴¹Osgood, pp. 20-21.

⁴²Osgood, p. xxxiii, so identifies them. Boccaccio's criticism of their "calling themselves Rabbi" (cf. Matt. 23.8) was an anti-fraternal commonplace since the days of William of St. Armour's attack on friars during the controversy at the University of Paris in the 1260s (Osgood, p. 35).

They say poetry is absolutely of no account, and the making of poetry a useless and absurd craft; that poets are tale-mongers, or, in lower terms, liars; . . . They say, besides, that their poems are false, obscure, lewd, and replete with absurd and silly tales of pagan gods, and that they make Jove, who was, in point of fact, an obscene and adulterous man, now the father of gods, now king of heaven, now fire, or air, or man, or bull, or eagle, or similar irrelevant things; in like manner poets exalt to fame Juno and infinite others under various names. Again and again they cry out that poets are seducers of the mind, prompters of crime, and, to make their charge fouler, if possible, they say they are philosophers' apes, that it is a heinous crime to read or possess the books of poets; and then, without making any distinction, they prop themselves up, as they say, with Plato's authority to the effect that poets ought to be turned out-of-doors--nay, out of town, and that the Muses, their mumming mistresses, as Boethius says, being sweet with deadly sweetness, are detestable, and should be driven out with them and utterly rejected. But it would take too long to cite everything that their irritable spite and deadly hatred prompt these madmen to say.⁴³

Even the reference to Boethius' scenicas meretriculas ("mumming mistresses") is familiar from the criticisms of Giovannino da Mantova and of Petrarch's unnamed Doctor.

d. Stefano Collona and Simon de Brossano

Simon de Brossano's response to Stefano Colonna's request for a copy of Apuleius' The Golden Ass constitutes another attack on the morality of the study of poetry.

Simon first addresses Stefano's ambitio ("eagerness") for

⁴³Osgood, pp. 35-36.

Apuleius as suspect:

Ambitionem tamen libri Apuleii litteris tuis impressam, non amplector, tempus quod tantum nostrum est, cuius pretium non est breve, etiam si non breve, expendere ubi plurimum supervacuae vanitatis, noxiae curiositatis est.⁴⁴

Simon sees in this desire a weakening of reason, contrary to the natural impulse towards knowledge of the true good, since Apuleius is full of fiction and falsity:

O quanto ergo ignorantia, & alienatio mentis, quanto sensuum debilitas, & infirmitas rationis, affectui tuo, sic ambitiose huiusmodi librum affectanti, nubem opposuit. Omnes natura ducimur ad cognitionem veri boni, in quo excellere pulchrum putamus. Quomodo ergo fabulosum & fictum ambis, quem Spiritus sanctus effugit?

First Simon attacks Stefano's motive, the ambitio which led him to so strive after Apuleius. However, Simon also attacks Apuleius as fabulosum et fictum; it is the ambitio towards this which is wrong. Simon quotes from St. Paul (2 Tim. 4. 4), who attacks a turning towards fabulas as a turning away from the truth:

Saltem addere debes, ut secundum Apostolum ad fabulas non fiat conversio, similisque angustiae turbatio, si de contemplatione ad actionem fiat versio.

⁴⁴"Simon Episcopus Mediolanensis Stephano Columnae, s.," in Francisci Petrarcae Florentini, . . . Opera quae extant omnia. . . . (Basel, per Sebastianum Henripetri [1581]), p. 1118. Note: four volumes are bound into one in this edition, and the first two and last two are numbered consecutively. All the citations given here are to be found on p. 1118.

According to Simon, it is wrong to desire something that will not lead one to act in accordance with virtue. But Stephano delights in many books, not making a distinction between some and others.

Omnes volunt beate vivere, nec hoc Cicero dubitavit. Quomodo vult beate vivere, qui non vult secundum virtutem vivere, secundum quod vivere, est solum beate vivere? Forte erues, beate vivere est, secundum delectationem suam vivere, quod omnes volunt. Error est, ad Augustinum in huiusmodi angustia te relego. . . .

Simon obviously sees in Stefano's uncritical attachment to Apuleius a danger that he will turn away from truth into myths, and will then fall into sin when he acts. It is wrong, as Augustine and Paul warn, to turn towards things which merely please one, not towards those which one ought to want. Stefano's ambitio has led Simon to think he is delighted by the fable, not by any wisdom he could glean from it.

In an important though obscure passage Simon criticizes Stefano for attempting to draw a moral allegory from the title of Apuleius' book:

Iuvat te librum intitulare de Monarchia temporis praesentis, sed plus iuaret si dixisses de Monarchia simpliciter. Amplius esse malum est pro dolor, cum Seneca loquar, translatum est certamen nostrum ad turpia, quod Oligarchia ac Daemocratia &c. alliciebas ex titulo tropologico, non ignorans historiam? Nam apud quosdam est de Asino, & sic est libri textura.

Simon criticizes Stefano for naming Apuleius' book "de monarchia temporis praesenti," when he should have said "de monarchia" simply. Stefano, that is, turns to a tropological title, though he knows the historical title, which is "The Ass." Simon appears, in this unclear passage, to be criticizing Stefano for attempting to allegorize a title when the title shows the book is to be suspect in its literal sense.

Simon continues his criticism by playing on connotations of asinus--i.e. one who is carnal, without understanding.

Quomodo ergo aliis sociabis? Nam scriptum est: Non arabis in bove & asino. Vis enim cibari carnibus asininis, ut dicatur quod in Propheta: Quorum carnes ut carnes asinorum? Scis quod alitum recipit naturam alimentij? Noli fieri asinus, sicut nec equus & mulus, in quibus non est intellectus.

Simon clearly fears that Stefano is already misreading Apuleius, though he knows only the title so far, and that is he joins himself with this "Ass," he shall become one--a person without reason.

In the rest of his letter Simon reiterates his fears that Stefano will fail to really understand Apuleius properly. He remarks that Stefano delights in many books. But this is dangerous. Firstly, to wander is to err (errare--a pun). Secondly, only the choosy stomach can safely

taste many things. Simon believes Stefano will not really understand, or digest, this work, since he is drawn by desire for many books. Stefano, he fears, does not have the discipline to carefully investigate and truly understand all this. Simon fears Stefano is not an investigator of Apuleius, but a deserter to his camp (transfuga).

Finally, Simon recommends a certain Nicolaus de Sicilia to Stefano. Since Nicolaus is a pious man, Stefano should seek his knowledge from him. Nicolaus will provide "an expiation for Stefano's vice" (vitii expiationis)-- that is, will help Stefano to read Apuleius properly.

Some important points emerge from this letter:

1. Simon clearly does not so much disapprove of Apuleius as he fears Stefano's motives for reading it, and his ability to interpret (i.e. allegorize) it correctly. This becomes even clearer when Stefano in his reply reveals to us that Simon is renowned for his knowledge of classical literature himself, and indeed knows Apuleius well.

2. Simon clearly does attack the study of the "fabulosum et fictum." In his reply Stefano deals at length with the need for fable and takes this attack on fable as an attack, not just on Apuleius (written in prose), but on poetry (as we shall see below).

With respect to the Quarrel of the Roman, these

two points have the following significance:

1. Simon can attack a work of literature (in this case, classical literature, similar to the Roman in that it is not literally a Christian work) as being "dangerous" and a "waste of time" for Stefano to read, not for everyone to read. As Stefano reveals in his response, Simon is a considerable classicist himself. Yet Simon's attack sounds as though he is condemning Apuleius' work itself. This is very similar to Gerson's position in the Quarrel.

2. Stefano clearly understands Simon's attack on the "fabulosum et fictum" in Apuleius' prose work as essentially a criticism of poetry. This apparent contradiction will appear logical enough once we recall that it was a common enough idea in the Middle Ages that the use of allegory--fable and fiction--was exactly what distinguished poetry from other forms of discourse. So, any criticism of fable was criticism of poetry.

3. Conversely, a criticism of poetic fable was at the same time an attack on any humanist activity. For the principal defense of the reading of pagan literature was that it could be interpreted so as to reinforce Christian moral principles, and thus serve a Christian purpose.

With respect to the Quarrel again, we shall see

that the humanists engaged in its defense considered an attack on the Roman as an attack on humanist literary activity itself.

e. Coluccio Salutati

Salutati responded to attacks on the morality of the study of poetry several times in his life. Giovanni di Samminiato began in 1389 a dispute with him to try to dissuade him from the study of poetry.⁴⁵ According to Hunt, Giovanni's first letter dealt with "the scanty rewards to be derived from literature as a profession," while in the second, "solicitous for Salutati's spiritual welfare," Giovanni "wrote him concerning the folly of the classics."⁴⁶ This can be deduced from the third document in this debate (since both of Giovanni's first letters are lost), Salutati's reply to Giovanni.⁴⁷

The nature of Giovanni's objections to classical studies can be seen more clearly in the one letter of his

⁴⁵Giovanni Dominici, Ioannis Dominici Lucula Notis, ed. Edmund Hunt (Notre Dame, 1940), p. ix.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Coluccio Salutati, Epistolario di Coluccio Salutati, ed. Francesco Novati, III (Rome: 1891-1911), pp. 539 ff.

in this dispute which survives: that to Angelo Corbinelli. Since it survives only in a rare eighteenth-century work, and even there only in excerpts, I reproduct them in full:

[Title] Angelo Corbinello civi Florentino Domni Ioannis de Sancto Minutae Monachi Camaldulensis epistola exhortatoria, ut discedat a lectura Poetarum, & sacrae paginae codicibus innitatur.

.....
Haec omina [i.e. the 'multis iam latinis vatis recensitis' in the letter, in which Corbinelli delights] non solum vanitas, & vanitas vanitatum, sed in ore Christicolae paene blasphemiae sunt, idolorumque ignota cultura, quae velut monstruosa portenta mentem inquinant, mores dissipant, & si quid boni animo possides, huius peste veneni perimetur. Nam quid non mali tibi suadent haec studia repetita?

.....
Noli deinceps fabulis, & procacibus versibus ingenuitatem tuae indolis subiicere. Si fabulas legas, fabulas habebis. Laborabis incassum, imo volens periculo te exponis. Redi itaque ad cor tuum, & illis omissis, quae vento animum tuum distentant, si sacra auri fame postposita, & lanificio, muliercularumque garrulo commercio aliis commisso laudabili scientiarum studio mentem exhibere delectat, ad sacri eloquii fontem adcede. . . .⁴⁸

Once again, the main attack is on the immorality of the fables in pagan poetry.

Salutati's debate with Johannes Dominici has been

⁴⁸Giovanni di Samminiato, in Lorenzo Mehus, Historia litteraria Florentina. (Vita Ambrosii Traversarii, generalis Camaldulensium, in qua historia litteraria Florentina deducta est). Ab anno 1192 usque ad annum 1439 (Florence, 1769; repr. Munich: Fink, 1968), pp. ccxcii - ccxciii. Earlier editions of this work were also called Vita Ambrosii Traversarii.

discussed frequently in scholarship; there is no need to summarize it here again. Hunt's edition of the Lucula Noctis, Johannes' lengthy attack on poetry, outlines the main points in his arguments.⁴⁹

Dominici's position is curious and instructive because of the contradictions it contains. On the one hand, it is clear in certain passages that he would prefer to condemn all the works of pagan authors for good, and would welcome a Pope who would decree this:

Et ideo non solum legendi non sunt [i.e. pagan works] sed edicto publico comburendi; et hoc utinam fiat aliquo pro viro in Ecclesia presidente.⁵⁰

However, as Salutati notes with satisfaction, Dominici is forced to allow, however reluctantly, the study of secular literature to those firm in faith,⁵¹ and in places he even limits his restrictions to children.

Here we certainly have a person similar in many

⁴⁹Hunt ed., pp. xiv-xvi.

⁵⁰Dominici, Lucula Noctis, ch. xxvii; quoted by Novati, Epistolario di Coluccio Salutati, IV, i (Rome: 1891-1911), p. 213, no. 1.

⁵¹Salutati says: "Consentis enim quod instructis et firmatis in fide neganda non sit lectio secularium litterarum; . . .," Novati, ed., IV, i, p. 212, ll. 20-21. Hunt, pp. xvi-xvii, n. 26, argues that Salutati is correct in stating this.

respects to Gerson. Dominici quotes the classics themselves fairly frequently in his work. Gerson was famous for his classical Latin style even among the humanists who defended the Roman against him. Clearly both Gerson and Dominici felt that men such as themselves, firm in faith, were not endangered by pagan literature, but that others might well be so carried away by their enthusiasm for pagan works as to have their Christian values threatened. (Simon de Brossano suggested the same thing.) And both Dominici and Gerson put their criticism in extreme terms, ready to welcome the destruction of works they considered a danger to some.

These attacks on poetry are no doubt the same ones, in the main, referred to abstractly in the opening pages of Salutati's De laboribus Herculis. Salutati condemns the ignorance of contemporary "Aristotelian" philosophers, i.e. theologians. He says they are illiterate, perhaps thinking of Dominici, since Salutati's MS of the Lucula Noctis is covered with his annotations of Dominici's solecisms.⁵²

We should recall that Salutati was initially stimulated to expand an earlier series of annotations of

⁵²Salutati, de lab. Herc., ed Ullman, pp. 3-4.

Seneca's Hercules furens to a full-blown work by the destruction of a statue of Vergil at Mantua by Carlo Malatesta after the battle of Governolo (31 August 1397).⁵³ This provoked much consternation among the Italian humanists of the day. According to Salutati's letter of 23 April 1398 to Pellegrino Zambecari, both Zambecari and Jacopo da Fermo wrote letters protesting this action. Pier Paolo Vergerio also wrote a long letter to Ludovico degli Alidosi on the same subject.⁵⁴ Why the consternation? These men were humanists, largely the employees of princes or of Italian communes (in the case of Zambecari and Salutati). Their campaigns to advance the acceptability of the new "classical" style depended to a great extent upon their ability to win their employers to accepting the study of the classics. Acts such as that of Malatesta, member of an extremely powerful Italian noble family, could be fatal to the humanist movement, should they become the rule. Hence, the carefully orchestrated and vociferous reaction of humanists such as Salutati.

⁵³ Francesco da Fiano, "Il 'Contra Oblocutores'," ed. Tau, p. 260.

⁵⁴ Ibid. See also Epistolario di Pier Paolo Vergerio, a cura di Leonardo Smith (Tipografia del Senato, 1934).

f. Francesco da Fiano

Hence also the occasion for Francesco da Fiano's compendious defense. Iginò Taù argues that the date of composition must be around the year 1400. This year, which also saw the real beginning of the Quarrel of the Roman de la Rose in France, lies in the middle of a decade which witnessed strong attacks on humanist activity, and yet stronger advances by the humanist forces.

The circumstances of Francesco's defense are clear enough in outline, even if the specifics elude us. A certain "Magistrum Stephanum Aretinum"⁵⁵ spoke before the Pope, and cited classical authors several times. For this he was later attacked by men around the Papal Curia. These men, no doubt ecclesiastics in the main (Taù surmises), proceeded to attack the pagan authors as well:

in Gentilium pium et fructuosum gregem frendenti
exasperari dente, et in eos, tanquam fabulosos et
mendaces homines . . . strepuisse. (p. 296, ll. 15-
17)

Francesco was one of the most prestigious humanists of the time. A friend of Petrarch and of the greatest litterati of the day, he was, by virtue of his position in the chancelry of the city, close to the Pope and the most

⁵⁵ Francesco da Fiano, "Il 'Contra Oblocutores'," ed. Taù, p. 297, ll. 9, 10.

powerful prelates.⁵⁶ This "Defense" was probably addressed to Cosimo Migliorati, in 1400 the Cardinal of Bologna and Pope from 17 October 1401 to June 1406, an enthusiastic patron of humanist studies. During his Papacy, Rome became a home for humanists, a Roman Studium Urbis being opened shortly after Pope Innocent VII's (Migliorati's) death on 1 September 1406.

Looking back on it, we can see that Francesco wrote his "Defense" on the eve of the triumph of classical style and humanist activity around the Roman Papal court and, indeed, in ecclesiastical circles in general. But Francesco could hardly have known that in advance.

In fact, the humanist position was under steady attack during the several years preceding Francesco's essay. Salutati, as we have seen, found himself under criticism for his studies in these years. Malatesta's destruction of the statue of Vergil in Mantua took place in 1397. In the same year Cino Rinuccini wrote a Latin "Invective Against Certain Slanderers of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio," of which only a later Italian translation

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 262-63.

survives.⁵⁷

I will not repeat Hans Baron's remarks on this work, which remain the only treatment of it in any length to my knowledge. To Baron this text is important testimony to "the aggressive attitude of classicism of those [i.e. early fifteenth century] years,"⁵⁸ as are the writings of Francesco da Fiano.

Rinuccini is, interestingly enough, not primarily a critic of classical studies at all. His diatribe is aimed at those "extreme" classicists who denigrated writing in the Volgare in favor of Latin poetry, and who therefore attacked Petrarch, Dante and Boccaccio to some extent. Therefore, the fact that he, too, dispraises the morality of the pursuit of classical studies may be taken as evidence that, around the year 1400, the strengthening of the humanist position could alarm even men of literary interests outside the Church.

Rinuccini ridicules many of the practices of the

⁵⁷Cino Rinuccini, "Invettiva contra a cierti caluniatori di Dante . . ." in Giovanni da Prato, Il Paradiso degli Alberti: Ritrovi e Ragionamenti del 1389 . . . a cura di Alessandro Wesselofsky, Volume primo [parte 2] (Bologna, 1867), pp. 303-16.

⁵⁸Hans Baron, The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance, rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 301.

humanists, mainly those which appear to him pointlessly pedantic. But he also attacks certain moral tendencies as dangerous. He says, for example, that study of pagan philosophers has led some to doubt the Catholic faith:

Della filosofia divino dicono che Varrone iscrisse molti libri dell' osservazione degli idej de' gientili con istilo elegantissimo, e molto eciesivamente il lodano, prepognendo in segreti ai dottori della nostra cattolica fede; e ardiscono a dire che quegli idej erano piu veri che questo, ne si ricordano de' miracoli de' nostri santi.⁵⁹

Rinuccini fully expects a counterattack, as is evident from the final words of his "invective."⁶⁰ We do not know whether any were in fact specifically directed at him. Baron, however (as we shall see below) largely agrees with Rinuccini's belief that there were strong "secularizing" tendencies in humanist activity.⁶¹ Taù sees evidence of further recognition of this fact in Guido Vernani of Rimini's attack on Dante at about the year 1400 as well.⁶²

Finally, we may discern yet one more echo of the sharp moral attack on humanist activity in Leonardo Bruni's

⁵⁹Rinuccini, "Invettiva . . . ," p. 315.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 317.

⁶¹Baron, Crisis, rev. ed., pp. 294-95; 315.

⁶²Francesco da Fiano, "Il 'Contra Oblocutores'," ed. Taù, p. 259, and n. 6.

dedicatory epistle to *Salutati* which he wrote as a preface to his translation of St. Basil's Epistola ad nepotes de utilitate studii in libros gentilium. There Bruni states that he has undertaken this translation to aid in refuting those who attack humanism:

Atque ideo libentius id [ie. the translation] fecimus, quod auctoritate tanti viri ignaviam ac perversitatem eorum cupiebamus refringere, qui studia humanitatis vituperant atque ab his omnino abhorrendum censent. Quod his contingit fere, qui ea tarditate ingenii sunt, ut nihil altum neque egregium valeant intueri, qui, cum ad nullam partem humanitatis aspirare ipsi possint, nec alios quidem id debere facere arbitrantur.⁶³

Before concluding this section on the moral attacks upon earlier humanists for their poetic studies and activity, a few remarks concerning the grounds for these attacks are in order. None of the humanists studied here were "anti-religious" in any way. Some, such as Petrarch and Boccaccio, were as well known for their religious writings as for their classical studies. Why the persistent doubts as to the moral value of their studies? I believe that there are essentially two reasons.

First, these humanists made claims for the value of

⁶³Leonardo Bruni, "Prologus in Basilii Epistolam ad nepotes de utilitate studii in libros gentilium traductam per L. Aretinum," in Baron, Leonardo Bruni Aretino, p. 99, l. 28 - p. 100, l. 6.

classical literature which threatened to put pagan writings on a par with Christian works. Mussato had stated that poetry was of divine origin, and this concept was taken up by Petrarch and those who came after him. That is, pagan poetry was said to be divinely inspired, somewhat like the Scriptures,⁶⁴ and in fact taught the same truths as Scripture, although through allegory rather than in plain language.⁶⁵ Petrarch repeats the same ideas. Both hold that "Poetry is another theology."⁶⁶ And, as we shall see below in the section on allegory, humanists constantly implied that the Scriptures, including the sayings of Christ, were essentially akin to classical poetry in their allegorical nature.

That is to say: The humanists constantly blurred any distinction between Christian (including sacred) writings and classical pagan literature. Although they did not equate the two, still they must have appeared, to others who did not share their views, to be only too ready

⁶⁴Mussato, Ep. IV, ll. 39-47, ed. Graevius, cols. 40-41; Ep. VII, ll. 15-23, col. 44.

⁶⁵Mussato, Ep. IV, ll. 47-52, col. 41.

⁶⁶Mussato, Ep. VII, l. 22, col. 44; Petrarch, Fam. X, 4, ll. 7-16, ed. Rossi, II, 301; Petrarch, Invective, III, 488, ed. Ricci, p. 72.

to overlook any essential differences between Christian and pagan philosophy and ideas. As Simon de Brossano warned, this could lead to sin if such wrongheaded ideas were translated into practice.

Second and probably more important, the activities of some humanists must have appeared to justify these fears. Mussato, for example, did compose licentious poetry in a classical style, and neatly skirted the question of its justification, as we have seen. If we discern in the writings of a Simon de Brossano or a Giovanni Dominici a concern that humanist activity is a threat to Christian morality, we can also see how they may have gotten that impression. Despite protestations to the contrary, the humanists were not primarily interested in pursuing religious ends.