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# **NATURALISM AND THE PICARESQUE IN JUSEPE DE RIBERA'S WORK**

**Volume One of two volumes  
(Text)**

**by  
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**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in History of Art at the University of Warwick**

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At the end of this work, my thought turns again to my Mother, and to my *magister ludi*,  
Fr. Giuseppe Rassello.

## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that it has not been submitted for a degree in any other university.



## Abstract

Although it was an era of extraordinary scientific progress and fertile methodological debate, the seventeenth century was characterized by a profound vein of scepticism that can be traced throughout its literary, scientific and philosophical works. Upon his arrival in Italy, the Spanish painter Jusepe de Ribera (1591-1652), one of the most innovative interpreters of Caravaggio's painting in Europe, wittily thematized, through his series of the *Senses* (c.1612-1616), the aspirations, achievements and doubts of his age with regard to man's sensorial experiences and the possibility of investigating and comprehending the functioning of the senses.

Scholars have singled out both the allusions within Ribera's paintings to scientific experimentalism and their affinity with the themes which characterised contemporary Spanish picaresque literature. However, neither the 'picaresque vein' nor the scientific factors in question have been analysed *per se*, or indeed been examined comparatively. In this regard, my main contention is that, by juxtaposing the tools of the new science with low-genre props, the *Senses* series clearly alludes to contemporary discussions about the function and reliability of sensory perception, a theme which was then of the utmost importance. By staging the equivalent of the *pícaro*, the shabby protagonist of numerous novels who has to constantly struggle for his existence and who is both assisted and misled by his senses, Ribera's series parodies not only the experimental method which had been established by the Roman and Neapolitan members of the Accademia dei Lincei, but also Galileo's contributions to the debate.

By the same token, his connection with picaresque literature is often reduced to Ribera's predilection for plebeian models and his propensity to represent high subject matters with ordinary figures and accessories. The main goal of this thesis is to offer a new interpretation of Ribera's naturalism and its interconnections with the picaresque novel, as developed not only in Spain but also in Spanish Naples. My contention is, in fact, that these two aspects of Ribera's art are not only inextricably connected, but are also specifically rooted in early seventeenth-century Roman and Neapolitan culture and society.

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## Introduction

### Ribera: 'The Picaresque' in an Age of Experimentalism

In 2011, the year before I started my PhD at Warwick University, the National Museum of Capodimonte in Naples, and the Prado Museum in Madrid co-organised an exhibition which was dedicated to the early activity of the Spanish painter Jusepe de Ribera (Játiva, 1591 – Naples, 1652).<sup>1</sup> The exhibition focused on the as yet not fully documented years between 1608 and 1616, which include Ribera's move from Spain to Italy and his sojourn between Parma and Rome. Before the event in 2011, an important exhibition on the painter had been organized in 1992 (Naples, Madrid, New York) with the purpose of exploring Ribera's relatively well-documented Neapolitan period (1616-1652).<sup>2</sup> In reviewing the 1992 event, the Italian scholar Paola Santucci pointed out that the organizers had focused exclusively on problems of attribution, iconography and chronology without trying to reconstruct the possible relationship that existed between the painter, his patrons and the scientific and literary academic societies of the time, both Italian and Spanish.<sup>3</sup>

The 2011 exhibition has conspicuously expanded Ribera's catalogue, but it has left those dated issues unsolved. Nevertheless, it gave me some important hints which were to become key foci of my research. Several works portraying beggars or humble characters – including those belonging to the Roman *Five Senses* series, which are at the core of my thesis [Figs 38, 41, 61, 88, 105] – were displayed on that occasion. The

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<sup>1</sup> *Il giovane Ribera tra Roma, Parma e Napoli: 1608-1624* (exhibition catalogue, Museo di Capodimonte, Naples, September 2011 – January 2012), ed. Nicola Spinosa (Naples: Electa, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> *Jusepe de Ribera 1591-1652* (exhibition catalogue, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 18 September – 29 November 1992), eds Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez and Nicola Spinosa (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Paola Santucci, 'La "dissimulazione onesta" di Jusepe De Ribera. Prolegomena su arte e cultura nel Seicento napoletano', *Archivio Storico del Sannio*, nn. 1-2 (1992), pp. 5-89.



compilers of the catalogue entries touched upon a possible connection with Galileo's discoveries in relation to the *Sense of Sight* [Fig. 41]. On the other hand, they alluded to rogue literature as a possible background for Ribera's ordinary figures (including beggars and Gypsies) [Figs. 88, 155]. Yet both issues remained thoroughly unexplored. In 2011, I had a reasonable knowledge of rogue literature, and of its Spanish branch known as picaresque literature, but I knew Ribera mainly as a painter of sacred subjects. At that time, then, it would have been difficult for me to fully comprehend the connections between the picaresque genre and Ribera's paintings portraying beggars. Yet, after seeing the exhibition I realised that it was not only possible to trace a picaresque and scientific background in some of Ribera's works, but also that his naturalism was the result of the combination of these two facets. As a result, the event spurred me on to embark on this PhD project.

Jusepe de Ribera, who was undoubtedly the most prominent painter of Spanish Naples and one of the most innovative interpreters of Caravaggio's painting in Europe, was born in 1591 in Játiva (Spain) to a large family of humble origin. He arrived in Italy in 1606, when he was fifteen years old. Scholars uphold diverse theories as to the route and stops on Ribera's journey. His presence in Lombardy and Veneto is plausible, although as yet unproven, while his only documented sojourns are, as we can reasonably state, those in Parma, Rome and Naples.<sup>4</sup> His artistic background and apprenticeship at a workshop in Spain are still debated, too. However, we know that the district of Valencia, which included Játiva, maintained a diplomatic relationship

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<sup>4</sup> The most up-to-date contributions on Ribera's sojourn in Parma and Rome are in *Il giovane Ribera* (2011); on his Neapolitan period see instead Nicola Spinosa, *Ribera. L'opera completa* (Naples: Electa, 2006, 2nd edition, first published 2003), pp. 82-226. For this short biography of Ribera, I follow these sources.

with the clergy and cultural societies of Lombardy thanks to the activities of its bishop Juan de Ribera, who was a close friend of Federico Borromeo, the archbishop of Milan. The same Juan de Ribera promoted the arrival in Valencia of Italian works of art – including those of Caravaggio and Giovanni Baglione – which Jusepe de Ribera was probably able to admire during his youth.

We know with certainty that Ribera spent the decade between 1606 and 1616 between Rome and Parma. We can presume, however, that during this timespan he visited Naples (where Caravaggio had worked in 1606-1607, then in 1609-1610) because he married a Neapolitan woman in 1616. It is feasible to think, in this regard, that the marriage was preceded by meetings aimed at finalising the wedding. He probably resided in Parma between 1610 and 1611, where he could admire the works of Correggio, Parmigianino and of the Carracci, among others. It seems that his paintings – lost but documented — from his sojourn in Parma gained him praise but most of all troubles, to the point that he was forced to leave Parma due to the envy of local painters.

During his Roman sojourn (documented 1612-1616), Ribera established himself in the district of Santa Maria del Popolo, in an area which was inhabited by northern Caravaggisti. Contemporary sources agree that he had a fierce and lively character, and that he was a joker and was known for his sparkling wit. We know, moreover, that during his Roman sojourn Ribera experienced poverty and was probably in close contact with the same marginalized people that he depicted in his paintings. More importantly, his stay in the papal city coincided with a crucial period in the life of the scientific Academy of the Lynceans, of which Galileo was a member.

His move to Spanish Naples (1616-1652) represented a decisive step forward in his career, as he married the daughter of Giovanni Bernardino Azzolino who was

one of the most prestigious painters in the city. Naples was not only part of the Spanish Vice-Kingdom (1503-1707), but was also one of the most strategically important colonies in the Spanish Empire, due to its geographical position as much as to its scientific and humanistic academies. The city became a bustling centre of business and cultural experimentation which attracted the most prestigious of Caravaggio's followers, investors, art traders, and art collectors. Here Ribera was to be patronised by the Spanish Viceroys, who determined and consolidated his social advancement. Last but not least, Ribera was to become acquainted with several members of the Neapolitan Academy of the Idlers, which included the most important and active European scholars of the time, such as the Spanish writer Francisco de Quevedo.

Ribera was not only a painter, but also a proficient draughtsman and engraver (the latter activity is the least studied). Sacred subjects (Biblical characters and stories, saints, martyrdoms) constitute the major part of his catalogue. Among these, a conspicuous percentage is represented by figures of apostles, which were made either as single paintings or as series of twelve. Philosophers of antiquity and beggars occupy a relevant part in Ribera's activity. He usually depicted wise men disguised either as mendicants or as humble figures. These are particularly intriguing because the categories of philosopher and beggar often overlap. He treated mythological and historical subjects very rarely. Finally, Ribera had an unrelenting interest for the study of physiognomic deformities, which he portrayed in both his paintings, prints and drawings [Figs 6-7, 139].

Although Ribera made some of his masterpieces during his Roman period, the core of his production was earmarked for the vice-royal court of Naples, its officers and cultural milieus. Scholars have singled out two important aspects of Ribera's art:

his naturalism and the affinity of many of his paintings with themes treated in contemporary Spanish picaresque literature. However, neither his naturalism nor his picaresque vein have been examined carefully and in parallel with one another. Scholars have almost systematically perceived Ribera's naturalism in merely stylistic terms. By the same token, his connection with picaresque literature is often reduced to Ribera's predilection for plebeian models and his propensity to represent high subject matters with ordinary figures and accessories. The main goal of this thesis is to offer a new interpretation of Ribera's naturalism and its interconnections with the picaresque novel as developed not only in Spain but also in Spanish Naples. My contention is, in fact, that these two aspects of Ribera's art are not only inextricably connected, but are also specifically rooted in early seventeenth-century Roman and Neapolitan culture and society.

More to the point, I argue that the emergence of scientific experimentalism in Naples in the wake of Galileo's new science, which first developed in Rome, is paramount for our understanding, both of certain crucial elements of Ribera's painting commonly categorized as naturalistic and some parodic aspects of his picaresque vein. In the same manner, I have approached and explored the poetics of the miserable that evolved in Neapolitan literature under the influence of Spanish models in order to confirm the specificity of Ribera's taste for the humble. In studying these two factors, their interrelation and their vast scope in Ribera's painting will manifest themselves.

Scholars have assumed that Ribera's depictions of anti-heroes – thieves, gypsies, and beggars – originate in the Spanish picaresque tradition. This assumption rests substantially on a generic association of Ribera's iconography with motifs to be found in picaresque literature. In other words, scholars have formulated parallels between Ribera's paintings and picaresque novels on the basis of loose thematic

comparisons, without analysing the literary or pictorial backgrounds of the texts and paintings they study, and without reflecting on the methodological implications determined by their examination of paintings in the light of texts: figurative arts and literature are nevertheless different forms of media which operate through different procedures and with different effects.

For this reason, the transposition of picaresque motifs into painting does not necessarily occur in a straightforward way. This means that Ribera employed strategies and procedures of the picaresque genre without adopting themes or narrative episodes from it. Furthermore, given the wide diffusion of the picaresque literature in seventeenth-century Naples, it is also understandable that Ribera would seek to create a pictorial equivalent to this literary genre on his own terms, that is, by developing subjects and motifs which are absent in, but evocative of, the picaresque.

Scholars have also remarked on the fact that Ribera magnifies the picaresque elements of his paintings through an optical accuracy that they have associated with seventeenth-century scientific experimentalism. In other words, Ribera's naturalism is assumed to incorporate the detailed and dispassionate observation of nature that characterizes the scientific experimentations conducted at the time by, among others, the Roman members of the Accademia dei Lincei. In this regard, it has not been observed that Ribera literally thematizes some of the topics of debate which were specific to the Italian scientific experimentalism by parodying them. For instance, through the representation of scientific tools, Ribera's *Five Senses* series clearly alludes to discussions about the senses, their functions and reliability that lay at the core of the new science of nature. And yet, by juxtaposing the tools of the new science with low-genre props inspired by picaresque literature, Ribera offers an interpretation of the senses that comically subverts the tenets of scientific experimentalism.

By mentioning the *Five Senses*, I mean to demonstrate not only that naturalism and the picaresque interrelate in Ribera's paintings to a great extent, but also, crucially, that their interrelation is neither linear nor crystalline. In fact, the picaresque also destabilizes the naturalistic components of Ribera's painting, and naturalism in turn contributes to the creation of new forms (visual forms) of the picaresque. Although this thesis relies on an interdisciplinary approach (linking together art history, literature and the history of sciences), its principal objective is to show the uniqueness of Ribera's art: that is, the ways in which Ribera created a new poetics of the picaresque through a new conception of naturalism.

These interrelated themes are approached in five chapters. The first two chapters are intended, on the one hand, to shed light on the literary and scientific background that underlies some of Ribera's works analysed in this dissertation; on the other, to prepare the ground for the following three chapters, which contain the main arguments of the thesis.

Chapter 1 focuses on literary sources and is divided into three parts. Firstly, I outline the chronological trajectory of the literary phenomenon known as picaresque literature, a genre that was born in Spain in the first half of the sixteenth century and that became widely known in Europe over the following decades. Its protagonist is the *pícaro*, a sort of beggar-philosopher who, in order to survive, learns to conceal his identity and to use misleading language in order to take advantage of people. Secondly, I quote and comment on numerous passages taken from the most important picaresque works (c. 1550-1650). The aim of this excursus is to provide the reader with significant examples of those literary devices which were used by picaresque writers to stage the *pícaro*. Perhaps not surprisingly, the threadbare *pícaro*-philosopher can be said

to embody the modern man who, at the dawn of the century of scientific experimentalism, rejects bookish knowledge in favour of personal experience, which is acquired through the constant use and refinement of the senses. Nevertheless, as he becomes aware, at his own expenses, that sensory experience can be misleading, the *pícaro* alerts the reader to the ambivalent nature and to the ingenuity which is concealed under his humble clothing. In the third part, taking as a starting point and expanding upon the opinions of literary scholars, I discuss the possible existence of picaresque motifs in the Italian and especially Neapolitan literature of the seventeenth century. Considering that Ribera spent the greater part of his life in Spanish Naples (1616-1652), I show that the cultural milieu of this city may have inspired Ribera's picaresque background.

The central theme of Chapter 2 is the birth and development of the scientific Accademia dei Lincei (1606-1620) in Rome, which was devoted to the study of nature across multiple disciplines (from botany to astronomy, medicine and zoology). It is generally accepted that the Accademia represents one of the most innovative moments in the history of modern science. Founded by the young Roman aristocratic Federico Cesi, the Academy enlisted prominent European scholars, such as Galileo, and the Neapolitans Fabio Colonna and Giovan Battista Della Porta, who were among the most eminent representatives of the Neapolitan cultural societies. In opposition to the Aristotelian academicians, the Lynceans aimed to revolutionise the study of nature by questioning traditional knowledge and by relying on personal experience. Hence, the crucial role which was played, in the Lynceans' methodology, by the senses in their investigation of nature and their use of modern tools such as the microscope and the telescope. Thanks to the Academy, the role of the natural philosopher changed; he became something resembling a hunter of knowledge who, instead of perusing dusty,

ancient volumes, is heroically engaged in adventurous excursion in order to rediscover nature. The Lyncean climbs mountains to collect herb samples, digs up fossils, makes drawings, and is willing to share his discoveries with the scholarly community. Yet in practice he discovers that the dissemination of knowledge is arduous inasmuch as the senses are misleading: neither the written word nor images can faithfully convey the result of the evanescent sensorial perception, the smell of a flower and its countless variations of colour. The heroic Lyncean thus becomes a sort of anti-hero who, like the *pícaro*, discovers, to his cost, the fallibility or even failure of the bodily senses and the necessity to resort to reason in order to explain what the senses cannot. The two figures, the *pícaro* and the new philosopher of nature, may paradoxically overlap as they both embody the desire of the modern man for a knowledge which is derived from personal experience.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to Ribera's Roman *Five senses* series (c. 1616), with which he revolutionised the traditional iconography of the senses. Instead of the usual and abstract figures elegantly dressed and engaged in simple activities [Figs 28-31], Ribera stages humble and ordinary characters in the act of experimenting with the function of the senses represented and their effects on the tester.<sup>5</sup> In the course of the chapter we will see that the series is rooted in the scientific experimentalism of the Accademia dei Lincei, and that the figures' approach to sensory experience is skilfully connected to the pioneering methodology set up by Lynceans scholars. Yet this transposition is not straightforward inasmuch as Ribera, employing a visual strategy that evokes patterns typical of the picaresque literature, ingeniously disguises the scientific facet under the humble dress of his picaresque-like characters. Just like their literary

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<sup>5</sup> As I explain in Chapter 3, I have excluded *Hearing* from my analysis since it may only be a copy made in imitation of a work by Ribera.



counterparts, Ribera's humble figures give the beholder clues to the understanding of a deeper message.

With Chapters 4 and 5 we move to Ribera's late Neapolitan period (1630s-1640s). In Chapter 4 I discuss *The Blind Man and His Boy* (c. 1632), a famous painting showing a beggar and a young assistant asking for alms [Fig. 127]. Art historians have traditionally connected this work – together with the more famous *Clubfooted Boy*, which I discuss in Chapter 5 – with the pietistic aims of the Catholic Counter-Reformation. Without rejecting the opinion of previous commentators, I argue that the painting has an unnoticed comedic subtext that can be traced into the forerunner of the picaresque novels, the anonymous *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554), which recounts the misadventures of a child working for various masters, including a blind beggar. By analysing the structure of the novel and commenting on some of its key passages, I show that Ribera conjures up the psychological tension at the core of the relationship between master and servant in the novel with great originality. Far from being a mere illustration of the tale, the painting instead interacts with it and proposes a new and unique visual picaresque.

Chapter 5 is dedicated to two of the most famous paintings by Ribera, the *Bearded Woman Maddalena Ventura* (1631) [Fig. 139], and the *Clubfooted Boy* (1642) [Fig. 155], two characters who are affected by physical malformations. Firstly, I outline the perception of physical deformities for Ribera's contemporaries relying on sixteenth and seventeenth-century treatises on monsters and anomalous beings. Generally speaking, deformed human beings were perceived as threatening figures, as they were believed to foreshadow evil and catastrophes. Ribera represents both characters with an optical accuracy that is reminiscent of seventeenth-century experimentalism. By doing so, he magnifies those physical peculiarities that disquieted contemporary

viewers. Yet Ribera goes far beyond the scientific aspect and brings out the comedic side of these figures, which had long been part of the collective imagination. I therefore analyse the specificity of each figure in two separate subchapters.

Bearded women are amusing characters of fictional literature and appear frequently in Spanish literature. Aware of this comic facet, Ribera turns the monster into a wife and a nursing woman, thus creating a sort of comically subverted *sacra famiglia*, which might have appealed not only to Ribera's Spanish patron, but also to a varied public acquainted with a certain type of pseudo-scientific and fictional sources.

The *Clubfooted Boy* was probably made for another Spanish patron, namely Medina de las Torres, the Viceroy of Naples. Although the painting seems to be in line with those principles of the Counter-Reformation that invited people to give to the poor, I argue that the boy's military gait acquires a very precise significance in relation to the contemporary economic situation of Naples. We have, on the one hand, the military propaganda which was promoted by the Spanish crown, which urged or forced the poor in the colonies, including Naples, to join the army with promises of glory and financial reward. Picaresque literature, on the other hand, lampooned the concept of military honour by staging an anti-hero, the *pícaro*-soldier returned from war tattered and crippled. The Viceroy of Naples, in contrast with Spanish policy, stated openly that the participation of the city in the war was impoverishing its population. In the light of visual and literary sources discussed in the chapter, I maintain that Ribera's young *pícaro* acting as a soldier ridicules, on the one hand, the military propaganda, and epitomises, on the other, the economic turmoil that was affecting Naples at the time.

During my research, I have availed myself of numerous primary sources, both fictional and non-fictional.

The former are mainly in Spanish and Neapolitan language. Spanish picaresque literature has been translated into numerous languages ever since the sixteenth century and continues to enjoy great popularity among modern readers. It is a literary genre that can be read for sheer entertainment, purely for the sake of its comic sketches. Nevertheless, demanding readers will also acknowledge its subversive charge and the social satire that lies behind the humour. In order to meet the needs of a varied and wide public, modern publishers have been publishing heavily abridged editions of the main picaresque novels (both in Spanish and in translation). In order to meet the needs of the scholarly public, academic publishers have instead issued new philological editions, which allow the reader to recognize the multiple aspects of the picaresque genre.

I have conducted my analysis using the most updated Spanish editions, and when I have come across critical passages, I have compared different comments on the same novel in order to dispel doubts about interpretation and offer reliable English translations. As for the translated passages in the main text of the thesis, I have tried to retain the humour of the originals to the greatest possible extent in order to provide the reader with a good taste of the picaresque. Where possible, I have cited further examples in the footnotes in order to show that some themes are not exclusive to a specific novel, but are in fact common to the picaresque genre. Only the quotes in the main text have the parallel Spanish in the footnotes; the additional examples in the footnotes are quoted only in the original language.

As regards the fictional sources written in Neapolitan (Basile, Cortese, Della Porta), they are almost unknown in other languages with the notable exception of Basile's *Lo cunto de li cunti*, which is, as is well known, a milestone within European

literature. The translations of these sources are also mine (unless specified otherwise) and I have tried to keep the tone of the originals.

The non-fictional sources which I have discussed and quoted throughout the thesis are mainly in Italian, Latin, Spanish, and occasionally in French. The lack of modern philological editions makes their understanding very difficult in places, especially when it comes to the jargon of a specific discipline such as botany or zoology. The Latin prose of the Lynceans has been particularly stimulating: it is the language of the pioneers of a new natural science, and, as such, it reflects doubts and perplexities of their age.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE PICARESQUE RHETORIC: DEVICES AND THEMES OF A NEW GENRE OF COMEDY

#### 1.1 Trajectory of the Picaresque Genre

‘We should not just look at the bark [appearance], but penetrate, with the eyes of reason, more deeply into things ... Those who content themselves only with the surface do not derive benefit from the work of the author; but those who observe with the eye of the soul will derive great benefit from it.’<sup>1</sup> These are the opening words from the first part of *Vida del Escudero Marcos de Obregón* (*Life of the Esquire Marcos de Obregón*, 1618), a well-known Spanish novel by Vicente Espinel. The author goes on to tell an anecdote about two students who, while heading for the University of Salamanca, come across an enigmatic Latin inscription carved in a stone. One of them, who is very knowledgeable about Latin, grasps the pun behind the inscription, and therefore picks up the stone and discovers a precious necklace, the well-deserved prize for his perspicacity. Espinel thus provides readers with a clue to an understanding of his novel, inviting them to go beyond the ‘appearance, for in my book everything has a hidden meaning.’<sup>2</sup> The anecdote exemplifies one of the cornerstones of Spanish picaresque literature – a genre of fiction that broadly speaking deals with the adventures of

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<sup>1</sup> Vicente Espinel, *Vida del escudero Marcos de Obregón*, ed. Maria Soledad Carrasco Urgoiti (Madrid: Castalia, 1972), Vol. 1, p. 80: ‘no es sola la corteza la que se debe mirar, sino pasar con los ojos de la consideración más adentro ... Quien se contenta con sola la corteza, no saca fruto del trabajo del autor; mas quien lo advierte con los ojos del alma, saca milagroso fruto.’

<sup>2</sup> Espinel (1972), Vol. 1, p. 81: ‘que nadie se contentase ... con leer la corteza, porque no hay en todo mi *Escudero* hoja que no lleve objeto particular fuera delo que suena.’

scoundrels – that is the binomial contrast of appearance and essence that inevitably confuses the judgment of the recipient.

The scholarship on picaresque literature is vast and long since consolidated. It has engendered a long-lasting debate and a variety of specific approaches that have contributed to an almost unanimously accepted definition of the genre. On the contrary, the scholarship on what I will call the ‘visual picaresque’ is relatively speaking more recent, less well developed and less coherent. In this chapter I will give, first of all, a broad outline of the literary genre, but will not discuss the reason why a certain novel is considered to fall, or not, into the category of picaresque according to different scholars. For discussion of these issues, I will refer the reader to the footnotes.<sup>3</sup> I will instead give an account of some specific aspects. Firstly, I will outline the origins of the genre in Spain. I will subsequently highlight some structures and themes of the genre, quoting and commenting on numerous passages available from novels which were published between 1550 and 1650. The picaresque genre entails a constant alternation of serious and lyrical modes with comic and satirical tones, a juxtaposition that creates uncertainty as to the real tenor of the psychology of the main character. The aim of this excursus is, therefore, to give a taste of the complex and sophisticated mechanism which was devised by picaresque writers. Secondly, I will deal with its diffusion in Europe and particularly in Italy (where the painter Jusepe de Ribera spent the majority of his life). I will eventually touch upon the alleged existence of an Italian picaresque literature to see if Ribera’s Italian sojourn might have stimulated his inventiveness. The aim of this examination will also be, as will be addressed towards

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<sup>3</sup> For a general outline of approaches to the picaresque genre, see Ulrich Wicks, *Picaresque Narrative, Picaresque Fictions: a Theory and Research Guide* (New York; London: Greenwood Press, 1989). Wicks, in proposing an analysis of the motifs and themes that in his opinion qualify a novel as picaresque, provides an overview of the alternative scholarship on the topic.

the end of my dissertation, the identification and definition of a visual picaresque. Some scholars have already touched upon this issue regarding the paintings of Ribera, Diego Velázquez, Bartolomé Esteban Murillo and other artists [Figs 2-4], although they have not reflected on the methodological implications determined by the examination of paintings in the light of texts.<sup>4</sup>

Very broadly speaking, the picaresque literature is a genre which concerns itself with the habits and adventures of crooks and beggars (*pícaros*), and its origins are to be found in the social, cultural and economic turmoil of late sixteenth-century Spain. For the sake of accuracy, it is necessary to briefly clarify that modern picaresque literature (c.1550-1650) is part of a wider and older phenomenon called rogue literature, about which I will say a few words. The interest in, and concern about, the condition of the poor has existed since time immemorial. Nevertheless, as Bronislaw Geremek and Piero Camporesi have pointed out, concern escalated into dread as a result of the economic crisis that beset European countries between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries.<sup>5</sup> The resulting unrest brought with it a dramatic rise in poverty, beggary and crime, which resulted in heated debates and contributed to the birth of rogue literature in the majority of the European states. Within the term rogue literature Geremek and Camporesi include not only prose and verse works, but also narrative works, chronicles, treatises, didactic essays, legislative measures and visual sources [Fig. 5] relating to the lives of wanderers, beggars, swindlers, Gypsies and so on; in short, all those undesirable individuals who were perceived as threatening the stability of the

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<sup>4</sup> Interesting ideas, although not developed, are to be found in José Antonio Maravall, *La literatura picaresca desde la historia social: siglos XVI y XVII* (Madrid: Taurus, 1986); Santucci (1992), pp. 5-89.

<sup>5</sup> Bronislaw Geremek, *La stirpe di Caino. L'immagine dei vagabondi e dei poveri nelle letterature europee dal XV al XVII secolo*, ed. Francesco M. Cataluccio (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1988), especially Chapter 1, 'La letteratura della miseria', pp. 11-54; and Piero Camporesi ed., *Il libro dei vagabondi. Lo «Speculum cerretanorum» di Teseo Pini, «Il vagabondo» di Rafaele Friaroro e altri testi di «furfantaria»* (Milan: Garzanti, 2003), especially the Introduction, pp. 1-174.

social order. In broad terms, rogue literature includes all those fictional and non-fictional sources that allow scholars to analyse, from different angles, the way some segments of society changed. Now, although the picaresque novel falls within the broad category of rogue literature, a novel centered on the lives of beggars and scoundrels is not necessarily a picaresque one. The distinction is extremely important for at least two reasons. Firstly, picaresque fiction reflects specifically the profound change that took place in Spain in a precise historical period. Secondly, while the fictional works of the rogue literature mostly employ ‘roguish’ anecdotes (frauds, thefts, disguises and so on) very loosely,<sup>6</sup> the picaresque authors instead rearrange them within a narrative structure which has a precise satirical and comic purpose, which I will analyse in the second part of this chapter.

Now that these aspects have been clarified, I can proceed to giving an outline of the genre. The adjective ‘picaresque’ comes from ‘pícaro’, a word whose etymology is still debated.<sup>7</sup> It seems that the term first appeared around the half of the sixteenth century, in a Spanish context, initially to describe a low character of folkloric literature in charge of menial jobs (‘pícaro de cocina’, or scullery boy), and later to refer to scroungers at the service of some powerful personages (‘pícaros de la corte’). Originally, then, the word did not necessarily have extremely negative connotations, as it was not always related to notions of degeneracy and delinquency.<sup>8</sup> Starting with the publication of the anonymous *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes y de sus fortunas y adversidades* (*The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes and of His Fortunes and Adversities*, 1554) [Fig. 1], the *pícaro*,

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<sup>6</sup> With the exception of *Till Eulenspiegel* (1515) and Johann Jakob Christoffel von Grimmelhausen’s *Der Abenteuerliche Simplicissimus Teutsch* (*The German Swindler/ Adventurer Simplicissimus*, 1669). The two novels in fact have more complex plots and characters. For a thorough analysis of the two novels, see Geremek (1988), chapter 6, ‘Vagabondo, briccone e mendicante’, pp. 381-468.

<sup>7</sup> For the development of the picaresque as a literary genre I have availed myself of Alberto del Monte, *Itinerario de la novela picaresca española*, translated by Enrique Sordo (Barcelona: Editorial Lumen, 1971).

<sup>8</sup> On the etymology, see del Monte (1971), pp. 11-13, and Harry Sieber, *The Picaresque* (London: Methuen, 1977), pp. 1-4.



until then a minor character in farces, became the protagonist of a novel with psychological and social undertones. The publication of *Lazarillo* almost coincided with the end of the kingdom of the Catholic monarch Charles V, ruler (1519-1556) of the Spanish Empire, one of the largest empires in history, which he had expanded thanks to his colonialist policies. Charles V had to face numerous problems of foreign policy that wore down his authority and burdened the finances of Spain. When he abdicated the throne in 1556 in favour of his son Philip II (1556-1598), the Spanish Empire was already experiencing economic problems which were accentuated by internal issues and by an excessively bureaucratic organisation of the country, which later led Philip III (1598-1621) and then Philip IV (1621-1665) to declare bankruptcy. An indication of the seriousness of the situation during the reign of Charles V is given by the crown policy and by the measures which were taken by religious authorities regarding the condition of the poor. Vagrancy and begging reached such proportions as to necessitate an intervention plan to understand the extent of the problem, to devise solutions to reduce poverty, and potentially to turn the beggars into workers. The practical phase was preceded by an intense debate which was characterized by the publication of numerous treatises and legislative measures. As I will explain in more detail later (see Chapter 3.2), the aim of the authorities was twofold. On the one hand, they wanted to unmask those people who, although fit for work, pretended to be ill-bodied through the most cunning tricks. The next step was to send them to war or employ them somehow, such as in manual work. On the other, authorities aimed to relieve the truly ill-bodied by providing them with shelter, and by ‘authorizing’ them to beg by equipping them with special licenses, together with special badges to wear. In spite of these measures, the situation got out of control, for mendicity and mendacity kept going arm in arm. It is significant, in this regard, that the novel *Lazarillo*

ends with a reference to Charles V. Lazarillo is a fatherless, penniless boy who becomes an unscrupulous and profligate adult while ascending the social ladder. He reaches the height of his career ‘when our victorious emperor [Charles V] entered the city of Toledo ... By that time I lived in prosperity and was at the height of my fortune.’<sup>9</sup> The reference to the sovereign is extremely subtle. It is ironic, on the one hand, because the adult Lazarillo associates his name and his controversial reputation with that of the glorious sovereign; yet it is polemical, on the other, because the success of an impostor such as Lazarillo epitomizes the failure and the contradictions of the society in which he lives.<sup>10</sup>

The Spanish picaresque novels that I have analysed for my dissertation date from 1550 to around 1650, but I have split the time-span into two periods, c.1550-1620 and c.1620-1650. The reason for this clear-cut division, which might seem excessively arbitrary, lies in the fact that the genre developed considerably over the years and its protagonists lose some of their original characteristics in favour of new features. The development of the genre is, indeed, much more complex than the framework I am describing. Yet, it being impossible to give a detailed account of its trajectory, I shall need to simplify it in order to give the reader a broad and clear outline of the genre.

Among numerous novels, the first phase includes the aforementioned *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554); Mateo Alemán’s *La vida del pícaro Guzmán de Alfarache* (*The Life of the*

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<sup>9</sup> *Lazarillo de Tormes*, ed. Francisco Rico (Madrid: Catedra, 1997, 12th ed., first published 1987), p. 135: ‘Esto fue el mismo año que nuestro victorioso Emperador en esta insigne ciudad de Toledo entró y tuvo en ella Cortes, y se hicieron grandes regocijos, como Vuestra Merced habrá oído. Pues en este tiempo estaba en mi prosperidad y en la cumbre de toda buena fortuna.’

<sup>10</sup> On the relationship between the Spanish economic crisis and the birth of picaresque literature see Geremek (1988), Chapter 5.1, ‘Il fenomeno picaresco e la Spagna del «secolo d’oro»’, pp. 299-307; and Maravall (1986). On the policy of the crown and on various theologians who participated in the debate see Linda Martz, *Poverty and Welfare in Habsburg Spain* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983) and again Maravall (1986), pp. 22-33.

*Rogue Guzmán de Alfarache*), which was published in two parts in 1599 and in 1604; and the apocryphal *Segunda parte de la Vida del pícaro Guzmán de Alfarache* (*Second part of the Life of the Rogue Guzmán de Alfarache*, 1602), due to an anonymous plagiarist who took advantage of the success of Aleman's *Guzmán* of 1599.<sup>11</sup> Gregorio González's *El Guitón Onofre* (*The Wanderer Onofre*), although published for the first time in 1973, dates back to around 1604 and was to some extent known as a manuscript, for it is listed in some seventeenth-century book catalogues.<sup>12</sup> Francisco de Quevedo's *Historia de la vida del Buscón* (*History of the Life of the Swindler*), the novel that closes this first phase, was published in 1626, although some critics argue, on the basis of comparisons with *El Guitón Onofre*, that it was already known before its printed publication.<sup>13</sup> As the aforementioned novels share some common characteristics, I will provide a summary that includes all of them. In this first stage, the *pícaro* is of miserable origins, descending from a long line of prostitutes and swindlers. Further to a death sentence or the arrest of one of his parents, he is forced to leave home while still a child. It is the beginning of his peregrinations across Spain and Europe (mainly Italy, France, and the Low Countries), during which he either serves various masters or joins companies of professional beggars and delinquents. Exposed to the hardship of life and acquainted with every sort of idler, the child turns into an experienced man and learns the most cunning tricks in order to survive. The experiences and peregrinations of the *pícaro* are not an end in themselves. He has, in fact, an objective: to ascend the social ladder and affiliate himself with powerful people. He grows up, then, with his own morality and

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<sup>11</sup> On the novel's attribution see David Mañero Lozano's discussion in *Segunda parte de la vida del pícaro Guzmán de Alfarache* (Madrid: Catedra, 2007), pp. 11-17.

<sup>12</sup> For the dating see Fernando Cabo's introduction to Gregorio González's *El Guitón Onofre* (Salamanca: ALMAR, 1988), especially pp. 13-19.

<sup>13</sup> See Fernando Cabo Aseguinolaza's introduction to Francisco de Quevedo, *La vida del Buscón* (Barcelona: RAE, 2011), pp. 181-202.

ethics, where right and wrong are not stable moral standards, but categories measured by the eye of the *pícaro* according to different situations. The *pícaro* embodies, in this sense, a marginalized person within Spanish society who was caught between other social groups made up of privileged individuals. On the one hand, there were the members of the upper nobility – ‘Grandes de España’ and ‘Rico hombres’ – that enjoyed numerous privileges from the crown. On the other, there were the ‘hidalgos’, impoverished nobles who could be exempted from paying taxes. They aspired to lead a life that they could not afford and became, with their sense of honour (‘honra’), stock and laughable characters of Spanish literature with Cervante’s *Don Quijote* (1605, 1615). Finally, there was a very powerful and often corrupt clergy. The *pícaro* is, in contrast, isolated, in conflict with his environment and even with his peers. When he puts himself at the service of people that he despises – powerful personages, ecclesiastics, penniless gentlemen – he allows us to witness their hypocrisy and their attachment to privileges from the inside and from his personal point of view. Yet, if on the one hand he severely criticizes the moral and religious tenets of society, on the other he conforms to the norms of that society.<sup>14</sup> The *pícaro* will either ascend the social ladder or fail miserably to do so, but whether he reaches the peak or plumbs the depths, he sets out to author his own life from childhood. As his purpose is to gain the sympathy of the reader, the first-person narrator carefully selects the anecdotes more suitable for his objective while excluding others. The first-person narrative – a technique fully exploited in many picaresque novels – gives life to what has been termed a ‘pseudo-autobiography’. The protagonist wants to prevent others from unveiling his passions and true nature in order to mislead them through the art of dissimulation. Language,

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<sup>14</sup> On this alternation of conformism and anticonformism in the *pícaro* see Alison Weber, ‘Cuatro clases de narrativa picaresca’, in Manuel Criado de Val ed., *La picaresca: orígenes, textos y estructuras. Actas del primer congreso internacional sobre la picaresca* (Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 1979), pp. 13-18.

then, becomes ‘the instrument of dissimulation or of irony’, used to turn societal norms upside down, and the ‘pseudo-autobiographical form, a way of inserting the entire tale into a double perspective of self-concealment and self-revelation’.<sup>15</sup> In this way, picaresque authors, in employing stylistic devices that evoke their protagonist’s ambiguous temper, deceive their readers and lead them through a crescendo of disorientation, enlightenment, shock and finally laughter, when they react to the writer’s subtle wit. In picaresque novels the main plot, which tells the story of the life of the protagonist, is never told in a linear fashion, but is instead interspersed with a myriad of tragicomic sub-anecdotes that distract and mislead the reader as to the real nature and sincerity of the character. The *pícaro* is, in conclusion, an opportunist with a philosophical temperament, halfway between a stoic and a cynic, one able to bear his social segregation and take advantage of people at the earliest opportunity.

The publication in 1605 of Francisco López de Úbeda’s *La pícara Justina* ushers in a new branch of the genre, the feminine picaresque, which continued with Salas Barbadillo’s *La hija de Celestina* (*The Daughter of Celestina*, 1612) and Alonso de Castillo Solórzano’s *Teresa de Manzanares* (1632). These novels are still in the autobiographical form, but the protagonists neither ascend the social ladder, nor drift from master to master. They are canny and bewitching girls who, resorting to the art of seduction and falsehood, take advantage of people in order to rob them.

The second phase incorporates the aforementioned *Vida del Escudero Marcos de Obregón* (1618) by Vicente Espinel, and Jerónimo de Alcalá’s *Alonso, mozo de muchos amos* (*Alonso, the Servant of Many Masters*, two parts published in 1624 and 1626). The protagonist is now no longer the wicked offspring of wrongdoers, but a poor and

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<sup>15</sup> Claudio Guillén, *Literature as System: Essays Toward the Theory of Literary History* (Princeton: UP, 1971), pp. 81-82.

respectable person of noble or otherwise respectable origins. He is well-mannered, has had a good education and is versed in a variety of disciplines: music, grammar, languages. Rather than a wanderer, he is an adventurer who does not fight to improve his position, but instead waits with aristocratic patience for a good opportunity, such as serving a respectable master or entering a convent. He pursues an honest life and even his picaresque tricks are used against the rogues.<sup>16</sup> In 1646 the anonymous *La vida y hechos de Estebanillo Gonzales* (*The Life and Adventures of Estebanillo Gonzales*) was published. Due to his tormented life, the protagonist of the novel recalls some genuine characteristics of the early *pícaro* (low birth, crimes), but the aim of the novel is completely different. Estebanillo becomes involved, despite himself, in the 'Thirty Years' War' (1618-1648). Acting in a most cowardly manner, he safely escapes its horrors. In the end, he becomes a 'hombre de buen humor', a buffoon at the court of a powerful personage. He is aware, when he addresses the reader and his protector, of the necessity of buffoonery in a world of violence, and he therefore constantly mingles the idea of death with the ferocity of laughter. With Estebanillo, the *pícaro* has turned himself into a self-conscious courtier.

I cannot conclude this brief overview without mentioning Miguel de Cervantes, one of the most ingenious representatives of the European literature of his time. Although Cervantes did not write any work which can be defined *strictu sensu* as picaresque, some of his characters do retain certain features of the genre, such as their ability to change identity and their affiliation with gangs of swindlers. The street urchins of *Rincorete y Cortadillo*, the Gypsy girl of *La gitanilla*, and the chameleon-like

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<sup>16</sup> Therefore, *Marcos de Obregón* has been defined as an anti-*pícaro*, see Sieber (1977), p. 33.

*persona* staging the main character of *Pedro de Urdemalas* are, arguably, among Cervantes's picaresque characters.<sup>17</sup>

After this excursus on the birth of the picaresque genre and on its main representative works, we can finally proceed to analysing some significant passages from the novels.

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<sup>17</sup> As the definition of the picaresque genre has long since been the subject of debate, so Cervantes' picaresque mode has also been the subject of discussion. In this regard, see the Peter N. Dunn, 'Cervantes De/Re-Constructs the Picaresque', *Cervantes: Bulletin of the Cervantes Society of America* 2, n. 2, (1982), pp. 109-131.

## 1.2 Heraclitus or Democritus? Themes and Strategies of a Genre

I have previously pointed out that one of the major themes of the picaresque genre is the all-pervading contrast between appearance and essence. Such a condition determines the protagonist's social isolation. Subsequently, he becomes aware of the reasons for such exclusion and therefore morally condemns the norms of the elitist society in which he lives. In the end, he is forced to conform to such norms and becomes a sort of artist in the field of falsehood. Let us see some examples that illustrate this *cursus honorum*. When the budding *pícaro* decides to go to the University of Alcalá on the pretext of attending classes – his real purpose is to scavenge food for himself – he is initially rejected due to his scruffy clothing:

‘They thought I wanted to mock them, because the mouths [tears] on my clothes brought discredit on me ... It was necessary to contradict such slander with real and tangible evidence ... and therefore I started talking in Latin to them, and they were stunned by the fact that such a dirty and shabby rag was capable of good rhetorical language.’<sup>18</sup>

The awareness that people judge by appearances instead of by what is actually there leads the character to acknowledge a bitter truth:

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<sup>18</sup> *Segunda parte de la vida del pícaro Guzmán de Alfarache* (2007), pp. 312-313: ‘Pensaron que burlaba dellos, porque tenía más bocas mi vestido para desascreditar que yo razones para persuadir ... Parecióme que convenía deshacer la violenta presunción del vestido con prueba real y evidente ... y, así, enderezando mis rezones en latín a mis clérigos, les dejé muy maravillados de que un mal trapillo sucio y ahumado supiese tan buen lenguaje retórico.’



'If you are a Cicero but you are dressed poorly, they will consider you a bad Cicero and they will despise you ... They will not offer you any chair or position if you are plucked [i.e. threadbare], even though you are dressed with virtue and science. On the other side, if you are a dunghill well covered in grass, they will come to you to graze ... They judge what they see solely with the eyes but not with reason. They do not mind what you know but only what you possess.'<sup>19</sup>

The reader might have noticed that this character puts things very bluntly. He employs straightforward language consisting of rough contrasts, which are typical of the picaresque genre. The *pícaro*, at first, compares himself to an unusual image of a threadbare Cicero, a philosopher and a prince of rhetoric. Later he introduces the harsh image of a well-covered dunghill and contrasts the two images to evoke the paradoxes of the society in which he lives. The disenchanted *pícaro* has therefore to adapt to the rules of society and learn various techniques to change role and identity. This entails, in the first place, being able to disguise himself according to different situations:

'I joined a young rascal ...<sup>20</sup> [He] took off ... the decent suit that he was wearing ... then he took a very torn shirt and a doublet with thousands of holes in it out of a sack and put them on; and [he put on] a pair of trousers with windows [i.e.

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<sup>19</sup> Mateo Alemán, *Guzmán de Alfarache*, ed. Luis Gómez Canseco (Madrid: RAE, 2012), pp. 553-554: 'Tal juzgan a cada uno como lo ven tratado. Si fueres un Cicerón, mal vestido, serás mal Cicerón; menospreciarante y aun juzgarante loco; que no hay otra cordura ni otra ciencia en el mundo, sino mucho tener y más tener. Lo que aquesto no fuere, no corre. No te darán silla ni lado, cuando te vieren desplumado, aunque te vean revestido de virtudes y ciencia. Ni se hace ya caso de los tales. Empero, si bien representares, aunque seas un muladar, como estés cubierto de yerba, se vendrán a recrear en tí ... Ya no se juzgan almas ni más de aquello que ven los ojos. Ninguno se pone a considerar lo que sabes, sino lo que tienes; no tu virtud, sino la te tu bolsa; y de tu bolsa, no lo que tiene, sino lo que gastas.'

<sup>20</sup> *La vida y hechos de Estebanillo González, hombre de buen humor. Compuesto por el mismo*, eds Antonio Carreira and Jesús Antonio Cid (Barcelona: Catedra, 2012, 2nd ed., first published 1992), Vol. 1, p. 184: 'Júnteme en esta villa con un mozuelo de nación francés, que andaba bribando por todo el reino y era uno de los más taimados y diestros en aquel oficio.'

tears] ... and a variety of mending and patching of different colours ... I obeyed his orders recognizing his authority, because he was the inventor of such a picaresque plot.’<sup>21</sup>

The initiation to the picaresque life cannot be achieved without learning the principles of rhetoric as applied to beggary:

‘I was taught how to beg using a different tone of voice and different words, according to the person addressed ... I was taught how to arouse compassion in the rich, pity in common people, and how to incite pious people ... how to induce vomiting ... what gestures I should do, how to raise my voice, how to choose the right time and place, and what kind of people I can pester once or several times.’<sup>22</sup>

At the end of the process, the character becomes one of those experienced ‘Quintilians of mendicity, who have invented more rhetoric and discourses to beg than the real Quintilian to speak well.’<sup>23</sup> The rogue’s progress takes place through experience, for ‘experience is the mother of everything, and nothing requires

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<sup>21</sup> *La vida y hechos de Estebanillo González* (2012), Vol. 1, pp. 186-187: ‘Llegamos cerca de Évora Ciudad ... y antes de entrar en ella se desnudó mi Juan francés un razonable vestido que llevaba; y quedándose en carnes abrió una talega de motilón mercenario, sacó della una camisa hecha pedazos, la cual se puso, y un juboncillo blanco con dos mil aberturas y bandoleras, y un calzón con ventanaje de alcázar, con variedad de remiendos y diferencias de colores ... Obedecíle y hice lo que me mandaba, reconociendo superioridad, por ser él autor de aquella maquina picaril.’

<sup>22</sup> Alemán (2012), pp. 260-261: ‘Guiábame otro mozuelo de la tierra, diestro en ella, de que comencé a tomar liciones. Este me enseñó a los principios cómo había de pedir a los unos y a los otros; que no a todos ha de ser con un tono ni con un arenga. Los hombres no quieren plagas, sino una demanda llana, por amor de Dios; las mujeres tienen devoción a la Virgen María, a nuestra Señora del Rosario ... Enseñome cómo había de compadecer a los ricos, lastimar a los comunes y obligar a los devotos ... Diome ciertos avisos que en cuanto viva no me serán olvidados; entre los cuales fue uno con que soltaba tres o cuatro pliegues al estómago sin que me parase perjuicio por mucho que comiese. Enseñome a trocar a trascantón ... qué gesto había de hacer, los puntos que había de subir la voz, las horas a que a cada parte había de acudir ... a quién había de importunar y a quién pedir solo una vez.’

<sup>23</sup> González (1988), p. 266: ‘Y, si lo puedo decir, repeer estoy con los bribones que, hechos Quintilianos de la mendiguez, han inventado más retóricas y arengas para pedir que él para saber bien hablar.’

experience more than our art [i.e. picaresque life].<sup>24</sup> Such self-training, which ensures the physical and social survival of the *pícaro*, is acquired and improved through an incessant refinement of the senses. To my knowledge, sensorial experience within picaresque literature has been paid little attention.<sup>25</sup> The theme is extremely complex, for it intertwines with the related topic of appearance and essence. The examples that we can draw from the literature are numerous, but it will suffice to quote some of them to give a significant taste. An important, and overlooked, passage from Alemán's *Guzmán* will enable us to have an understanding of this issue:

‘One of our freedoms is that of the five senses. There is no-one who enjoys the senses more than the poor. I will start with taste: there is no pan that we do not smell, food that we do not try, or banquet in which we do not participate ... As to hearing, no-one hear better than the poor ... For apparently we are not interested in anything, no-one suspects that we are listening to them ... As to sight, we can use it without being noticed ... And what about smell? No-one can smell better than we can. In fact we are called sniffers of other people's houses ... We stay at the crossroads and wait for the odours emanating from the stores to penetrate our eyes and nostrils. Finally, touch. If you think that we cannot touch anything good you are fooling yourself ... In fact the poor touch and enjoy things as good as the rich do.’<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Segunda parte de la vida del pícaro Guzmán de Alfarache* (2007), p. 291: ‘Todo esto se alcanza con la experiencia, que es madre de todo, y no hay cosa que más necesite experiencia que este nuestro arte.’

<sup>25</sup> To my knowledge, the only reference to the relationship between senses in the picaresque literature and scientific knowledge is to be found in Maravall (1988), and Santucci (1992), particularly pp. 29-42.

<sup>26</sup> Alemán (2012), pp. 276-277: ‘La otra libertad es de los cinco sentidos ¿Quién hay hoy en el mundo que más licenciada ni francamente goce dellos que un pobre, con mayor seguridad ni gusto? Y pues he dicho gusto, comenzaré por él, pues no hay olla que no espumemos, manjar de que no probemos, ni banquete de donde no nos quepa parte ... El oír, ¿quién oye más que el pobre? Que, como desinteresados en todo género de cosas, nadie se recela que los oiga ... aunque sea caso importante ... Nada nos fué secreto, y de lo público mil veces lo sabíamos mejor que todos, porque oíamos tratar de ello en más partes que todos. Pues el ver, ¡cuán francamente lo podíamos ejercitar sin ser notados ni haber quien lo pidiese ni impidiese! ... El oler, ¿quién pudo más que nosotros, pues nos llaman olores de casas ajenas? ... Y si otro oler queríamos, nos íbamos a una esquina de las calles donde se venden

This excerpt, which I have dramatically shortened compared to the full version, is a real manifesto of the picaresque life. The fact that the character can use his senses from afar and without being noticed indicates his social isolation, while the reference to an alleged freedom of the senses in reality conceals a bitter irony. There are some things that he learns by hearsay and that make him an extremely modern and up-to-date character:

‘Sight is said to be the noblest among the bodily senses, and this is the reason why philosophers grant it honourable epithets. I have heard that Aristotle said that sight is the most loyal friend to science ...’<sup>27</sup>

Considering sight to be the sense best allied to science and knowledge was an old commonplace of philosophy and literature, which was reiterated by Galileo Galilei and other seventeenth-century scholars. The reason for the alleged primacy of sight lies partly in the invention of new optical tools and partly in the advancement of the studies on the mechanism of sight. Yet, as I will clarify later, in the seventeenth-century the scholarly discussion on the senses was much more complex so that some disciplines (botany, medicine and so on) necessarily required the use of the other senses for their investigations (see Chapter 2). Picaresque literature did address the debate on the relationship between sensory experience and knowledge, but it translated it from the realm of science to the realm of the purely pragmatic and existential. The modernity

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estas cosas y allí estábamos al olor de los coletos y guantes aderezados hasta que los polvillos nos entraban por los ojos y narices. El tacto querrás decir que nos faltaba, que jamás pudo llegar a nuestras manos cosa buena. Pues desengañaos, ignorantes ... Los pobres tocan y gozan cosas tan buenas como los ricos.’

<sup>27</sup> Francisco López de Úbeda, *Libro de entretenimiento de la pícara Justina*, ed. David Mañero Lozano (Madrid: Cátedra, 2012), p. 728: ‘Dicen que la vista es el sentido más noble de los cinco corporales, y por esta causa los filósofos le dan muy honrosos epítetos. Y he oído que Aristóteles dijo ser la vista la más noble criada del alma y la más fiel amiga de las ciencias.’

of the *pícaro* lies in his ability to keep up with the times and extol the role of the senses as a whole. The senses in the picaresque genre are not imbued with any metaphysical tone inasmuch as they are strictly connected with practical life, such as the search for food, which often has tragicomic outcomes. Some examples will clarify what the senses represent in the life of the *pícaro*. Let us see what happens when the perpetually hungry Guitón Onofre, protagonist of the novel of the same name, is asked to look after a panful of food:

“The devil ... started tempting me ... and provoking my sense of smell with celestial odours. The smell, in turn, affected my sense of taste. I am making this clear because I do not want you to blame taste alone. I doubt that Eve was tempted by the apple as much as I was. I resorted to tricks and stratagems to restrain myself: I made the sign of the Cross, I recited the Salve Regina, the Credo and the Ave Maria, the Pater Noster, and the Commandments ten times. I did not have anything left except the Works of Mercy.”<sup>28</sup>

The passage is particularly significant not only for its reference to the senses, but because it shows a typical procedure that mingles comic and serious issues together in order to de-sanctify religious subjects. If on the one hand we have the contrast between ‘devil tempting with celestial odours’, toward the end of the passage the

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<sup>28</sup> González (1988), p. 86: ‘Pero el diablo, que es enemigo del sosiego y cuidadoso en el perseguirnos, comenzóme a echar varillas de tentación y a ponerme en el olfato un apetito insaciable y deseo desordenado, de manera que todo se me iba en poner y quitar la cobertera y en recibir aquellos vapores celestiales, que en aquel tránsito me parecían mejor que los bálsamos aromáticos ni perfumes odoríferos, de tal suerte que este sentido, sin duda por sus vías, quiso contaminar al del gusto, siquiera porque a él no se le atribuyese toda la culpa de este delicto. Estoy por decir que dudo que fuese Eva tan tentada por la manzana, y aun que usé yo de más ardides y estratagemas para no incurrir en aquella torpeza: cruces hice, salves recé, credos y avemarías, pues el paternoster y los mandamientos a veinte veces. No me quedó cosa en la cartilla: hasta las obras de misericordia.’

narrator uses the forbidden food to compare his temptation with that of a biblical character, Eve, and his incantation reaches a climax with the list of prayers as an antidote for his gluttony. The religious satire, which in this case is explicit, is more subtle in other cases, which I will illustrate briefly. One of Onofre's housemates arranges a disgusting prank at the expenses of the latter. He eats the sausages in a dish and then defecates in it, knowing that Onofre will wake up at night to furtively consume the food. As Onofre is in the darkness, he has to rely on touch alone:

'I was unlucky because it [i.e. the food] was solid and my touch perceived it as it were the real sausage ... Therefore, I bit into it with a good appetite ... It was like a theological act, but in name only. Then I recognised the substance ... and I started to spit ... My housemate lighted a candle and raised it saying: "Ecce lumen Christi ..."'<sup>29</sup>

Onofre takes the prank lightly for, 'according to the philosopher Bias, impatience, and not adversities, harm the man.'<sup>30</sup>

The satire in this example is more complex and irreverent than in the previous one. The substitution of food with excrement becomes a theological act, which is nothing less than the Transubstantiation.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the action takes place in the dark until someone barges into the room holding the 'light of Christ'. Finally, betrayed by his sense of touch, Onofre finds comfort in none other than the philosopher Bias, one

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<sup>29</sup> González (1988), pp. 128-129: 'Mi desgracia fue que aun hubo de ser dura porque en el tacto tuviese apariencia de verdadera morcilla ... mordí con gusto, y al fin gusté de la morcilla. Fue mi boca necesaria de los excrementos alfonsinos. No parece sino acto de teología en el nombre. Cuando reconocí la especia, que no olía a gengibre, comencé de escupir ... Alonso, que no estaba descuidado, más tardó a sentirme que a encender la luz, y, con ella levantada, salió diciendo: -*Ecce lumen Christi*, señor duende.'

<sup>30</sup> González (1988), p. 130: 'Acabada esta desventura -que lo fue para mí; aunque no me quiero llamar desdichado pues tuve sufrimiento en la desdicha, que, según dijo el filósofo Bías, no matan a los hombres las adversidades, sino la impaciencia que tenemos en ellas.'

<sup>31</sup> Catholic dogma according to which, during the mass, the wine and the consecrated bread (the 'host') are transformed into the blood and body of Christ.

of the seven sages of antiquity. In the next example, Guzmán de Alfarache, the anti-hero of the apocryphal novel of the same name, comes across two prostitutes in a poorly lit and unknown place:

‘I came across two women ... As I was inexperienced ... I took one of them by the hand ... But I was disappointed by such a flabby hand and skinny arm ... by such an unpleasant smell, which would have scared away a person more experienced than I am. Yet I heard such a pleasant voice that I thought I was going to see something never seen before. Therefore, I thought that touch and smell were misleading me and that I should rely only on hearing, which is my sincere and good friend. My eyes could not be of much help in the dark ... in the end I decided not to go ahead for I understood that my ears were misleading me ...’<sup>32</sup>

The unexpected situation engenders surprise and doubt as to the reliability of the senses. In short succession, touch, smell, sight and hearing confuse the character about what to do, until he makes a decision that saves him from a very awkward affair. Daily life, which exposes the character to humiliation and embarrassing circumstances, teaches him the importance of personal experience, and leads him to criticise those who rely only on hearsay or bookish knowledge:

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<sup>32</sup> *Segunda parte de la vida del pícaro Guzmán de Alfarache* (2007), pp. 417-419: ‘una noche entre otras, me sucedió un caso donoso. Érame yo de tan mal gusto, que toda cosa que tuviese tocas y faldas largas me parecía la diosa Venus; al embocar por los caños de Alcalá ... tópome dos mujeres ... ; yo, que tenía poca experiencia de las cosas de aquel cuartel ... asgo la una por la mano ... me maravillé mucho de una mano tan flaca y caliente; un brazo seco, sin ningún adorno; un olor de enfermedad de muchos días, que a otro que yo hiciera huir a más de paso; pero, como sentía una voz tan viva, un pico tan gracioso ... me prometía que era una cosa nunca vista ... ; pensé que el tacto y olfato me querían engañar, y que sólo tenía el oír verdadero y buen amigo. Los ojos, en aquella ocasión, no eran de provecho por la oscuridad ... y, así, aunque yo era tan voluntario y tenía el apetito tan irritado, y lo que podía entender me engañaba de tal manera los oídos, y no pensaba ser engañado en el precio, ... no determiné de averiguallo todo.’

“The tendency of the present philosophy is to say and to acknowledge things that come from scholarly authorities, not only in the speculative field but also in the moral one ... Theologians accept what Thomas Aquinas said without batting an eyelid ... Similarly, physicians say: "this is what Hippocrates and Galen maintained ...”<sup>33</sup>

The *pícaro* does not despise philosophy in itself or its representatives, inasmuch as he himself leads a kind of philosophical life. He rather mocks a society that is based on consolidated hierarchical structures and cultural conventions. The marginalised character, accordingly, has his own personal and original view on life:

“The philosophical life we profess, which means living without any possessions, is a very subtle invention ... the same as Christ and his Apostles professed, although with a different purpose ... In the old days, the professors of such moral philosophy would not refrain from begging using the art of persuasion ... Our leader, the great Diogenes the Cynic, used to beg by saying: "If you have not given to anyone yet, start giving to me. If you have already given, give to me too".”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Segunda parte de la vida del pícaro Guzmán de Alfarache* (2007), pp. 500-501: ‘No carece hoy el mundo desta manera de filosofía; las más cosas que se afirman y saben estriban en la autoridad de quien las dijo, no sólo en lo especulativo, sino en lo moral ... Un teólogo os alega que es sentencia de Santo Tomás, y sin poner en ello dificultad ... Lo mismo los médicos, llegando a decir un aforismo: así lo dice Hipócrates, o así lo entiende Galeno.’

<sup>34</sup> *Segunda parte de la vida del pícaro Guzmán de Alfarache* (2007), pp. 291-292: ‘la vida filosófica que profesamos de vivir sin propios es una invención muy sutil ... Cristo Nuestro Señor y sus apóstoles lo profesaron, aunque con diferente modo ... Y no penséis vosotros ... que antiguamente se pedía con poca energía y no procuraban los profesores desta filosofía moral que el modo de la petición indujese y persuadiese a dar; que el grande Diógenes Cínico, caudillo nuestro, se cuenta que pedía diciendo: "Si no habéis dado aún, empezad por mí; y, si habéis dado a otro, dadme a mí también".’



He extolls the picaresque life, an allegedly frugal existence comprised of wisdom and knowledge, by comparing it to the life of the Apostles. Soon afterwards, Diogenes, the philosopher who despised material goods and possessions, becomes the leader of beggary. Yet the alternation of seriousness and irony is such that it is not always possible to understand the real tenor of the character and what he is driving at. When the discourse does seem to become lyrical or thoughtful, it dramatically engenders puzzlement in the reader:

“Whatever happens, it is better to know than to possess. In fact, if luck leaves you, knowledge never abandons you. While material goods dwindle, science [i.e. knowledge] increases. Worthier of praise is the little that the wise man knows, rather than the abundance that the rich possess ... Science is like an opencast mine and you can dip into its great treasures ... The wise man overcomes every obstacle, while the simpleton succumbs ... Every man has to live to know and to know to live well. Such a man’s goods are everlasting and stable ... If you ask me: "Where are you going, Guzmán, with all this science? Why do you praise it? What do you aim to do with it?" In faith, my brother, the only science that I have studied is that of getting food.”<sup>35</sup>

As I have mentioned before, the incessant search for food causes trouble for the protagonist. Whether he participates in huge banquets or eats miserable leftovers,

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<sup>35</sup> Alemán (2012), pp. 214-215: ‘En qualquier acaecimiento, más vale saber que haber; porque, si la Fortuna se rebelare, nunca la ciencia desampara al hombre. La hacienda se gasta, la ciencia crece, y es de mayor estimación lo poco que el sabio sabe que lo mucho que el rico tiene ... Ella [la ciencia] es riquísima mina descubierta, de donde los que quieren pueden sacar grandes tesoros ... En los pasos peligrosos, en los casos graves de fortuna, el sabio se tiene y pasa, y el simple en el llano tropieza y cae ... y así debe desear todo hombre vivir para saber y saber para bien vivir. Son sus bienes perpetuos, estables, fijos y seguros. Preguntarame: “¿Dónde va Guzmán tan cargado de ciencia? ¿Qué piensa hacer con ella? ¿Para qué fin la loa con tan largas arengas y engrandece con tales veras? ¿Qué nos quiere decir? ¿Adónde ha de parar?” Por mi fe, hermano mío, a dar con ella en un esportón, que fue la ciencia que estudié para ganar de comer.’

the food is usually described in plenty of detail, which is often very unpleasant. The following excerpt – in which the young Lazarillo serves the second master, a stingy priest that starves the poor boy – is a good example of the representation of food in the picaresque genre:

‘He used to send me to buy [a sheep’s head] ... He would cook it and eat the eyes, the tongue, the nape, the brains and the meat in the jawbones, and would give me the gnawed bones saying: "Take them, eat, enjoy, for yours is the world: you enjoy a better life than the Pope himself!".’<sup>36</sup>

The taste of the picaresque for the disagreeable and disgusting reaches great heights and achieves extraordinary results in the grotesque descriptions of the strange characters that regularly barge into the lives of the protagonists. Particularly ingenious and notorious is the description of Dr Goat (‘licenciado Cabra’), the educator of Pablos, the protagonist of Quevedo’s *The Swindler*:

‘[Dr Goat] was as slim as a peashooter ... he had a small head ... and his eyes were so dark and hollow as to seem a merchant’s shop; the nose ‘devoured’ by cold sores (not the pox, of course; it costs too much to catch that). His whiskers were pale, scared stiff of his starving mouth which was threatening to gnaw them. I do not know how many of his teeth he was missing ... His neck was as long as an ostrich’s and his Adam’s apple was as prominent as if it wanted to go and look for food. His arms were

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<sup>36</sup> *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1997), p. 50: ‘enviábame por una ... [cabeza de carnero] ... Aquélla le cocía, y comía los ojos y la lengua y el cogote y sesos y la carne que en las quijadas tenía, y dábame todos los huesos roídos, y dábamelos en el plato, diciendo: - Toma, come, triunfa, que para ti es el mundo. Mejor vida tienes que el Papa!’ I have slightly modified the translation of Michael Alpert, *Two Picaresque Novels*, (New York: Penguin, 1969), p. 39.

withered and his hands were like dried-up vine shoots. His legs looked like the prongs of a fork or a compass.<sup>37</sup>

I have chosen Quevedo's description among the numerous passage available both because he is particularly ingenious in devising grotesque figures, and because Ribera achieved similar results in his grotesque drawings [Figs. 6-7]. Nevertheless, this propensity to debase and 'dismantle' the human body and reconstruct it through comparisons with objects and animals is a leitmotif that I have traced in almost all the novels mentioned and also in some Neapolitan novels (see also Chapters 3.2 and 3.3). If a taste for the grotesque and deformity might lead to laughter, in other cases the brutality of some descriptions escalates into such crudeness that it does not leave room for irony. During his peregrinations, the *pícaro* comes across despicable individuals who are capable of the cruellest actions. It is not infrequent for the reader to find detailed descriptions of the tortures which were inflicted on children, who were maimed from birth in order to be employed or 'rented' to gangs of exploiters as alms-seekers, as has also been confirmed by historical sources.<sup>38</sup> The dramatic effect of such accounts is enhanced for they arrive unexpectedly, bluntly marking the passage from a light moment to an extremely serious one. In the end, the cynical *pícaro* knows that life is a

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<sup>37</sup> I quote here almost the entire passage from Quevedo (2011): pp. 15-16: 'Él era un clérigo cerbatana ... una cabeza pequeña; los ojos ... tan hundidos y oscuros, que era buen sitio el suyo para tiendas de mercaderes; la nariz, entre Roma y Francia, porque se le había comido de unas búas de resfriado, que aun no fueron de vicio porque cuestan dinero; las barbas, descoloridas de miedo de la boca vecina, que, de pura hambre, parecía que amenazaba a comérselas; los dientes, le faltaban no sé cuántos ... el gaznate largo como de avestruz, con una nuez tan salida, que parecía se iba a buscar de comer forzada de la necesidad; los brazos, secos; las manos, como un manojo de sarmientos cada una. Mirado de medio abajo, parecía tenedor u compás, con dos piernas largas y flacas.' I have adapted the English translation of Alpert (1969), pp. 93-94.

<sup>38</sup> Some examples in: Alemán (2012), p. 280; *Segunda parte de la vida del pícaro Guzmán de Alfarache* (2007), p. 304, footnote 171, and p. 308, footnote 183; Carlos García, *La desordenada codicia de los bienes ajenos*, ed. Victoriano Roncero López (Pamplona: EUNSA, 1998, 2nd ed., first published 1996), p. 118 and footnote 14 for further bibliography. An historical source on the subject, is, among others, Cristóbal Pérez de Herrera, *Discursos del amparo de los legítimos pobres, y reduccion de los fingidos, y de la fundacion y principio de los Albergues destos Reynos, y amparo de la milicia delllos* (Madrid: Luis Sanchez, 1598), cc. 6r-v.

constant alternation of tragic and comic. In closing the apocryphal *Guzmán de Alfarache*, the protagonist explains the differences between tragedy and comedy to the reader. The first stages the vicissitudes and afflictions of noble characters and aims for the catharsis of the recipient, while the second stages the misadventures of low-born people, thus provoking the recipient's laughter. Guzmán explains that the two arts are traditionally depicted as two philosophers of antiquity, a weeping Heraclitus and a smiling Democritus. The death of a tragic hero arouses pity. Yet, Guzmán concludes spitefully, the death of low-characters in the comedy, wherever it happens, leads to laughter for they are redundant.<sup>39</sup>

Perpetually threadbare, perpetually in search of food, the *pícaro*-philosopher starts his initiation in life between dives and brothels, between lashings of counterfeit wine and mouldy food, in the company of assassins, cardsharps, prostitutes and scroungers. The background of his peregrinations is populated with every sort of individual who seeks to conceal their real social status, such as well-off beggars and penniless though contemptuous knights, representatives of that Spanish society in continual flux and on the brink of catastrophe. As Geremek pointed out, when a country is impoverished, 'the simulation of a social status takes over'.<sup>40</sup> The two-faced *pícaro* goes through the world turned upside down, now showing his laughter, now his weeping.

During this chapter, I have several times mentioned the use of rhetorical language, which picaresque authors employ as a means of persuasion, deception, or

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<sup>39</sup> Guzmán's Aristotelian division between tragedy and comedy is drawn from Alonso López Pinciano, *Philosophía antigua poética* (1596). For the entire passage see *Segunda parte de la vida del pícaro Guzmán de Alfarache* (2007), pp. 522-524; for the reference to Pinciano see *Ibid.*, p. 522, note 430.

<sup>40</sup> Geremek (1988), p. 304: 'Quando vengono a mancare i mezzi materiali, subentra la simulazione di uno stato sociale: il romanzo picaresco mostra dei cavalieri che donano generosamente, ma chiedono l'elemosina, cavalieri che assumono servitori, ma non hanno da mangiare.'

distraction. This rhetorical process consists of at least two procedures, of which the first concerns the way in which the text is structured, the second the use of figures of speech. Let us consider some examples. The picaresque novel is, as I have already said, in autobiographical form. Its peculiarity is that the autobiography does not develop in a linear fashion, for it is constantly interspersed with minor episodes – proverbs, maxims, common places, inflated descriptions, sub-episodes and so on – that make it extremely fragmentary. This procedure is, on the one hand, a strategy that keeps the reader in suspense and keeps his curiosity alive. On the other, it entails the use of pitiful anecdotes that aim at winning the goodwill of the reader and that prevent him from judging the protagonists' future misdeeds too harshly. The second procedure entails the use of figures of speech that reflect the personality of the *pícaro*. Among the many employed in the genre, I have chosen those which, besides characterizing the majority of the novels, lend themselves to transformation into visual figures and as such can be traced into Ribera's paintings. One of the most common figures of speech is the similitude, of which we have already seen some examples in this chapter. The *pícaro* and the minor impostors that populate the stories are compared with biblical figures, saints or philosophers. The use of this figure is consistent with the elusive identity of the protagonist, who in a sense reflects the characteristics of real beggars as perceived by society. Connected with the problem of the identity, or rather the identities, of the protagonist is the depiction of the *pícaro* and of his rags through comparisons with animals, vegetables and other inanimate things, such as food. This procedure, as we will see in detail later (Chapters 3.2 and 3.3), has a destabilizing effect inasmuch as it induces the reader to perceive everything as if it were something else. Moreover, his tattered clothing is described with incredible accuracy and through a process of noun accumulation, which are often connected through asyndeton. This not only brings

about a comic outcome, but also enhances the crescendo-like effect and gives the sensation of being faced with a labyrinthine structure. Another typical trope of the picaresque genre is the use of antithesis, which is employed particularly in religious invocation. God and the Saints are in fact invoked for the fulfilment of the material needs of the *pícaro* at the expense of other individuals, thus recasting the invocations as something like ‘saint’ curses. During the course of this thesis, we will see practical examples that show how Ribera re-employs and enhance those figures that convey deception and irony while keeping the viewer in suspense.

### 1.3 A Neapolitan Picaresque?

At the beginning of this chapter I touched upon the diffusion of picaresque literature across Europe, an issue I now want to expand upon. Although the breadth of circulation of Spanish Golden-Age literature has been questioned in the past, the most recent scholarship has proven otherwise.<sup>41</sup> The invaluable research conducted by the Italian Hispanist Alberto Martino has, indeed, shed new light on the topic. The Italian scholar has confirmed the diffusion of the major picaresque works in Italy, in England and across German and French-speaking areas of Europe, highlighting differences between translations, adaptations and cases of plagiarism. Moreover, he has analysed how censorship affected the release and reissue of some novels both in the original and in foreign languages.<sup>42</sup> If we narrow down the field to Italy, we can better understand the reason for the success of such literature. Cultural and linguistic affinities did facilitate the circulation of Hispanic works in Italy, but there are also other reasons. Firstly, Naples and Milan, two of the most important and populated cities of the country, were under Spanish dominion. Naples was part of the Spanish Kingdom between 1503-1707, while the Duchy of Milan was under Spanish rule between 1535-1714.<sup>43</sup> Secondly, we know that Spanish works (including picaresque novels) were printed in Italy – in descending order, in Venice, Milan and Rome – both in the original

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<sup>41</sup> Doubts have been expressed by Keith Whinnom, 'The problem of the 'best-seller' in Spanish Golden-Age Literature', *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 57, n. 3 (1980), pp. 189-198.

<sup>42</sup> See Alberto Martino, *Il Lazarillo de Tormes e la sua diffusione in Europa* (Pisa; Rome: Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali, 1999), Vol. 2, *La ricezione*; Idem, *La metamorfosi del pícaro. La ricezione della picaresca nell'area di lingua tedesca (1555/1562-1753). Saggi di storia sociale e comparata della letteratura* (Pisa; Rome: Fabrizio Serra editore, 2013) (the essay contains, despite the title, important information on the reception of the picaresque novel in Italy and France); Idem, *Per una sociologia empirica della letteratura del Siglo de Oro. Tentativo di ricostruzione del contesto sociale, 'ideologico' e letterario della Pícaro Justina* (Pisa; Rome: Fabrizio Serra editore, 2010), Vol. 2, pp. 785-787. I have also drawn this data from Eduart Toda y Güell, *Bibliografia espanyola d'Italia: dels orígens de la impremta fins a l'any 1900* (Castell de Sant Miquel d'Escornalbou; Barcelona: Vidal-Güell, 1927-1931).

<sup>43</sup> Naples was already in the Spanish sphere of influence from 1442, when it was conquered by Alfonso V of Aragon, then Alfonso I of Naples.

language and in translation. The circulation of picaresque literature in Italian was due mainly to the activity of the Lombard Hispanist Barezzo Barezzi, a Venice-based printer who translated, adapted and extended the original novels. Moreover, he purged them from potentially heretical passages, although he was not always able to spot these.<sup>44</sup> Finally, we can further narrow down the field to the Kingdom of Naples, where Ribera spent most of his life (1616-1652). If Benedetto Croce pointed out (in 1891) the presence in Naples of Spanish theatrical companies that performed both for the natives and for the colonizers,<sup>45</sup> current research has shown the widespread bilingualism among the natives in certain areas of the Kingdom and a concrete interest in Spanish literature.<sup>46</sup> There is, in this regard, an example that is particularly meaningful for my research, for it might lead to promising results. The National Library of Naples holds a seventeenth-century manuscript entitled *Myrobiblon* (*Review of Books*), by the Neapolitan scholar and priest Antonio Matina (? – 1701).<sup>47</sup> The manuscript contains short bibliographic descriptions of around a thousand and two hundred prose and verse books in alphabetical order. Each entry is accompanied by a short summary and a comment. From analysis of the text, it seems that Matina owned, among other things, works by the most important Spanish writers from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century in both Spanish and Italian, including the major picaresque novels. Matina also owned works by the great Neapolitan writers of the time, such as Giovan Battista Della Porta, Giambattista Basile and Giulio Cesare Cortese, whom I

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<sup>44</sup> See Elisa Aragone, 'Barezzi Barezzo, stampatore e ispanista del Seicento', *Rivista di letterature moderne e comparate* 14, n. 4 (1961), pp. 284-312.

<sup>45</sup> Benedetto Croce, *I teatri di Napoli. Secolo XV-XVIII* (Naples: Luigi Pierro, 1891).

<sup>46</sup> See Encarnación Sánchez García ed., *Lingua spagnola e cultura ispanica a Napoli fra Rinascimento e Barocco: testimonianze a stampa* (Naples: Pironti, 2013).

<sup>47</sup> *Myrobiblon seu de libris perlectis iudicium et syllabus auctor Antonius Matina canonicus Neapolitanus*, ms. XIII H 64, Biblioteca Nazionale, Naples. The list is numbered and is in alphabetical order by authors, or titles in case of anonymous works. The manuscript contains three indexes in alphabetical order by authors, by titles and by titles of 'opere drammatiche'.



will discuss later. Moreover, Matina was interested in art and he apparently drafted an essay on the life of Neapolitan painters, although it was never published.<sup>48</sup> His interest is confirmed by an obscure poem by Giuseppe Campanile who was a member of the Accademia degli Oziosi (Academy of the Idlers), a Neapolitan cultural society whose affiliates were prestigious European scholars.<sup>49</sup> Campanile's poem is dedicated to the Neapolitan priest and praises Jusepe de Ribera's works displayed in the houses of some friends of Campanile ('We celebrate Jusepe de Ribera's brush and discuss some of his works that we can see in the houses of various friends of the writer', 1666).<sup>50</sup> In the last two strophes, the poet urges Matina to finally immortalize the name of his 'departed friend' Ribera (died in 1652), addressed to as 'the Spanish Zeusi'.<sup>51</sup> The verses tell us that Ribera was acquainted with members of the Neapolitan cultural societies and sheds a light on lesser known aspects of the cultural context in which Ribera spent most of his life.

Some scholars have wondered about the possible existence of a genuine Italian picaresque novel.<sup>52</sup> The question is particularly challenging, but I will be able to give a possible answer only after having examined some themes and motifs of this alleged

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<sup>48</sup> It has been surmised that the Neapolitan biographer Bernardo De Dominici got hold of the manuscript and used it in his *Vite de' pittori* (1742-43). See Giorgio Fulco, 'Il diario personale di un consumatore barocco di letteratura a Napoli: Antonio Matina e lo spoglio critico della sua biblioteca', *Rendiconti dell'Accademia di archeologia, lettere e belle arti di Napoli* 51 (1976), p. 201 and bibliography in footnote 5.

<sup>49</sup> See Girolamo De Miranda, *Una quiete operosa: forma e pratiche dell'Accademia napoletana degli Oziosi, 1611-1645* (Naples: Fridericiana editrice universitaria, 2000).

<sup>50</sup> 'Si celebra il pennello di Giuseppe di Rivera, e si discorre sopra alcune pitture di quello, che si vedono in case di varii amici dell'autore', Giuseppe Campanile, *Poesie liriche* [1666] (Naples: Domenico Antonio Parrino, 1674), pp. 154-155.

<sup>51</sup> Campanile (1674), p. 155: 'Antonio, tu se hai di eternar desio / gli avanzi illustri del Amico estinto, / Su [pi]glia l'Arpa. ch'invidia oggi Aracinto, / ch'emula di Permessio il maggior Dio. // Avido tra' colori, / io non so come / Ozioso ne stai: alza l'ingegno; / lascia il Pennello. Il tuo canoro legno / può di Rivera immortalare il nome.' Campanile also mentions some of Ribera's works.

<sup>52</sup> Ezio Raimondi, *Anatomie secentesce* (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1966), pp. 73-86; Raffaele Sirri, *Teatro e letteratura teatrale nel Cinquecento. G. B. Della Porta* (Naples: De Simone, 1982), pp. 120-141.

Italian picaresque. The understanding of this aspect will help us clarify to what extent the cultural societies of the Spanish Naples inspired Ribera's picaresque mode.

In Italy, as in other European countries, there was a copious production of rogue literature, such as legislative measures, treatises and didactic pamphlets which were halfway between eyewitness testimonies and pure fiction. At the end of the sixteenth century the friar Tommaso Garzoni published *La Piazza universale delle professioni del mondo, e nobili e ignobili* (*The Universal Place of all the Professions of the World, Both Noble and Vile*), a successful volume that includes a chapter on every sort of rogue.<sup>53</sup> In 1621, the Dominican friar Raffaele Frianoro (pseudonym of Giacinto Nobili), published the popular *Il libro dei vagabondi* (*The Book of the Wanderers*), a sort of revision or plagiarism of an older pamphlet on the same topic, the fifteenth-century *Lo speculum cerretanorum* (*The Encyclopaedia of Charlatans*) by Teseo Pini.<sup>54</sup> Garzoni and Frianoro's moralizing books aim to alert gullible people to scoundrels, and therefore list different typologies of wrongdoers, their jargon and the expedients employed to take advantage of people. From time to time, the two authors try to break the monotony of the lists with a more narrative style. Very different is the aim of *L'Arte delle forfanteria* (*The Art of Roguery*, 1622) by Giulio Cesare Croce.<sup>55</sup> The Bolognese storyteller Croce stages the story of the baker Gian Pitocco (John Beggar), who opts for a more exciting life and pretends to be in turn a survivor of the war, an invalid, a quack and so on in order to scrounge money. Croce does not take any stand regarding roguery. He rather acts as an observer who describes, in ironic tones, a social

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<sup>53</sup> Tommaso Garzoni, *La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo, e nobili e ignobili. Nuovamente formata* ... (Venice: Giovanni Battista Somascho, 1586), Chapter 'De guidoni, o furfanti, o calchi', pp. 590-594. The text was first published in 1585.

<sup>54</sup> Raffaele Frianoro, *Il vagabondo, ovvero sferza de' bianti e vagabondi. Opera nuova, nella quale si scoprono le fraudi, malitie, et inganni di coloro che vanno girando il mondo a spese altrui* ... (Viterbo: [s. n.], 1621). Both Frianoro's and Pini's texts are in Camporesi (2003).

<sup>55</sup> Giulio Cesare Croce, *L'arte della forfantaria* (Ferrara; Bologna: Bartolomeo Cochi, 1622).

phenomenon of the time, that is the renunciation of a socially acceptable work in favour of a despised and blameworthy lifestyle. The artists's biographer Carlo Cesare Malvasia describes, in his *Vite de' pittori bolognesi* (*Life of Bolognese Painters*, 1678), how the painter Lionello Spada had an argument with some friends as they refused to believe what Friarioro had written in his *Book of the Wanderers*. Spada, therefore, avails himself of those expedients and disguises revealed by Friarioro and acts in turn as a mendicant, a cripple and so forth in order to mock his friends.<sup>56</sup> The works cited, although they repropose clichés which can be traced in other sources such as Boccaccio's *Decamerone* and Masuccio Salernitano's *Il Novellino*, are the proof of concern about beggary and vagrancy.<sup>57</sup> In any case, such sources, both fictional and non-fictional, propose a series of loose anecdotes, which are not part of a coherent narrative structure.

The scholar Ezio Raimondi wrote, in 1966, that the Italian picaresque novel was a missed opportunity, and suggested that the one who could have turned this pre-narrative material into the creation of a picaresque novel was the Neapolitan Giambattista Basile.<sup>58</sup> Twenty years later Raffaele Sirri suggested the existence of a picaresque background in Giovan Battista Della Porta's plays.<sup>59</sup> Their reference to these two eminent Neapolitan writers, although not underpinned by critical comparisons, is extremely significant as it brings us back to the context of Spanish Naples. As I have already pointed out, Naples was part of the Spanish Kingdom and contributed originally, especially during the seventeenth century, to the advancement

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<sup>56</sup> Cesare Malvasia, *Scritti originali del Conte Cesare Malvasia spettanti alla sua Felsina pittrice*, ed. Lea Marzocchi (Bologna: Alfa, 1983), pp. 256-257.

<sup>57</sup> See, for example, *Decameron* VI.10 and *Novellino* II.16.

<sup>58</sup> Raimondi (1966), p. 86: 'Occorreva uno scrittore, e forse uno scrittore nuovo, perché la materia del *Vagabondo* potesse convertirsi in racconto, come scoperta di un'esistenza quotidiana, senza eroismi. Ma quello scrittore non venne, e le prove festose di un Basile, per omettere gli esperimenti lunatici di un Frugoni [i. e. Francesco Fulvio Frugoni], non bastano per compensare l'assenza di un romanzo picaresco italiano sulla via del realismo borghese.'

<sup>59</sup> Sirri (1982), Chapters 'Risentimento picaresco' and 'Il macabro e il deforme', pp. 120-141.

of art, literature and philosophy. The profitable exchange of ideas between the colonizers and the conquered did not only take place through the circulation of books and works of art, but also thanks to the presence in Naples of Spanish writers such as Miguel de Cervantes and Francisco de Quevedo (the latter being the author of one the most famous picaresque novels).<sup>60</sup> The presence of Quevedo was extremely profitable both for the Spaniard and for the Neapolitan scholars. If the admiration of the *pícaros* Guzmán de Alfarache and Estebanillo Gonzales as they survey the beauty of Naples repeats commonplaces of the literature of the time,<sup>61</sup> the presence of Quevedo (1616) accounts for the Spaniard's real admiration of Naples and his scholars.<sup>62</sup> This appreciation was reciprocated. The Italian Paolo Antonio di Tàrsia, a companion to Quevedo in the Accademia degli Oziosi, wrote a very flattering biography of his Spanish friend and, interestingly, reported a sonnet written for Quevedo by some Gerónimo Ribera. The latter, as has been suggested, might have been Jusepe de Ribera's brother.<sup>63</sup>

Let us now come to some details. In 1635 and in 1648 *Le Muse napoletane* (*The Neapolitan Muses*), nine eclogues by Basile,<sup>64</sup> and *El Parnaso Español con nueve musas castellanas* (*The Spanish Parnassus with Nine Castilian Muses*) were published, both posthumously.<sup>65</sup> The two works share some features. First of all, a symmetrical

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<sup>60</sup> Francisco Elías de Tejada, *Napoli Spagnola*, Vol. 4, *L'età d'argento nelle Spagne (1598-1621)*, ed. and trans. Gianandrea de Antonellis (Naples: Controcorrente, 2012), pp. 50-55 and pp. 589-600.

<sup>61</sup> *Segunda parte de la vida del pícaro Guzmán de Alfarache* (2007), p. 197; *La vida y hechos de Estebanillo González* (1992), Vol. 2, p. 265.

<sup>62</sup> See again Elías de Tejada (2012), pp. 589-600.

<sup>63</sup> Pablo Antonio de Tàrsia, *Vida de don Francisco Quevedo Villegas* [1663] (Madrid: Sancha, 1792), pp. 76-77. On the identification of Jerónimo de Ribera as a brother to the painter, see José Milicua, 'From Játiva to Naples', in *Jusepe de Ribera 1591- 1652* (1992), p. 16, note 12. For Ribera's family tree, in which a certain 'Jerónimo' appears, see *Il giovane Ribera* (2011), pp. 230-231.

<sup>64</sup> For the sake of clarity, the works by Neapolitan writers which I am going to quote in the next pages were all written in the Neapolitan language.

<sup>65</sup> Quevedo's first edition of the posthumous *Parnaso* (1648) contains in reality only six Muses: *El Parnaso español, monte en dos cumbres dividido, con las nueve musas castellanas* (Madrid: Diego Díaz de la Carrera, 1648). The remaining three were published in 1670: *Las tres musas últimas castellanas, segunda cumbre del Parnaso español* (Madrid: Imprenta Real, 1670).

structure made up of nine parts.<sup>66</sup> In the second place, they both describe the Muses with adjectives that recall the origins of the poets and bring the goddesses from the abstract Parnassus to the concreteness of geographical places. Yet, more than the similarities, the differences are most intriguing. While Quevedo's *Parnassus* remains on a high-content register, Basile's *Muses* witness the bustling Neapolitan life teeming with cardsharps, prostitutes, gambling dens and brothels. Moreover, in the sixth eclogue of *Le Muse Napolitane, Lo giovane n̄zuraturo* (*The Marriageable Young Man*), the elder Cuosemo gives a boy wise suggestions on the virtues that a marriageable woman should have. The satirical eclogue is extremely similar to a passage of a letter by Quevedo (1633), in which the poet describes his ideal woman.<sup>67</sup> Finally, in 1626 Quevedo published *Cuento de Cuentos*, while between 1634-1636 Basile's *Lo cunto de li cunti* was published posthumously. It seems that apart from their titles – both can be translated as *The Tale of Tales* – the works have nothing in common. Quevedo's text is an invective against the abuse of vulgar expressions that were contaminating the Spanish language. In contrast, Basile's contains an extraordinary and calculated collection of vulgarities and obscenities, which rise to the highest artistic dignity. In comparing the structures and some features of the works cited, one has the impression that each of them is a sort of symmetrical reverse of the other, as if the two ingenious writers were challenging each other to a game of mirrors. This short preamble is to say that it is not possible, in my opinion, to show if and which of them influenced the other, or insist on the alleged

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<sup>66</sup> I am indebted to Alessandra Ceribelli, University of Santiago de Compostela, for some important suggestions on the relationship between Quevedo and Basile.

<sup>67</sup> Ferdinando Russo makes a mistake when he says that Quevedo's passage is part of *El Buscón*. See Russo, *Il gran Cortese: note critiche su la poesia napoletana del '600* (Rome: Modernità, 1913), pp. 252-258. The passage is contained, as I have said, is a letter addressed to Ines de Zuñiga y Fonseca, see Quevedo, *Obras completas en prosa*, ed. Luis Astrana Marín (Madrid: Aguilar, 1945, 3rd edition, first published 1932), pp. 1753-1755.

primacy of Quevedo over Basile and other Neapolitan writers, as has been stated.<sup>68</sup> The meeting of Neapolitan and Spanish writers – and in this specific case of Quevedo and Basile, both members of the Academy of the Idlers – might have generated a mutual profitable exchange.

We can now come to the works of several eminent Neapolitan writers of the Golden Age and see if there is any connection to be found with Spanish picaresque literature. Taking as a starting point, and expanding upon, the propositions of the aforementioned Raimondi and Sirri, I will approach this issue by proposing comparisons between Spanish and Neapolitan sources for the first time. We are indebted to some original Neapolitan artists for the admission of lower-class themes to the realm of Italian literature. Giulio Cesare Cortese (c.1570-post 1640) and Giambattista Basile (1566-1632) were close friends. Both led an adventurous life, travelled frequently, wandered from court to court in search of a patron and became acquainted with important Spanish personages residing in Naples.<sup>69</sup> Both lamented the precariousness of their position, made of broken promises and betrayed hopes. If, on the one hand, they denounced the intrigues that characterized the courtly life of Spanish Naples, on the other they had to flatter their current patrons. Basile's aforementioned *Lo cunto* contains fifty fables separated by four interludes, three of which deals with a *topos* of Baroque art, the contrast between appearance and reality, and the triumph of appearance that tricks the sight and our judgmental faculties. The first interlude is entitled *La coppella*, which is a container used to test the purity of

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<sup>68</sup> Benedetto Croce, *Saggi sulla letteratura italiana del Seicento* (Bari: Laterza, 1911), p. 43; Russo (1913), pp. 251-271; Encarnación Juárez, *Italia en la vida y obra de Quevedo* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), pp. 65-66.

<sup>69</sup> On Basile see Michele Prisco ed., *Protagonisti nella storia di Napoli. Grandi napoletani: Giambattista Basile* (Naples: Elio de Rosa, 1995). On Giulio Cesare Cortese see Salvatore Nigro in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 29 (1983), available at <[http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giulio-cesare-cortese\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/>](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giulio-cesare-cortese_(Dizionario-Biografico)/>), consulted 29/03/2016.

precious metal. The narrator says that ‘appearance deceives the sight, puzzles the judgement, and everything is just appearance’.<sup>70</sup> The noble man leads a lifestyle that he cannot afford, the alleged noble gets a fake genealogy, the courtier flatters his patron while plotting behind his back, and the merchant cheats the buyer. All this can be unveiled thanks to the ‘coppella’, which reveals the real nature of people. On the contrary, *La tenta* (*The Dyeing*) of the second interlude allows, according to the concept of the world turned upside down, the distortion of everything thanks to the manipulation of language. Therefore, the thief is called skilful, the fearful cautious, the brave foolish, the squanderer magnanimous, the reserved sociable, the sociable a snooper, and the outspoken a chatterbox. The last interlude, *La vorpara* (*The Hook*), deals again with language as a means of falsification, but this time not of human types but of human actions. Therefore, the bribe is in turn called a gift, present, contribution, tip and so forth.

In *Viaggio di Parnaso* (*The Voyage in Parnassus*, 1621), Giulio Cesare Croce sets out a trip to the Muses’ mount to denounce the condition of the poet-servant in a society that do not appreciate the talent of artists: ‘Poor and naked you who follow the philosophic life! / Virtue does not bring you any money, / wherever you go, you do not get a garlic!’<sup>71</sup> Cortese’s unusual Parnassus is also a sort of gastronomic trip, where food and hunger act as metaphors for the poet in search of stability. Parnassus is, in fact, equipped with kitchens. Phoebus leads Cortese to sumptuous banquets, where the poet, between delicacies and beverages, continues his tirade, incidentally alluding

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<sup>70</sup> Giambattista Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, ed. Michele Rak (Milan: Garzanti, 2013, 9th ed., first published 1989), pp. 224 and 226, vv. 55-59: ‘Quanto a la ’ncornatura e a primma fronte / para cosa de priezzo / tutto ’nganna la vista, / tutto ceca la gente, / tutto è schitto apparenzia.’

<sup>71</sup> Giulio Cesare Cortese, *Opere poetiche*, ed. Enrico Malato (Rome: Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 1967), Vol. 1, I.4, p. 257, vv. 3-5: ‘Povera e nuda vai, Filosofia! / Devonca arrive nun t’è dato n’aglio, / Chi la virtù conosce non ha crial’

to powerful personages – the Viceroy of Naples and his relatives, for example – who do not keep their promises.<sup>72</sup>

The courtier's complaint, his search for a better position along with his denunciation of that courtly falseness that prevents him from achieving his goal, bring us back to the theme of the *pícaro* as an aspiring courtier. Let us consider, in this regard, the disappointment of Alemán's Guzmán de Alfarache when he compares himself to the rich: 'the poor man is like money that is no longer in circulation ... his suggestion is considered a foolishness, his discretion madness ... On the contrary, the rich man is respected ... His weirdness is considered chivalrous, his foolishness is wisdom. If he is spiteful, he is called astute, if he is a squanderer, magnanimous, if stingy, frugal and wise.'<sup>73</sup> Guzmán continues with a long list that shows, as in Basile's interlude *The Dyeing*, how rhetoric mystifies and affects human relations. Deceit and lies intertwine and make a subtle and imperceptible web, which deceives the sight and the judgment. It is like an illness that affects animate and inanimate beings.<sup>74</sup> There is, in Mateo Alemán, in Basile and Cortese, the same bitter disappointment and sense of disillusion. Yet the lyrical mode disappears when the *pícaro*-courtier Cortese defines Parnassus as a 'pigsty' and turns it into a tavern. This allows me to introduce the next aspect, the motif of the tavern, which is frequently exploited in picaresque literature. As we will see later again (see Chapter 3.3), taverns become the byword of corruption and deceptiveness, as they are haunted by any sort of idler or cheat. The most famous

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<sup>72</sup> Cortese (1967), Vol. 1, I.39, p. 366, vv. 1-8.

<sup>73</sup> Alemán (2012), pp. 251-252: 'Es el pobre moneda que no corre ... su sentencia es necead; su discreción, locura ... ¡Cuán al revés corre un rico! ... Sus locuras son caballerías ... Si es malicioso, lo llaman astuto; si prodigo, liberal; si avariento, reglado y sabio.'

<sup>74</sup> Alemán (2012), pp. 394-396: 'Son tan parecidos el engaño y la mentira, que no sé quién sepa o puede diferenciarlos ... no hay mentira sin engaño ni engaño sin mentira. ... Es una red sutilísima ... Es tan imperceptible y delgada que no hay tan clara vista, juicio tan sutil ni discreción tan limada que pueda descubrirla ... Es tan general esta contagiosa enfermedad que no solamente los hombres la padecen, mas las aves y animales.'



tavern in Naples was, in the seventeenth century, the ‘Cerriglio’ – a den well known to Caravaggio – which was at times used as a set for comedies and novels. Cortese named a posthumous poem after it, the *Cerriglio incantato* (*The Enchanted Cerriglio*). He tells of a Kingdom called Cerriglio, besieged by mercenaries. The two armies fight but the end of the war is deferred due to treasons on both sides. The last verse of the unfinished poem reads ‘the Kingdom has been turned into a tavern’, a statement that epitomizes the falseness characterizing the society.<sup>75</sup> The most interesting and vivid description of the place is in the third eclogue of Basile’s *Le muse napolitane*. Basile explains that the etymology of the word Cerriglio might derive from ‘cera’ (wax), because there the money melts like wax.<sup>76</sup> The Cerriglio is a ‘magnet attracting the glutton ... the hook that hooks the idlers ...’<sup>77</sup>, where ‘the innkeeper is an eagle that devours the heart of the customers ... Charon is the one that drives you to this place, while Minos and Rhadamanthus collects the toll.’<sup>78</sup> The food served there is ‘ant milk and tongue of parrot’.<sup>79</sup> It is the place where thieves, harlots and assassins gather for their skullduggery. Basile’s Cerriglio is a real hell: ‘the wine flows in torrents ... one grabs an octopus, the other a crab ... one cries, the other laughs; one eats, the other vomits.’<sup>80</sup> Such a trenchant sketch has an intriguing parallel in the tavern–den as described by López de Úbeda in *La pícaro Justina* (see Chapter 3.3). Although I do not surmise that

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<sup>75</sup> Cortese (1967), Vol. 1, VII.30, p. 492, v. 8: ‘Che de no Regno è fatta na taverna.’ The Cerriglio also appears in: Cortese’s *Vaiasseide* (V.31) and *Mirco Passaro* (I.32, 35; II; IV.20, 25), in Giovan Battista Della Porta’s play *Tabernaria* and in the first tale in Basile’s *Lo cunto* (see my chapter 4.3).

<sup>76</sup> Giambattista Basile, *Le Muse Napolitane. Ecloghe*, ed. Olga Silvana Casale (Rome: Edizioni Benincasa, 1989), Eclogue 3, ‘Talia ovvero lo Cerriglio’, p. 80, vv. 215-216: ‘perché lo denaro / se squaglia comme cera.’

<sup>77</sup> Basile (1989), p. 71, vv. 50-53: ‘Fa cunto de trovare na coccagna: / la calamita de li cannarune / l’argano de li cuorpe de buon tiempo, la vorpara dell’uommene mantrune.’

<sup>78</sup> Basile (1989), pp. 73-74, vv. 83-85 and 89-94: ‘Lo tavernare è l’Aquila affamata, / che ogni iorno se pasce / lo core de chi c’entra, e po’ renasce ... Caronte [è] che te passa / a sti belle paixe. / Chi piglia li tornise / e chi face li cunte / tanto pe chesto e pe chell’autro tanto, / è Mino e Radamanto.’

<sup>79</sup> Basile (1989), p. 76, vv. 132-133: ‘latte de formica / lengua de pappagallo.’

<sup>80</sup> Basile (1989), pp. 78-79, vv. 181 and 189-193: ‘Lo vino sauta e zompa ... / Mo’, so varie l’effette / de chi piglia lo purpo, / de chi afferra lo grangio: / uno chieghe, uno ride, / uno magna, uno vomeca.’

Basile was directly inspired by the Spanish writer, it seems that his depiction of the underworld stems from the same ground. The representation of lower-class life is a substantial part of Giovan Battista Della Porta's plays. Della Porta (1535-1615) was an eclectic scholar, by turns philosopher, scientist, chemist, and play writer. One of his comedies, *La Tabernaria* (*The Tavern*, 1616), is set in a house turned into a fake Cerriglio in order to organize a complex fraud. Della Porta's plays have a solid Plautine background, for they are based on extremely entangled plots and their main theme is deception. Usually there are young or elderly men in love who, in order to achieve their aim, have to disguise and avail themselves of servants or parasites. The names of these scoundrels often have etymological roots connected with food: Leccardo and Leccabono (from the verb 'to lick'), Panimbolo and Panfago (where 'pan-' stands for bread, '-imbolo' comes from 'imbolare', to steal, and '-fago' stands for eater), and Ventraccio (stomach). They are, usually, treacherous individuals who are game for anything in order to gorge themselves. It is not by chance, in fact, that they are addressed as 'rapazes, picarazos' (rapacious, *pícaros*).<sup>81</sup> Della Porta's servant-parasite is the key element for the organisation of a well-devised plot: 'And now let us erect a monument to deceit, a mausoleum to the fraud, a triumphal arch to the lie, a colossus to the falseness.'<sup>82</sup> Like the *pícaro*, he is willing to betray his master for his own advantage. Contrary to the *pícaro*, he does not have any aspirations for his aim is only physical survival. He is merely an anatomical machine: 'Oh Lord, if I could enlarge my stomach, open my mouth wide, get a row of teeth more, extend this neck.'<sup>83</sup> On the

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<sup>81</sup> Giovan Battista Della Porta, *La Trappolaria* [1596], in *Teatro*, ed. Raffaele Sirri (Naples: ESI, 2002), Vol. 2 (hereafter referred to as Della Porta, 2002<sup>5</sup>), IV.10 and IV.11, p. 311.

<sup>82</sup> Della Porta, *Gli duoi fratelli rivali* [1601], in *Teatro* (2002), Vol. 3 (hereafter referred to as Della Porta, 2002<sup>2</sup>), IV.4, p. 88: 'PANIMBOLO: "Or drizzisi un trofeo all'inganno, un mausoleo alla fraude, un arco trionfale alla bugia, un colosso alla falsità"'.

<sup>83</sup> Della Porta, *L'Olimpia* [1589], in *Teatro* (2002), Vol. 2 (hereafter referred to as Della Porta, 2002<sup>4</sup>), III.4, p. 49: 'O Dio, potessi allargarmi questo ventre altrettanto per verso, spalancarmi questa bocca, accrescermi un altro filaro di denti, allongarmi questo collo.'

verge of being hanged for his wrongdoings, Leccardo says: 'I prefer to be hanged rather than being starved. However, if you want to hang me, let me eat something, do not let me die twice, by noose and by hunger ... Oh sausages, oh cheeses, will I die without savouring you? Oh tavern, will I never more taste your wines? ... Farewell, capons, hens and chickens.'<sup>84</sup> Such cues brings us back to the Spanish novel *Estebanillo González*, with some differences. Estebanillo, when sentenced to death, replies in this way to the priest who comes for the confession of the sins: 'there is no commandment or precept that says "you will not eat either drink"; therefore, father, for I am not doing anything against God, fetch me some food and drink.'<sup>85</sup> While he is in jail, he is able 'to turn the stone into bread, although it was not the first Sunday of Lent',<sup>86</sup> meaning that he has got food by corrupting a guard. The joke alludes to one of the temptations of Christ in the desert, when he is asked by the devil to turn the stone into bread (Matthew 4.3). The spectre of hunger hangs over both Leccardo and Estebanillo, but while in Della Porta's play the cue remains a sheer joke, in *Estebanillo* it is endowed, according to the picaresque mode, with a satirical tone. A further comparison might be useful. We find Leccardo once again engaged in a hilarious conversation:

Leccardo: Flaminio, do you happen to have some salami or cheese in your pocket?

Don Flaminio: You fool! Why should I bring with me such foul-smelling stuff?

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<sup>84</sup> Della Porta (2002<sup>2</sup>), IV.8, pp. 98-98: 'Ma io vo' morir appiccato per non morir sempre di fame; ma se volete appiccarmi, fatemi mangiar prima, che non muoia di doppia morte, e della fune e della fame ... O pergole di salsiccioni alla lombarda, o provature, morirò io senza gustarvi? O câneva, non assaggerò più i tuoi vini? ... A Dio, galli d'India, caponi, galline e polli, non vi goderò più mai.'

<sup>85</sup> *La vida y hechos de Estebanillo González* (2012), Vol. 1, p. 272: 'no hay mandamiento ni precepto divino que diga: "no comerás ni beberás", y así, pues no voy contra lo que Dios ha ordenado, vuestra paternidad trate de que se me dé de comer y beber.'

<sup>86</sup> *La vida y hechos de Estebanillo González* (2012), Vol. 1, pp. 276-277: 'había convertido la piedra, sin ser domingo tentación, en dos libras de pan.'

Leccardo: No musk, amber or precious perfumes are better than these!<sup>87</sup>

The tone of Leccardo's answer is similar to the one we find in Alemán's *Guzmán de Alfarache*: 'For me, the more beneficial the odour, the better. Therefore, my amber and my musk fragrance is garlic, the best and the most truthful smell. I never run out of garlic, an effective protection against infections.'<sup>88</sup> Yet again, while Leccardo's joke is devised to arouse laughter just in that moment and wears off soon afterwards, Guzmán's is more than a joke and requires further reflection on the condition of the protagonist. The sentence is in fact drawn from a long passage on the *pícaro*'s alleged freedom of senses, which I have already quoted above. Guzmán would willingly smell something more pleasant, but his humble condition does not allow him to do it, inasmuch as the alleged freedom instead represents his seclusion.

There is no shortage of disgusting and picaresque-like pranks in Della Porta's plays, with the substitution of food with filth, although these pranks are completely devoid of any deeper meaning other than the amusement of the reader: 'Oh knavish traitor! The barrel is full of piss, the caviar is sawdust, the cheese is stone and the haggis is a bladder full of dirt.'<sup>89</sup> Food, which together with deceit is one of the leitmotifs of Della Porta's plays, is often employed to sketch grotesque portraits. In the following

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<sup>87</sup> Della Porta (2002<sup>2</sup>), I.3, pp. 27-28: 'LECCARDO: Don Flaminio, avreste qualche poco di salame o di cascio parmigiano in saccoccia? - DON FLAMINIO: Orbo, questa puzza vorrei portar addosso io? - LECCARDO: Ma che muschio, che ambra, che aromati preziosi odorano più di questi?'

<sup>88</sup> Alemán (2012), pp. 276-77: 'El Oler, ¿quién pudo más que nosotros ... ? Demás que si el olor es mejor cuanto nos es más provechoso, nuestro ámbar y almizque, mejor que todos y más verdadero, era un ajo –que no faltaba de ordinario–, preservativo de contagiosa corrupción.' I quoted the same passage in chapter 4.2.

<sup>89</sup> Della Porta, *La Carbonaria* [c.1601], in *Teatro* (2002), Vol. 2 (hereafter referred to as Della Porta, 2002<sup>1</sup>), IV.3, p. 509: 'O gaglioffo traditore! Il barilotto è pieno di piscio, le bottarghe sono di mattoni, il formaggio di pietra e le provature vessiche piene di sporchezze!' I have adapted this passage in order to keep its amusing tone. I have translated 'le bottarghe sono di mattoni', literally the 'hard roe are bricks', with 'the caviar is sawdust'. It being impossible to translate 'provature', a sort of soft cheese encased in a hard rind, I have substituted the word with the more familiar 'haggis' (a sort of bladder containing sheep's pluck).

example the parasite Leccardo declares his love to the servant Chiaretta: ‘Your lips are as red as ham, your mouth is prominent like a pig’s, your eyes are shining like the goat’s, your breasts generous like the udder of the calf ... in short, everything in you makes me hungry.’<sup>90</sup> The Italian scholar Raffaele Sirri has pointed out that Della Porta frequently describes the human being through comparisons or parallels with food or animals.<sup>91</sup> To these we should add a certain taste of Della Porta’s for deformity and illness that might be related to his interest in medicine and physiognomy [Figs. 8-10]. In his unflattering portraits a girl is described with ‘tumefactions in the mouth and with a hernia down there’,<sup>92</sup> while a man is said to be ‘frail, with a twisted neck and bulging, crossed eyes’.<sup>93</sup> This taste for grotesque sketches, achieved by ‘decomposing’ and reconstructing the human body as it were a mere physiological machine is also present in Quevedo and in other picaresque authors (see further examples in Chapters 3.2 and 3.3).

This excursus bring us back to the open question of the possible existence of a picaresque genre in Italian literature. For this purpose, I have analysed and compared as many sources as possible, focusing my research especially on the most eminent representatives of the Neapolitan literature. In light of the examples provided, I neither believe in the existence of an Italian picaresque literature, nor do I believe that the Italian picaresque was a missed opportunity. Nevertheless, the Spanish picaresque and

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<sup>90</sup> Della Porta (2002<sup>3</sup>), III.4, p. 68: ‘Hai certi labruzzzi scarlattini come un prosciutto, una bocchina uscita in fuori com’un porchetto, gli occhi lucenti come una capra, le poppe grassette come una vitella ... in somma, non hai cosa che non mi muova l’appetito.’

<sup>91</sup> Sirri (1986), Chapters ‘Risentimento picaresco’ and ‘Il macabro e il deforme’, pp. 120-141. Sirri has also connected these grotesque figures to Della Porta’s studies on physiognomy, in which the Neapolitan playwright and philosopher postulates a morphologic resemblance between animals and human beings in order to explain the moral attitude of the latter. On this aspect see also my chapters 4.2 and 4.3.

<sup>92</sup> Della Porta, *La fantesca* [1592], in *Teatro* (2002), Vol. 2 (hereafter referred to as Della Porta, 2002<sup>3</sup>), IV.1, p. 171: ‘NARTICOFORO: " ... venne fuori [la ragazza] con certe tumefazioni nella bocca, con una ernia di sotto".’

<sup>93</sup> Della Porta (2002<sup>3</sup>), in *Teatro* (2002), Vol. 2, IV.1, p. 171: ‘NARTICOFORO: "[Egli è] Gracilesciente, col collo obtorto, con oculi prominenti, strabbi e di color fosco".’

the Italian literature compared here seem to share the same taste for the representation of lower-class life, although they achieve different results. The Spanish picaresque was certainly known and read in Italy. The Neapolitan sources seem even to suggest noticeable parallels with the Spanish ones. Without going too far and suggesting a direct influence of the latter on the first, it is reasonable to conclude that both reassemble and reshape motifs and themes common to a new literary production staging lower-class life. As I have already pointed out, the European countries experienced, to different extents and in different periods, an economic turmoil that violently shook their stability and affected all the social classes. The increase in numbers of the impoverished, vagrants and criminals – not necessarily coming from a corrupt background, but also people with a good cultural education – became so conspicuous as to be impossible to ignore the issue: they represented a threat to those who were wealthier, and who urged the authorities to take action. Treatises, legislative measures, pamphlets, and novels about roguery are means that the organized society employs, still in the present day, to exorcise fear, condemn the danger, (mis)inform people and produce propaganda. Each European country reacted in their own peculiar way, giving birth to a local rogue literature, made up of loose anecdotes and staging common marginalised individuals in conflict with their environment. Spain gave birth to the picaresque genre, a great and widespread literary phenomenon staging the adventures of the *pícaro*, with whom the anti-hero becomes, for the first time, the protagonist of a literary genre. What was the situation in Naples at that time? Under the long Spanish dominion, Naples experienced not only a fertile cultural exchange, but also a series of famines and rebellions against the fiscal oppression. Intellectuals and writers used the Neapolitan language as a symbol of cultural protest against the

colonizer.<sup>94</sup> In 1599 the Calabrese philosopher Tommaso Campanella was arrested for organising a conspiracy against the Spanish ruler. The city saw the formation and increase of the underclasses.<sup>95</sup> Della Porta, Basile, and Cortese described, each in his own way, the instability of the time in which they lived. Neapolitan literature did not stage such a well-defined character as the *pícaro*. Yet it dealt with major issues common to the picaresque genre. Basile and Cortese told of the aspirations of the Neapolitan *pícaro*-courtier fighting to reach or keep a stable social position, in contrast with a mischievous and deceptive social environment. Both, together with Della Porta, dealt with an imminent threat, the spectre of hunger, which they tried to exorcise through irony. Their representation of hunger brought the representation of lower-class life to the fore: slums, deprivation, bad smells, unpleasant descriptions, and low characters shifted from the background to the foreground, occupying a consistent part of their works.

The more Naples grew demographically, the more the Spanish rulers widened the city walls. Naples in its Golden Age became an uncontrollable and pulsating area that swallowed up the suburbs, a city teeming with lavishly ornamented churches and wretched taverns, elegant palaces and brothels, notable personages and ragamuffins. All these contrasts are present in Della Porta's plays, where rich men and parasites live side by side, for they are mutually dependent on one another. Yet the spectre of hunger haunted the Vice-Kingdom of Naples. The aforementioned Leccardo, one of the servants that animate Della Porta's plays, engages his worst enemy, hunger: 'Hunger was a living person, skinny, thin ... We challenged each other to a duel. The fighting

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<sup>94</sup> Michele Rak, 'La tradizione letteraria popolare-dialettale napoletana tra conquista spagnola e le rivoluzioni del 1647-48', in *Storia di Napoli* (Naples: ESI, 1967-1974), Vol. 4.2 (1974), pp. 574-593.

<sup>95</sup> Giuseppe Galasso, 'Una capitale dell'Impero', in José Luis Colomer ed., *España e Napoles. Coleccionismo y mecenazgo virreinales en el siglo XVII* (Madrid: CEEH, 2009), pp. 39-61.

area was a lake made with a soup wherein capons, chickens, pigs, calves and entire oxen swam. We threw ourselves into the battle and fought tooth and nail.”<sup>96</sup> Leccardo is a minor character, only a pale reflection of his great ancestors Lazarillo and Guzmán. Yet he embodies the anxieties of his time, anxieties that tormented the rich and the poor and that would lead, in 1647, to the popular uprising led by the fisherman Tommaso Aniello.

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<sup>96</sup> Della Porta (2002<sup>2</sup>), Vol. 3, I.4, pp. 31-32: ‘La fame era una persona viva, macra, sottile ... Ci disfidammo insieme; lo steccato fu un lago di brodo grasso dove notavano capponi, polli, porchette, vitelle e buoi intieri intieri. Qui ci tuffammo a combattere con i denti.’



## CHAPTER 2

### EXPERIMENTALISM AND THE SENSES IN EARLY SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ROME AND NAPLES

#### 2.1 The Alleged Pre-Eminence of Sight in Seventeenth-Century Science

In 1610 Galileo Galilei published the *Sidereus Nuncius* (*The Starry Messenger*), which announced new discoveries he had made using the telescope to the world [Figs 11-12].<sup>1</sup> The marvels that he unveiled with this new tool – the satellites of Jupiter and the craters on the Moon, among other things – were at odds with the astronomical theories dating back to Aristotle which were still current among the majority of scholars. Some readers criticised the results presented in the treatise and claimed that the telescope distorted reality. What disappointed Galilei more was the fact that his detractors were not disposed to believe their eyes. In 1611 Galileo was invited to visit the Roman residence of Federico Cesi, the founder of the scientific Academy of Lynceans (1603). The incredulous Cesi showed his lodger a collection of extraordinary colour drawings depicting newly discovered Mexican plants. Galileo referred to the episode in a letter to his friend Piero Dini (21 May 1611), remarking that although he had never seen the plants before he had no reason to deny their existence.<sup>2</sup> The seventeenth century thus began in Rome with the meeting of two pioneers who contributed, each in his own way, to the laying of the foundations of the new natural sciences and to new reflections upon the function of the senses. These two documents are of paramount importance. With the *Sidereus Nuncius*

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<sup>1</sup> Galileo Galilei, *Sidereus Nuncius* (Venice: Thomam Baglionum, 1610).

<sup>2</sup> Galileo Galilei, *Opere*, Vol. 11 (1901), *Carteggio 1611-1613*, pp. 105-116. The drawings are mentioned on pp. 107-108.

Galileo demonstrated, on the one hand, how the faculty of sight opened up inconceivable possibilities for human knowledge. On the other, he exposed the possible shortcomings of sight, claiming that the data collected through sensory perception must be subject to the scrutiny of the intellect.<sup>3</sup> As to the drawings in Cesi's possession, his Academy companions worked on them for over forty years. The result was the *Rerum Medicarum Novae Hispaniae Thesaurus* [Fig. 13],<sup>4</sup> the only treatise published by the Lynceans as a group. Modern scholars agree that the *Thesaurus* was one of the most important botanical publications of the seventeenth century.<sup>5</sup> One of the reasons for its significance lies in the fact that its groundwork involved not only official members of the Academy, but also a large number of European scholars who were expert in various fields of knowledge, as well as artists, especially engravers. Another reason, no less important than the first, was the new botanical classification set up by the Lynceans. This innovative system entailed the 'collaboration' of all the senses (excluding hearing, of course) to classify plants and unlock the doors of botanical knowledge. This procedure was not a simple one, since the sensorial analysis pioneered by the Lynceans questioned the reliability of sensory perception and the usefulness of images as a tool to disseminate the results of scientific knowledge. Whereas Galileo mainly favoured sight as a means of scientific investigation, the Lynceans founded their research on the synergy of the senses.

In opening this chapter, I have brought such different scholars into the discussion inasmuch as they epitomize diverse, and to a certain extent contrasting, investigative methodologies which coexisted at the beginning of the seventeenth

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<sup>3</sup> On the interaction of sight and intellect in Galileo, see Marco Piccolino and Nicholas J. Wade, *Galileo's Visions: Piercing the Spheres of the Heavens by Eye and Mind* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Accademia dei Lincei, *Rerum Medicarum Novae Hispaniae Thesaurus seu Plantarum, Animalium, Mineralium Mexicanorum Historia* (Rome: Vitalis Mascardi, 1651).

<sup>5</sup> For the importance of the text for the history of see Antonio Graniti ed., *Federico Cesi: un principe naturalista* (Conference Proceedings, Acquasparta, 29-30 September 2003) (Rome: Bardi, 2006).

century. Important technological innovations that contributed to the empowerment of sight, namely the telescope and the microscope, marked the beginning of that century. The new tools and other scientific inventions certainly revolutionized the principles of knowledge, opening up new and inconceivable potentialities of mankind's sense of sight. Both past and present scholarship has emphasized that the reliability of sight became the favoured object of scrutiny at the dawn of the seventeenth century. In 1942, the French historian Lucien Febvre published an essay which was destined to be very influential for the next generations of scholars, *Le Problème de l'incroyance au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle. La religion de Rabelais* (*The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais*). The scholar analysed numerous sources, especially French poetry, literature, science and philosophy which had been published between the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, and argued that the Rabelaisian 'hommes de plein air' (open air or outdoor men), used to experiencing nature using all their senses, had to adjust their perspective owing to the empowerment of sight.<sup>6</sup> Several scholars, both European and non-European, have drawn on Febvre's approach. Of particular importance among these scholars is the Canadian linguist Marshall McLuhan, the author, amongst others, of *The Gutenberg Galaxy: the Making of Typographic Man* (1962), and his American pupil, the Jesuit Walter Ong, who is especially known for his *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* (1958) and the more recent *Orality and Literacy* (1982). Both Marshall and Ong dedicated their studies to the influence of mass media on society and analysed, among other things, the diffusion of mobile print in Renaissance society. They maintained that mobile print contributed to a shift from the world of orality to the world of sight, and therefore from oral reading in groups and shared knowledge to the private and

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<sup>6</sup> Lucien Febvre, *Le problème de l'incroyance au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle. La religion de Rabelais*, revised ed. (Paris: Albin Michel, 1947), Part 2, Book 1, Chapter 4 and conclusion, pp. 425-464.

alleged ‘silent reading’, thus affecting human thought and the perception of reality. The printed book, they say, an object made of visible signs, made the magic of sound disappear, thus leading the reader to perceive a word or a concept merely as a visual sign. The bestsellers McLuhan and Ong have been very influential, although they have also incurred criticism due to some over-simplifications. The Italian philologist Ezio Raimondi argued, in this regard, that the mental and sensorial revolution brought about by print and technology in the Western world cannot be explained solely in terms of the contraposition of hearing and sight, between the oral and the visual.<sup>7</sup> Although Raimondi criticised the methodology of the two American scholars, he also embraced, and even reinforced, the general idea that the scientific revolution taking place between the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries was essentially due to the empowerment of sight. Raimondi alleged that the pre-eminence of sight was so undisputed that it ran through the scientific publications of the time. Scientific books contributed, the scholar goes on, to the triumph of the culture of visualisation through illustrations and with the preferential use of verbs related to vision, such as ‘to see, to seem’. To underpin his theory, Raimondi referred to the aforementioned *Novae Hispaniae Thesaurus*. The scholar maintained that the treatise was an example of the scientific culture of the time that privileged sight over the other senses. Both the numerous illustrations and language of the *Thesaurus*, he says, contribute to this ‘visual’ objective, and the language was devised to emphasize the images of the treatise.<sup>8</sup> As a matter of fact, the scholar drew some passages *ad hoc* both from the *Thesaurus* and from the epistolary correspondence of the Lynceans in order to

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<sup>7</sup> Ezio Raimondi, *Il romanzo senza idillio. Saggio sui “Promessi sposi”* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974), in the Chapter ‘Verso il realismo’, pp. 3-56.

<sup>8</sup> Raimondi (1974), pp. 28-33.

underpin a current theory that has become a commonplace of some modern scholarship.

It is undeniable that between the two centuries the empowerment of sight became a priority among scientists and philosophers. Investigations of the senses achieved considerable results pertaining to the mechanism of sight (while the study of hearing was far less advanced due to a lack of knowledge of acoustics). Mathematicians and physicists such as Giovan Battista Della Porta (1535-1615) and Johan Kepler (1571-1630) followed in the footsteps of anatomists and dedicated their particular attention to the structure of the eye and to refraction.<sup>9</sup> The pre-eminence of sight seemed to have been established when the telescope and later the microscope became more widely accepted by the scientific community. Yet this is only part of the story, an over-simplification that has nevertheless led many a scholar to neglect or misunderstand alternative views and methodologies. The most recent Italian contribution to the topic is, to my knowledge, *Per evidenza. Conoscenza e segni nell'età barocca* by Giacomo Jori,<sup>10</sup> who places himself in the tradition established by Febvre years before. Jori acknowledges that seventeenth-century scientists, artists and ecclesiastics sought to further test the reliability of the senses other than sight in the process of knowledge. Yet the space he dedicates to these alternative sources is limited and refers only to the late-seventeenth century. The pioneering research of the Academy of the Lynceans is not mentioned at all in his book, while Fabio Colonna, a key figure in the intellectual life of the Academy, as well as a pioneer of the natural sciences, is cited only once, in a footnote.<sup>11</sup>

Fortunately, there has been a turnaround with a recent collective publication

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<sup>9</sup> See Alistair Cameron Crombie, *Science, Optics and Music in Medieval and Early Modern Thought* (London: Hambleton, 1990), pp. 379-398.

<sup>10</sup> Giacomo Jori, *Per evidenza. Conoscenza e segni nell'età barocca* (Venice: Marsilio, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> Jori (1998), p. 101, footnote 71.

edited by Herman Roodenburg, *A Cultural History of the Senses in Renaissance* (2014).<sup>12</sup> The team coordinated by Roodenburg has in fact investigated the development of a variety of disciplines across Europe and pointed out that the cultural situation in the age of experimentalism was much more animated and not necessarily focused on the function of sight. The studies of anatomy, for example, to which Andries van Wesel (1514-1564) and Giulio Cesare Casseri (1522-1616) contributed greatly, had long since set out an investigative methodology which was based on the cross-examination of visual and tactile stimuli [Figs 17-18]. The same applies to medicine, where touching organs and limbs and smelling humours was as essential as seeing them.<sup>13</sup> In the light of the most recent research, it is no longer feasible to believe that the other senses were excluded from the process of scientific knowledge. In the second part of this chapter, I will venture to show that the *Thesaurus*, and the activity of the Lynceans alike, represent a major example of how different methodologies dramatically coexisted in the early seventeenth-century debate on the senses.

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<sup>12</sup> The work consists of six volumes, whose general editor is Constance Classes, each one dedicated to a particular time span. I have consulted the third, which covers the period 1450-1650, *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Renaissance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), edited by Herman Roodenburg.

<sup>13</sup> In this regard and particularly on the use of touch and smell in anatomy and medicine see Bjørn Okholm Skaarup, *Anatomy and anatomists in Early Modern Spain* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), and Stephen Pender, 'Medicine and the Senses: Physicians Sensation, and the Soul' in Roodenburg (2014), pp. 127-147.

## 2.2 The ‘Collaboration of the Senses’ in the Lyncean’s Treatise ‘*Novae Hispaniae Thesaurus*’ (1611-1651)

‘It is of paramount importance that we read this great, truthful and universal book of the world carefully; it is necessary to explore its parts, so that we gain experience in observation and experimentation. These two activities will sharpen our ingenuity. Observation will show us how things are and how they naturally change; experimentation will teach us how to modify and manipulate them. In order to achieve such results, we will have to see many places and arrange perilous excursions in unsafe places: each one of us should reflect upon this very carefully, and may the death of Pliny not dismay you. If our research makes progress, and especially if it proves advantageous for the community – and such is the aim of any real philosopher – we will have to avail ourselves of collaborators, scribes, writers, illustrations and such similar aids.’<sup>14</sup>

This short but meaningful passage is drawn from *The Natural Desire for Knowledge* (1616), a long speech that the naturalist Federico Cesi, co-founder and head of the scientific Lyncean Academy, delivered to his companions gathered in Naples. The issues he pointed out in his discourse are extremely significant, as they somewhat represent the tenets of the new science of nature as set up at the dawn of

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<sup>14</sup> Federico Cesi’s 1616 speech *Del natural desiderio di sapere et Institutione de’ Lincei per adempimento di esso*, in *Federico Cesi e la fondazione dell’Accademia dei Lincei* (exhibition catalogue, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice, 27 August – 15 October 1988), eds Giuseppe Montalenti and Saverio Ricci (Naples: [s.n.], 1988), p. 114: ‘È necessario ben leggere questo grande, veridico et universal libro del mondo; è necessario dunque visitar le parti di esso ed essercitarsi nello osservare et sperimentare per fondar in questi due buoni mezzi un’acuta e profonda contemplatione, rappresentandoci il primo le cose come sono e da sé si variano, l’altro come possiamo noi stessi alterarle e variarle; quante parti perciò bisogni vedere e quante difficoltà habbiano le peregrinationi e glia accessi in certi luoghi e tempi, ciascuno lo consideri, né si sgomenti della morte di Plinio. Se li progressi poi dello studio saranno maggiori, e massime se frutteranno a beneficio d’altri, come ogni buon filosofo deve procurare, sarà necessario l’aiuto de compagni et amanuensi, de scrittori e de stampe et simili.’

the seventeenth century. In inviting his companions to read the book of nature, Cesi implicitly criticized those academics who relied excessively on the authorities of the past without any critical sense. He urged scholars to abandon the comfort of the *aulae magnae* and *studioli*, and to bring academic knowledge into question. The Roman naturalist Pliny the Elder, who died from inhaling fumes in the eruption of the Mount Vesuvius (79 A.D.), epitomised, for Cesi, the ideal of a scholar who, ignoring all danger, was totally devoted to science. The cornerstones of the new science of nature as they were conceived by the Lynceans are observation and experimentation. Aware that the world, which we perceive through the senses, is changeable and elusive, they aimed to observe nature and record the way its creatures – animals, plants, insects and so on – change and develop under certain conditions. Such a procedure does not entail the mere accumulation of information – an old-fashioned methodology that the Lynceans in part surpassed – but rather a thorough and comparative analysis of data resulting from close investigation. The project was not at all abstract. The Lyncean scholar had to be an integral part of society, and the experiments he conducted had to contribute to the material and moral progress of humankind. Finally yet importantly, his achievements had to be disseminated using tools offered by advancements in technology and with the close collaboration of academics and artists.

The fascinating and promising adventure of the Academy of Lynceans, one of the most important episodes in the history of modern science, had started thirteen years before Cesi's speech thanks to the initiative of very young and passionate scholars.<sup>15</sup> The project aimed to create a network of established European academics,

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<sup>15</sup> Unless otherwise specified, for the history of the birth and progress of the Academy I refer to Michele Maylender, *Storia delle Accademie d'Italia* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1926-30), Vol. 3 (1929), pp. 430-503.



and its operating bases were Rome and Naples. From 1603 Federico Cesi (1585-1630), an eighteen-year-old man descended from Roman nobility, started gathering close and erudite friends in his family palace. The idea of setting up a cultural society, free from political and ecclesiastical control and devoted to the study of nature in all its aspects, was born during their philosophical conversations. As an initial project, Cesi had planned the construction of several branches all over Europe in order to form a wide network of scholars. Later, due to financial difficulties, he decided to cut such an unrealistic and ambitious enterprise down to size. The main purpose of this project was to radically renew natural philosophy and related fields such as botany, medicine, astronomy and alchemy. His early fellows were the Italians Francesco Stelluti and Anastasio De Filiis, researchers in mathematics, geometry and astronomy. The fourth component was the Dutch physician Johann van Heeck. As an emblem they chose the lynx – which was believed to have excellent sight – accompanied by the motto ‘Sagacius ista’ (‘In a more sagacious manner than the lynx’), to present themselves as able to scrutinize the natural world with the powerful eyes of the mind. The members of the newborn Academy dedicated the following months to the outlining of the regulations of the group in order to define objectives, structure and membership requirements. The latter were extremely rigid. Members had to lead a sober life and avoid worldly pleasures; they had to live in harmony with one another and be free from envy in order to focus entirely on their investigation. Their behaviour outside the Academy was also subject to strict rules. Moreover, members of religious orders were not admitted to the society. Embracing the Lyncean lifestyle was so demanding that it rendered it impossible to follow other sets

of rules at the same time. As Giuseppe Olmi has pointed out, Cesi probably drew inspiration from the rules of religious orders to constitute his 'militia philosophica'.<sup>16</sup>

The personal nicknames and emblems they chose testify their early interest in astronomy, although they expanded their horizons in all directions.<sup>17</sup> Toward the end of 1603, Cesi was elected President of the Society and Heeck was chosen to be in charge of contacting the most established European scholarly experts in a variety of fields. The first steps were the hardest in the history of the Academy. Cesi's father did not approve of the gatherings in his palace and it seems that his fierce opposition had serious consequences in the early years of the institution. The reason for this paternal disapproval are as yet unclear. The first Lynceans used to hold secret meetings, during which they allegedly discussed unorthodox subjects, with the risk of coming up against ecclesiastical authorities. Further to a criminal accusation, Heeck was forced to leave Italy and to make incessant journeys around Europe, from whence he often wrote to his colleagues about the intellectuals he encountered at the European courts. By the time he returned to Rome in 1614, the Academy had changed profoundly, partially owing to the admittance of prestigious affiliates, including Galileo. The Lynceans scattered, and did not recruit new members until 1610; however, they did not give up on the project and kept in touch through epistolary correspondence. Hardship did not dishearten them; on the contrary, it strengthened them. Federico Cesi began to travel and at the beginning of 1604 arrived in Naples to evaluate the possibility of the Lynceans having an alternative base there. His arrival in Naples was the result of much careful deliberation. The

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<sup>16</sup> Giuseppe Olmi, *L'inventario del mondo. Catalogazione della natura e luoghi del sapere nella prima età moderna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992), pp. 335-336.

<sup>17</sup> The thoughtful Stelluti became Tardigradus, referred to the slow-moving planet Saturn. The Illuminato (Enlightened) Heeck had the Sun illuminating the Moon as his emblem. The Eclissato (Eclipsed) De Filiis chose the Moon obscured by the Earth. Finally, Cesi was the Coelivagus (Wanderer of the Heavens), and his insignia was an eagle holding a globe lit by the Sun between its talons.

constant vigilance of ecclesiastical censure rendered Rome unsafe for them, and the Lynceans therefore kept a low profile for a while. Naples, capital of the Spanish Vice-Kingdom (1503-1713), appeared, by contrast, to be a more tolerant environment that would be favourable to the progress of the enterprise, and so it proved to be until 1611. In that year, in fact, the prestigious Accademia degli Oziosi (Academy of Idlers) was founded, a cultural circle which was devoted to science and literature.<sup>18</sup> Members included eminent intellectuals, among whom were Giovan Battista della Porta, Giovan Battista Marino, Giambattista Basile, and the Spanish writer Francisco de Quevedo. It is worth noting that members were acquainted with the most important representatives of Neapolitan painting, including Battistello Caracciolo, Massimo Stanzione and Cesare Fracanzano.<sup>19</sup> The foundation of the Academy, indeed, reflected a process of cultural and political centralization that had been set up by the Viceroys of Naples. The *Oziosi* were in fact not allowed to discuss religion and politics in their meetings. Be as it may, the Accademia degli Oziosi played an important role in the intellectual life of the Italian peninsula, thus reflecting the absolute centrality of the city of Naples and justifying Cesi's choice.

In Naples Cesi regularly met with some of the most prominent scholars of the time, including Ferrante Imperato (c. 1525-post 1615) and Giovan Battista della Porta (1535-1616). The lively intellectual climate of the city amazed him to the point that he referred to Neapolitan researchers as 'wonders of nature' in a letter he wrote.<sup>20</sup> A naturalist and an apothecary, Imperato created a museum, or cabinet of curiosities, in his palace in which he displayed every kind of specimen from the three kingdoms of nature. The museum became one of the most renowned in Europe, an

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<sup>18</sup> De Miranda (2000).

<sup>19</sup> De Miranda (2000), p. 46.

<sup>20</sup> Giuseppe Gabrieli, *Il carteggio Linceo* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1996), letter from Cesi to Stelluti, Rome, 17 July 1604, p. 36.

absolute must-see for scholars, and Cesi did not omit to go himself. The collection was enriched with new specimens thanks to frequent exchanges with other European naturalists. In 1599 Imperato published the successful *Dell'istoria naturale* (*On Natural History*) – a kind of compendium of his investigations which was illustrated with images taken from the museum – which was acclaimed by his contemporaries for its scientific rigour and intellectual clarity [Fig. 19]. Imperato's approach involved philological and critical analysis of ancient sources, alongside fieldwork and collaboration with a varied network of scholars.<sup>21</sup> Although Cesi approved of Imperato's methods, the latter never became a member of the Academy, probably due to his involvement in political issues.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, Della Porta and then the naturalist Fabio Colonna, who was a pupil of Imperato, had by then been enrolled.

Della Porta was so eclectic in his research that it would be difficult to precisely define his scholarly profile.<sup>23</sup> Alternately characterised as a magician or as a scientist by modern biographers, he in reality embodied the highest form of the sixteenth-century polymath, whose vast interests ranged from physiognomy to alchemy, astrology, the art of memory and optics. His numerous treatises were reprinted and translated into several languages and attracted the attention of Ecclesiastical censure as well as that of European sovereigns, the latter being interested in Della Porta's search for the philosopher's stone. The prestige he enjoyed throughout Europe was probably one of the reasons why Cesi wanted him as a member of the Academy. Della Porta joined in 1610 and was in charge of the

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<sup>21</sup> Enrica Stendardo, *Ferrante Imperato. Collezionismo e studio della natura a Napoli tra Cinque e Seicento* (Naples: Accademia Pontaniana, 2001).

<sup>22</sup> Stendardo (2001), p. 36.

<sup>23</sup> On the complex figure of Della Porta see Paolo Piccari, *Giovan Battista della Porta. Il filosofo, il retore, lo scienziato* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2007).

constitution of the Neapolitan branch of the Academy, of which he became Vice-President.<sup>24</sup> His membership certainly improved the Lynceans' chances and acted as a decoy. On the other hand, there were far more important reasons for the admittance of Della Porta. As I have already pointed out, the life of the early Academy had an esoteric background that shrouded the society in mystery. The Lynceans adopted a secret alphabet, and rituals connected with magical and astrological disciplines characterized their meetings. Alchemy and numerology were among the other disciplines they practiced. The elderly Della Porta was a real expert in all these fields and therefore exerted a certain influence on the young founders of the Academy. They must have sincerely admired the ageing scholar, to the point that they obtained the imprimatur for some of his works from the Roman Curia thanks to the intercession of the cardinal Bartolomeo Cesi, uncle of Federico.<sup>25</sup> The works that boosted Della Porta's fame are *Magiae naturalis* (*Natural Magic*, 1558), *De Humana physiognomonica* (*On Human Physiognomy*, 1586) and finally *Phytognomonica* (*On Plant physiognomy*, 1588), which were all republished in several Latin editions and translated into various languages.<sup>26</sup> The title *Natural Magic* is misleading for the modern reader, who might imagine Della Porta to have been engaged in witchcraft. In reality, the scholar considered magic an introductory instrument to the furtherance of knowledge. The text is an extraordinary repository of information on a variety of apparently unrelated subjects. *Natural Magic* is an encyclopaedia which includes old-fashioned tenets along with the most recent achievements of science and technology. It ranges from geology to cosmetics, optics, cookery, metallurgy, perfumes and much else besides. The magician-scientist Della Porta believed that the use of magic could

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<sup>24</sup> Very little is known about the constitution of the 'Linceo napoletano', see Piccari (2007), p. 40.

<sup>25</sup> Piccari (2007), p. 38.

<sup>26</sup> On the Latin and Italian editions of Della Porta's works see Antonella Orlandi, *Le edizioni dell'opera di Giovan Battista Della Porta*, preface by Marco Santoro (Pisa: F. Serra, 2013).

lead to the understanding of the secrets of nature. The aim of the philosopher is, according to Della Porta, to grasp the correspondences existing between all things in nature: numbers, sound, images, geometric figures, and colours are all connected by invisible links, which only the philosopher can comprehend. Once the scientist grasps these correspondences, he can manipulate and combine them to the advantage of humankind. Della Porta is also considered the father of modern physiognomy, a discipline that has its roots in antiquity. Broadly speaking, physiognomy allows the appraisal of the character or personality of a person by analysing his physical features, especially facial features. Della Porta had a thorough knowledge of ancient sources on physiognomy, which he discussed, compared and annotated with the addition of numerous illustrations. In *De Humana physiognomonica* human and animal heads are depicted next to each other to demonstrate that people who look like particular animals have those creatures' traits [Figs. 8, 9, 10]. With the *Phytognomonica* the Neapolitan scholar went even further. Here Della Porta maintains the existence of morphologic similitudes between animate and inanimate beings: plants, human beings, animals, insects, planets, fossils and so on, he claims, are animated by the same vital principle. In the second part of *Phytognomonica* the scholar affirms that plants resembling human limbs and organs can be employed to cure diseases affecting those specific parts [Figs 20, 21]. This principle of similitude, also called *signatura*, can be traced in the methodology of the Lynceans' research, as I will show in the chapter on the *Sense of Smell*. This is, in the end, Della Porta's own 'natural magic', a faith that made him a philosopher of nature: the belief that the whole of creation is characterized by invisible and crossing correspondences, which only the scientist-magician can unravel and employ by means of alchemy to the advantage of all humankind. Another important figure is the naturalist Fabio

Colonna (1567-1640) [Fig. 55], who was admitted to the Lyncean Academy in 1612 thanks to the sponsorship of Della Porta and upon the approval of Galileo. The descendent of a cadet branch of a noble Roman family, Fabio Colonna studied Greek and Latin and graduated in jurisprudence, although he later dedicated himself to the study of a variety of disciplines – he was a botanist, physician, zoologist, an engraver and was skilled in optics – and achieved great results in all of them. The role played by Colonna in the life of the Academy is even more relevant than Della Porta's, although his contribution has not yet been carefully examined.<sup>27</sup> In this chapter, I will highlight only two aspects of Colonna's scientific activity, as they are strictly connected with crucial issues which are both at the core of the Lynceans' investigations, namely botany and astronomy. The Lynceans supported Galileo both financially and intellectually, giving him advice on how to improve the telescope he had devised; Colonna's contribution, owing to his competence in optics, was particularly valuable, as several letters he addressed to his fellow scientist between 1612 and 1619 testify. The field in which Colonna excelled was without any doubt botany. His most important works in this regard were the *Phytobasanos* (1592) and *Minus cognitarum* (1606 and 1616, better known as *Ekphrasis*), publications that boosted his notoriety but did not improve his financial security. One of the most radical aspects of Colonna's methodology is the fact that, in describing the vegetable specimens from life ('ex vivis plantis'), he strived to convey to the reader not only the visual characteristics of the plants (a process which was facilitated by numerous illustrations), but also to convey their more elusive taste, odour and tactile consistency. Like Della Porta, Colonna dedicated himself to herbalism, which is the

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<sup>27</sup> Antonio Ottaviani, 'La natura senza inventario: aspetti della ricerca naturalistica del Linceo Fabio Colonna', *Physis* 34 (1997), pp. 31-70; Id., 'La parte di Fabio Colonna nel *Tesoro Messicano* dei Lincei', in Andrea Battistini, Gilberto De Angelis and Giuseppe Olmi eds, *All'origine della scienza moderna: Federico Cesi e l'Accademia dei Lincei* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007), pp. 367-393.

use of plants for medicinal purposes. There is, nevertheless, a fundamental difference between them. For Della Porta, the distillation of plants was a process which was still imbued with magical and alchemical reminiscences. Colonna, the former apprentice of Ferrante Imperato, translated the discipline into the field of science and personally tested the real effectiveness of officinal herbs. Although Della Porta and Colonna were the representatives of two different schools of thought, they both maintained their influence within the Academy of the Lynceans. Colonna's approach to botany had a consistent impact on the activity of the Academy, and especially on the *Novae Hispaniae Thesaurus*, the only publication that the Lynceans published as a group in half a century of activity. I will give more details on this aspect shortly, after summarising the Neapolitan contribution to Cesi's project and introducing the Roman side of the Academy. Colonna and Della Porta's thought is rooted in the so-called philosophy of nature, a doctrine to which Naples had given a great contribution. When Cesi arrived in Naples, the city was experiencing its intellectual zenith due to the previous activity of Bernardino Telesio (1509-1588), Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) and Tommaso Campanella (1568-139), who were major representatives of the philosophy of nature. The thought of the Calabrian philosopher Telesio exerted a noticeable influence on European scholars, and especially on Bruno and Campanella. Very broadly speaking, one of the tenets of the philosophy of nature was hylozoism. According to this doctrine, nature is a living organism, and matter is considered to be alive and endowed with a vital principle that enlivens both animate and inanimate creatures. Man is part of this organism and is able, solely through the use of the senses, to penetrate and understand the principles governing nature. It is on the ground of knowledge that the philosophers of nature break with Aristotle and the Aristotelians. For Aristotle (*Metaphysics*), the ability of the



senses to comprehend reality is imperfect, and therefore only intellect – or *sensus communis*, which gather and elaborate information resulting from sensory perception – can gain man a truthful knowledge of nature.<sup>28</sup> Bernardino Telesio (*De rerum natura*, 1565), in contrast, although not denying the function of the intellect, states the pre-eminence of sensory perception over intellect to know nature. He wrote that the senses are reliable and our knowledge derives from the memory of previous sensory experiences.<sup>29</sup> Telesio's influence can be traced in Tommaso Campanella's *Philosophia sensibus demonstrata* (*Philosophy Demonstrated by the Senses*, 1592), written in defence of Telesio's theories, and *Del senso delle cose* (*The Sense of Things*, 1620).<sup>30</sup> In the latter Campanella dedicates several chapters to the function of the senses refuting, like Telesio, the opinion of the Aristotelians on the role of the sixth sense or *sensus communis*.<sup>31</sup> Campanella was also the author of the philosophical and political dialogue *La città del Sole* (*The City of the Sun*, 1602), in which the philosopher theorized the constitution of a utopian city ruled by justice and wisdom. The city is protected by seven circle of walls painted with images representing the fields of human knowledge. The walls of the third circle bear images of officinal herbs and specimens of marine fauna. In both cases the illustration are devised, Campanella says, in order to highlight their correspondence with celestial and earthly things, that is their morphologic likeness with human limbs, stars, metals and so on.

In 1591 Tommaso Campanella was arrested and tried for heresy. It was only the beginning of a long series of trials and prosecutions, following which he served almost thirty years in various prisons, where he was to write his most important

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<sup>28</sup> On Aristotle's *Sensus communis* and its reception in Renaissance see Herman Roodenburg, 'Entering the Sensory World of the Renaissance', in Roodenburg (2014), pp. 4-17.

<sup>29</sup> See in this regard and on *De rerum natura* Spartaco Pupo, *L'anima immortale in Telesio. Per una storia delle interpretazioni* (Cosenza: Luigi Pellegrini, 1999).

<sup>30</sup> The Latin text, *De sensu rerum*, dates back to 1590. See Antonio Bruers's comment to Tommaso Campanella, *Del senso delle cose e della magia* (Bari: Laterza, 1925), pp. VII-VIII.

<sup>31</sup> Campanella (1925), Book 2, Chapters 12-17, pp. 68-93.

works. In spite of his vicissitudes, Campanella wrote several letters in defence of Galileo's theories. The Lynceans, in their turn, used their influence to protect the philosopher, obtaining letters of introduction to powerful personages for him.<sup>32</sup> In 1600 the heretic Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake in the Campo de' Fiori in Rome. The violence of the Roman Inquisition had not suppressed the 'natural desire for knowledge' among the Neapolitan scholars when Cesi arrived in the city. Early-seventeenth century Naples was still teeming with apothecaries, alchemists, botanists, secret laboratories, private libraries and museums. There a variety of subjects, orthodox and unorthodox, were debated. The bustling life of the city was characterized by the activity of philosophers, charlatans, scientists and magicians, all aiming, in their own way and for different purposes, to 'sense' the secrets of nature, to unravel the hidden correspondence between heaven, earth and everything in between.<sup>33</sup> Such was the situation in the lively capital of the Spanish Vice-Kingdom, and the young Lynceans, pioneers of the new science of nature yet still imbued with old-fashioned tenets, found in Naples a fascinating breeding ground for the early Academy.

The beginning of the second decade of the century coincided with a new era for the Academy, which took place mainly in Rome. Membership grew with the addition of Italian and European scholars, including both scientists and humanists. There are quite a few relevant names that should be mentioned, but for the purpose of this study, I will dwell only on two of them, the Tuscan scientist Galileo Galilei

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<sup>32</sup> Giuseppe Gabrieli, *Contributi alla storia dell'Accademia dei Lincei* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1989), Vol. 2, Chapter 'Fra Tommaso Campanella e i Lincei della prima Accademia', pp. 385-391.

<sup>33</sup> On magic, philosophy and science in the early seventeenth-century Naples see Nicola Badaloni, 'Fermenti di vita intellettuale a Napoli dal 1500 alla metà del 600', in *Storia di Napoli* (Naples: Società Editrice Storia di Napoli, 1967-1978), Vol. 5.1 (1972), pp. 643-689; Biagio De Giovanni, 'Magia e Scienza nella Napoli seicentesca', in *Civiltà del Seicento a Napoli* (Naples: Electa, 1985), Vol. 1, pp. 29-40; Stendardo (2002), pp. 23-49.

(1564-1612) and the German physician Johann Schmidt (Latinized Faber, 1574-1629), who were both members of the Academy from 1611. In the final part of this chapter I aim to discuss the importance of the aforementioned Lyncean treatise *Novae Hispania Thesaurus*. In order to accomplish this task, I shall need to indicate the different roles played by Galilei and Faber in the publication of the *Thesaurus* and in the life of the Academy. Galileo did not participate directly in the treatise, although he might have shaped the investigative methodology of the Lynceans and consequently the structure of the text to some extent. This aspect is still a matter of debate among scholars, who alternately belittle or exalt the role played by the scientist. Due to the complexity of the subject, I will start with Faber, whose activity within the Academy is easier to summarise compared with Galileo's.

Johann Faber from Bamberg had been in Rome since 1598.<sup>34</sup> In the papal city he worked as a surgeon, becoming particularly known for his knowledge of human anatomy, and then as the supervisor of the *Orto Botanico* of the Vatican. During his sojourn in Rome he was sent to collect some samples of rare plants in Naples, where he met Imperato, Della Porta and Colonna. In 1611 he became Chancellor of the Academy, on behalf of which he established diplomatic and cultural relationships with northern-European scholars and personages. Faber composed the ninth book of the *Novae Hispaniae Thesaurus*, entitled *Aliorum novae Hispaniae animalium* (*Mexican Animals*) [Fig. 22]. We know, moreover, that he was fascinated by physiognomic studies and that he promoted the treatises of Della Porta on the subject in Germany. His personality is particularly interesting because, among his numerous interests, he was also a refined art collector. Relatively recent studies

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<sup>34</sup> On Faber's activities as an art collector and as a member of the Academy see Irene Baldry, *L'occhio della linca. I primi lincai tra arte, scienza e collezionismo (1603-30)* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 2002), Chapter 5, 'Ritratto di un eclettico: Giovanni Faber linco, collezionista e mecenate', pp. 171-233.

have proved that during his Roman sojourn Faber not only purchased works of art from the most important painters and engravers of the time, but also became an intermediary between European collectors and artists stationed in Rome. He became acquainted, among others, with Filippo Napoletano, who executed engravings representing animal skeletons for him; the Flemish landscape painter Paul Bril; the German Adam Elsheimer, a painter interested in Galileo's astronomical observations; and finally Pieter Paul Rubens, with whom he probably shared an inclination for Neostoicism. The Lynceans availed themselves, for scientific purposes, of the services of draughtsmen and engravers, and we know that they had a predilection for the northern-European craftsmen who were renowned for their ability in rendering detail and as such were particularly suitable for creating scientific illustrations. One soon realizes that the German scholar played a strategic role in this regard. I have emphasised Faber's artistic concerns to show that the Academy of the Lynceans was more than a scientific society. It was a breeding ground for experimentation, a modern research group where scientists and artists worked consciously, probably for the first time, side by side.

The encounter with Galileo was inevitable. In 1604 a new star appeared in the heavens. It was what astronomers call a supernova, a stellar explosion that shines for several days and progressively fades before disappearing. Around a century before, the German mathematician and astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus had elaborated the theory of heliocentrism, an astronomical model in which the Earth and planets revolve around the Sun at the centre of the Solar System, thus dismantling the geocentric theory, which placed the Earth at the centre. The appearance of the supernova in 1604 put the Christian and Aristotelian principles, according to which the heavens were immutable and incorruptible, further into

question. In 1604 the fleeing Lyncean Heeck observed the new star from Prague and described it in his first publication as a Lyncean.<sup>35</sup> Galileo observed the phenomenon in the same year, during his Paduan period (1592-1610). He gave lectures on it and published a dialogue to discuss the *stella nova* under an alias.<sup>36</sup> The story of Galileo is well known. The Tuscan mathematician and astronomer embraced and re-examined Copernicus's heliocentrism. In 1609 he built his first telescope, obtained by improving an optical tool already known in Germany and in the Low Countries. Some years later, he also constructed a microscope, which he donated to Federico Cesi. The two tools, but especially the second, became indispensable research aids for the Lynceans. The telescopic observations allowed Galileo to make some important discoveries on the Milky Way, the satellites of Jupiter and the craters on the Moon, whose surface was believed to be smooth. The scientist enthusiastically announced his new discoveries in the aforementioned *Sidereus Nuncius*. The following year the Roman Inquisition started keeping an eye on Galileo. It was the beginning of the judicial proceedings in which the scientist would have to defend his theories.

Cesi and his companions did not overlook the *Sidereus Nuncius*, in which Galileo had given a thorough description on how to build and use a telescope; they offered him their scholarly support. In 1611 Galileo visited Rome and, in the presence of Federico Cesi and various ecclesiastical authorities – Pope Paul V, Cardinals Francesco del Monte and Maffeo Barberini – explained the functions of the device.<sup>37</sup> The enthusiastic reception of the religious authority did not protect him from future troubles. On the other hand, the visit gained him the protection of the Lynceans. Although they aimed to be extraneous to religious discussions, Federico

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<sup>35</sup> Johann van Heeck, *De nova stella disputatio* (Rome: Aloisium Zannettum, 1605).

<sup>36</sup> *Dialogo di Cecco di Ronchitti da Bruzene in perpusito de la stella nuova* (Padua: Pietro Paulo Tozzi, 1605).

<sup>37</sup> The demonstration took place on the 14 of April 1611. Galilei joined the Academia on the 25 of the same month. See Gabrieli (1996), p. 161, note 4, and p. 157, fig. 18.

Cesi was still the nephew of an important Cardinal of the Curia Romana, Bartolomeo Cesi; a relationship that was of no little importance. The event marked the beginning of a mutually profitable collaboration and epistolary exchange. The first result of this encounter was the publication of Galileo's *Istoria e dimostrazioni intorno alle macchie solari e loro accidenti* (*Letters on Sunspots*, 1613), a text in the form of letters published with the sponsorship of the Lynceans. Galileo wrote these letters to refute the assertions of the Jesuit Christoph Scheiner, astronomer and mathematician. The latter had observed the dark spots around the sun through a telescope. Excluding any defect of the tool or fault of the eye, he concluded that the spots were heavenly bodies located in the atmosphere between the Sun and the Earth.<sup>38</sup> In response to Scheiner, Galileo proved, by relying on observation and on geometrical demonstrations, that the sunspots instead belonged to the surface of the sun. The importance of *Istoria e dimostrazioni* lies in the fact that it is a form of tirade against Aristotelians and the epistemological function of sight; appearances can be deceptive and therefore they must be subjected to the scrutiny of intellect.<sup>39</sup>

The most important and influential text written by Galileo with the support of the Lynceans is *Il Saggiatore* (*The Assayer*, 1623) [Fig. 24]. The genesis of *Il Saggiatore* dates back to 1619 and originated as a result of a dispute on the origins of the comets with the Jesuit Orazio Grassi.<sup>40</sup> The work, written in the form of a long epistle, was addressed to the Lyncean Virginio Cesarini and was sent to the Lynceans in 1621 for review, which took several months. Its publication in 1623 was in part the result of a thorough diplomatic action by the Lynceans. The frontispiece bears the insignia of the Academy, together with the allegories of mathematic and natural philosophy and

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<sup>38</sup> Christoph Scheiner, *Tres epistolae de maculis solaribus scriptae ad Marcum Velsorum* (Augustae Vindelicorum [Augsburg]: Ad insigne Pinus, 1612).

<sup>39</sup> Piccolino and Wade (2014), pp. 37-48.

<sup>40</sup> Orazio Grassi, *Libra astronomica ac philosophica* (Perugia: Ex typographia Marci Naccarini, 1619).

the coat of arms of the pope Urban VIII, whose nephew, the cardinal Francesco Barberini, had been admitted to the Lyncean society just a few months before the publication of the *Assayer*. Modern science has demonstrated that Galileo was wrong about the origin of comets, but was correct from the methodological point of view. Grassi, in fact, relied uncritically upon the authority of Aristotle, while Galileo's mistake originated in personal and genuine experimentation. Several pages of the *Assayer* are dedicated to a crucial issue, namely the distinction of two different qualities of bodies, an idea that had occurred to, and been developed by Galileo quite some time before.<sup>41</sup> Broadly speaking, the distinction is between those qualities which are mathematically or geometrically measurable (in number, size and shape) and which are therefore unquestionable and immutable, and those which are perceived solely by the senses (by taste, colour or sound) and which are, as such, unstable. This distinction might have had some influence on the shaping of the *Novae Hispaniae Thesaurus*, together with the contribution of the Neapolitan Lyncean Colonna. I will analyse all this in detail, after describing the genesis and structure of the treatise.

In 1570, Philip II of Spain sent the royal physician Francisco Hernández (1514-1587) to Mexico (known as New Spain) in order to collect information on the flora and fauna of the Spanish colony. Within the space of seven years, Hernández travelled all over the country and put together hundreds of drawings and descriptions of the specimens he analysed, going far above and beyond the task that the sovereign had given him. When the physician returned back to Spain and showed his manuscripts to Philip II, the king overlooked the importance of the material that had been collected and ordered that it be archived in the library of El Escorial without

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<sup>41</sup> Crombie (1990), p. 325.

being published. Later he asked another physician at his court, the Italian Nardo Recchi, to make a compendium out of Hernández's manuscripts. Recchi accomplished the task, but even then the text remained unpublished. In 1589 Recchi returned to Italy, settling down in Naples with a complete copy of the original project of Hernández. Della Porta and Colonna came across the manuscript and informed several scholars, including the naturalist Ulisse Aldrovandi, of its content. In 1610 Federico Cesi acquired the manuscript. He understood, more than others, that he had in his hands material of inestimable scientific value, which contained descriptions of animals and above all of medicinal plants that were only partially known in Europe; it was a great opportunity for the Lynceans. Soon afterwards Cesi, with the collaboration of Faber, Colonna and Johann Schreck (who became a Lyncean in 1611), started to prepare the manuscript for publication with comments and illustrations. The project only came to fruition in 1651, after around forty years of corrections and improvements, with the title *Rerum Medicarum Novae Hispaniae Thesaurus* [Fig. 13], a text with over a thousand pages and hundreds of illustrations. The first book of the treatise contains Recchi's compendium, including plants, animals and minerals and is annotated by Schreck. It seems that Cesi was not completely satisfied with Schreck's work, and therefore gave Faber and Colonna the responsibility of further annotating the sections dedicated to animals and plants which constitute the second and third part of the *Thesaurus*, respectively *Aliorum novae hispaniae animalium* and *Annotationes et additiones* [Figs 22, 23].<sup>42</sup>

It is now time to come to the last part of the treatise, which comprised twenty diagrams known as the *Tabulae Phytosophicae* (*Phytosophical tables*), which were developed by Federico Cesi and were already at an advanced stage in 1622. The

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<sup>42</sup> A very good outline of the structure of the treatise is to be found in Giovanni Battista Marini Bettolo, *Una guida alla lettura del Tesoro messicano* (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1992).



conceptual framework behind the tables is extremely complex, and their meaning has only recently been thoroughly expounded by Luigi Guerrini.<sup>43</sup> Through them, Federico Cesi not only laid the foundations of modern botanical classification, but also structured a sort of ‘encyclopedia’ of the Creation. Broadly speaking, the first table is a sort of conceptual map that leads the reader through the content of the following plates [Fig. 14]. It displays a pyramidal diagram that begins with God (*Causa causae*, cause of everything) and angelical creatures. It continues with the most sophisticated creatures (the human being) and terminates with the most elementary (from animals to insects and stones). It is accompanied by numerous comments that highlight the imperceptible connections that run through the Creation and bind all the beings, both animate and inanimate, to each other. There is, at the beginning of everything, a common vital and generating principle, with which everything is endowed. The following tables from two to twenty summarise the state of botanical knowledge at the beginning of the seventeenth century and the use of plants for medicinal purposes. There are nevertheless some ground-breaking innovations, of which I will point out only those necessary for my discussion. As Luigi Guerrini has clarified, Cesi was not satisfied with the traditional tenets of botanical classification and aimed to go beyond them. Cesi acted, Guerrini says, both as a mathematician and as a botanist. In the first place, he analyses plants as physical entities [Fig. 15]. Every plant is a bounded and independent body (*corpus proprium*), with a certain shape and dimension. Yet its body is also made up of smaller parts, in their turn with particular shapes and dimensions. At this stage, Cesi analyses the relationship between the single parts and the body of which they are a part (*interiores, exteriores*). The examination goes further. The plant is analysed not as an independent entity, but

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<sup>43</sup> Luigi Guerrini, *I trattati naturalistici di Federico Cesi* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 2006), pp. 153-231.

as a specimen that occupies a position (*positio, collocatio*) in space and in relation with other vegetable samples (*adiacentium*). This kind of classification is purely quantitative and, although it is not explicitly stated, is conducted solely using the sense of sight. The second type of classification is instead qualitative and more complex than the first [Fig. 16]. Now Cesi classifies the plants according to their smell and odour (*sapores ac odores*). Such qualities are described meticulously by highlighting their nuances (*tenuis, gravis*), the effect produced on the tester (*amarus, dulcis, acrus*) and the possible medicinal uses (*energia et prestantia plantae viventis*). Such a formidable record of odours and smells represents, as Guerrini justly pointed out, one of the most extraordinary moments in the history of natural sciences in the modern age. One might wonder what the motive that led Cesi to elaborate such complex classifications was. Scholars disagree on this aspect. The most recent and important contributors to the history of the Academy are those of David Freedberg (2002)<sup>44</sup>, Irene Baldriga (2002).<sup>45</sup> and the aforementioned Luigi Guerrini (2006). Freedberg has probably overestimated the influence of Galileo on the scientific methodology of the Lynceans, while Guerrini has lessened the role of the Tuscan scientist, claiming the intellectual independence of Cesi and the originality of his thought.<sup>46</sup> Baldriga – who has brought to light important documents pertaining to the artists who did work for the Lynceans – has almost ignored the role of Galileo.

I believe, instead, that the greatness of Cesi lies in his ability to expand upon stimuli coming from heterogeneous backgrounds in an original manner, which I am going to focus on. In the aforementioned botanical treatises *Phytobasanos* (1592) and *Minus cognitarum* (1606), Fabio Colonna frequently evokes the colour, smell, taste and

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<sup>44</sup> David Freedberg, *The Eye of the Lynx: Galileo, his Friends, and the Beginnings of Modern Natural History* (Chicago: The Chicago UP, 2002).

<sup>45</sup> Baldriga (2002).

<sup>46</sup> Guerrini (2006), p. 7 and p. 204, note 93.

tactility of specimens in order to share his sensory experience with the reader.<sup>47</sup> Colonna's methodology is made clear from the first pages of the *Minus cognitarum*. 'The author has reproduced images of plants made from life ... and added details reproducing their internal and external parts ... in order to facilitate their understanding',<sup>48</sup> and 'he has rooted out, tasted and portrayed the plants and added notes to the images, describing the smell and taste of the specimens'.<sup>49</sup> Colonna is extremely verbose and his choice of words that convey tactile, gustative and olfactive sensations is very accurate: 'the lobe is round ... the colour is pale ... [the plant is] viscous to the touch, the fragrance of the odour is gentle, the flavour is aromatic and delicious'<sup>50</sup>; or again, 'the colour tends toward red'.<sup>51</sup> He makes comparison between the internal and external parts, 'the external bark is black',<sup>52</sup> and strives to recreate unpleasant sensations, 'its odour is intense and aromatic, yet the flavour is rather bitter and horrible ... the steam [from the distillation] makes the air stink and leaves a bitter taste in the throat'.<sup>53</sup> When conveying a particular odour is difficult, the botanist resorts to more familiar sensations in order to facilitate the reader's understanding: 'It smells like incense, but slightly stronger'.<sup>54</sup> The transmission of knowledge derived from sensory perception is arduous and Colonna resorts to the

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<sup>47</sup> Gabriella Belloni Speciale, 'La ricerca botanica dei Lincei a Napoli: corrispondenti e luoghi', in Fabrizio Lomonaco and Maurizio Torrini eds, *Galileo e Napoli* (Naples: Guida, 1987), p. 76: '[il] continuo rimando al colore, all'odore e al sapore delle foglie, fiori, bacche, bulbi e radici ... offriva al lettore ... la concreta sensuale realtà dei suoi semplici.'

<sup>48</sup> Fabio Colonna, *Minus cognitarum* (Rome: Guilielmum Facciottum, 1606), p. [1] (introduction of the 'typographus' to the reader): 'icones ex vivis plantis ... [auctor] apposit ... partes singulas internas atque externas ... addidit, ut ex sola pictura facilis etiam illius rei cognitio redderetur.'

<sup>49</sup> Colonna (1606), p. 87: 'plantam hanc eruimus, gustavimus, depinximus, atque notas apud iconem, saporem, et odorem descripsimus.'

<sup>50</sup> Colonna (1606), pp. 139-140: 'rotundiore lobo, sed vix differente, colore vero pallidiore, tactu viscoso, et odoris fragrantia nobilior, et sapore aromatico iucundissimo, adstringente.'

<sup>51</sup> Colonna (1606), p. 28: 'ad rubedinem inclinantem colorem.'

<sup>52</sup> Colonna (1606), p. 38: 'tunica foris nigra, intus candida.'

<sup>53</sup> Colonna (1606), p. 42: 'odore gravi aromatico, sapore amaro admodum, ac haborendo ... illius vapore, ut ita dicamus, inficiatur aër, atque guttur amarum reddatur.'

<sup>54</sup> Colonna (1606), p. 24: 'Huius odor quodammodo thurem imitatur, sed gravior, non tamen ingratus.'

strangest, and sometimes exaggerated, analogies.<sup>55</sup> He was aware that the word and the image can fail, and his prolixity seems to be a symptom of this dramatic awareness. It has been said that for Cesi Colonna's approach – those incessant references to sensory perception – was meaningless.<sup>56</sup> On the basis of the passages quoted so far, it seems to me, instead, that the methodology of the Neapolitan scholar can be traced back to the botanical classification of Cesi. It is also possible that, in devising the tables for the *Treasure*, Cesi reflected upon the research of his other fellow Lyncean, Galilei. I have previously touched upon Galileo's *Il Saggiatore*, pointing out the distinction made by the scientist between two different qualities of bodies. Some passages from the treatise will help to clarify it:

‘Now I say that whenever I conceive any material or corporeal substance, I immediately feel the need to think of it as bounded, and as having this or that shape; as being large or small in relation to other things, and in some specific place at any given time; as being in motion or at rest; as touching or not touching another body; and as being one in number, or few, or many ... But that it [the substance] must be white or red, bitter or sweet, noisy or silent, and of sweet or foul odor, my mind does not feel compelled to bring in as necessary accompaniments. Without the senses as our guides, reason and imagination unaided would probably never arrive at qualities like these. Hence I think that tastes, odors, colors, and so on are no more than mere names ... Hence if the living creature were removed, all these qualities would be

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<sup>55</sup> He does not hesitate to employ vulgar as well as a scientific language, so much so that he resorts to analogies related to sexual organs in order to clarify certain shapes and colours for the reader, see Colonna's *Aquatilium et terrestrium aliquot animalium* ..., p. xxvii, text printed as an appendix to *Minus cognitarum* (1606) with independent paging.

<sup>56</sup> Such is the opinion of Belloni Speciale (1987), p. 76, which is not shared by Alessandro Ottaviani (2007).

wiped away and annihilated<sup>57</sup> ... I think that if ears, tongues, and noses were removed, shapes and numbers and motions would remain, but not odors or tastes or sounds. The latter, I believe, are nothing more than names separated from living beings.<sup>58</sup>

As I have already pointed out, there are some qualities of bodies (shape, dimension, position) which Galileo considers unquestionable, as they can be expressed as mathematical entities and do not depend on our sensory organs. On the contrary, there are other qualities (colour, sound, odour), that exist only when the human being perceives them. In reading these passages, and especially those on the mathematical properties of bodies, I have the impression that the same language and concepts can be traced in the table elaborated by Cesi, specifically where he analyses plants in mathematical terms. It is useful to remember that the genesis of *Il Saggiatore*, published in 1623, is inseparable from the story of the Lynceans, and that Cesi's tables were almost completed in 1622. Moreover, as Alistair Crombie has pointed out, the Tuscan scientist developed the idea of the qualities of bodies as early as

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<sup>57</sup> Galileo Galilei, *Il Saggiatore* (Rome: appresso Giacomo Mascardi, 1623), p. 196: 'Per tanto io dico, che ben sento tirarmi dalla necessità, subito, che concepisco una materia o sostanza corporea a concepire insieme, ch'ella è terminata, e figurata di questa, o di quella figura, ch'ella in relazione ad altre è grande, o piccola, ch'ella è in questo, o quel luogo, in questo o quel tempo, ch'ella si muove, o sta ferma, ch'ella tocca, o non tocca un altro corpo, ch'ella è una, poche o molte; né per veruna imaginazione posso separar[la] da queste condizioni; ma ch'ella debba essere bianca, o rossa, amara o dolce, sonora, o muta, di grato, o ingrato odore, non sento farmi forza alla mente di doverla apprendere da cotali condizioni necessariamente accompagnata, anzi se i sensi non ci fussero scorta, forse il discorso, o l'immaginazione per se stessa non v'arriverebbe già mai, per lo che vo io pensando, che questi sapori, odori, colori etc. per la parte del soggetto, nel quale ci par, che riseggano, non sieno altro, che puri nomi, ma tengano solamente lor residenza nel corpo sensitivo, sì che rimosso l'animale, sieno levate ed annihilate tutte queste qualità, tuttavolta però, che noi sì come gli abbiamo imposti nomi particolari, e differenti da quelli de gli altri primi, e reali accidenti, volessimo credere, ch'esse ancora fussero veramente, e realmente da quelli diverse.' Translation is by Stillman Drake, *Discoveries and opinion of Galileo* (New York: Anchor, 1957), p. 274.

<sup>58</sup> Galileo (1623), p. 199: 'stimo, che tolti via gli orecchi, le lingue, e i nasi, restino bene le figure, i numeri, e i moti, ma non già gli odori, né i sapori, né i suoni, li quali fuor dell'animal vivente, non credo, che sieno altro che nomi.' See translation in Drake (1957), pp. 276-277.

during his Paduan sojourn (1592-1610).<sup>59</sup> Even if we did not want to maintain that there was a direct influence on the part of Colonna and Galileo on the conceptual framework of the phytosophical tables, it is clear that the three scholars were dealing, in different ways and in the years before becoming academic fellows, with a common issue which is related to sensory perceptions as a means of understanding reality. These considerations allow me to come to an initial conclusion. The botanical treatment of the *New Spain Treasure* is not based, as Raimondi believed, solely on the use of sight. On the contrary, it entails an analysis of the vegetable specimens achieved with the collaboration of all the senses. Additionally, three eminent representatives of the new natural sciences were concerned with the function of the five senses, thus confirming that the seventeenth century was not only the century of sight. Before continuing further, some additional clarification is required in view of the series painted by Ribera. From the reading of the treatises which were produced by the Lynceans, both individually and within the Academy, no explicit hierarchy of the senses in the context of their taxonomy seems to emerge. The senses seem to share the same importance in terms of knowledge, at least potentially, as I have not noticed any attempt to stress the importance of one of them over the others. The scenario changes, nevertheless, if we look at it from the point of view of the outcomes resulting from sensorial investigation. From the statistical point of view, it seems that smell and taste are mentioned more often than the others. As to the latter, it is the only one to which an entire section of a table is dedicated [Fig. 16]. Notably, this is also the point at which the authors' effort to refine their language in order to convey the gustative sensation reaches its peak. Now, the particular attention dedicated to smell and taste could lead us to surmise that they attained the highest

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<sup>59</sup> Crombie (1990), p. 325.

rank in the Lyncean taxonomy. I believe, on the contrary, that this peculiar treatment (and especially that dedicated to taste) reflects the major evanescence of these senses (which does not necessarily imply that they are the vilest). As I have already noticed, the more elusive sensory perceptions are, the more the Lynceans strive to ‘capture’ them with refined language and accurate description. If there is a ranking of the senses, this is neither explicit nor based on their grade of nobility. It seems to be based, instead, on their epistemological reliability. If I am right, we have enough ground to surmise that taste remains the most ambiguous and deceptive.

The extraordinary belated publication (1611-1651) of the treatise was due to various causes.<sup>60</sup> One of the reasons lies in the fact that the Lynceans were constantly dissatisfied with the illustrations, a process that involved close collaboration with numerous artists. Once again, Fabio Colonna played an important role in the realisation of the images. Over the years the Neapolitan scholar sharpened his ability to observe plants to the point that he became able to discern the tiniest details and the most subtle nuances, thus often requiring improvements and modifications to be carried out by the engravers.<sup>61</sup> This usage of images as a means to disseminate knowledge became a real problem for the Lynceans, which David Freedberg has labelled as ‘the failure of pictures’.<sup>62</sup> The Lynceans became aware, at a certain point, that it was impossible to reproduce things, and their real essence, as they are. Things are unstable, and plants alike. The appearance of vegetable specimens changes according to seasons, an issue that engenders a dramatic tension between an allegedly stable essence and the unstable and multiple appearances of things. In the end, the Lynceans became progressively sceptical about the real usefulness of images to

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<sup>60</sup> On the delay see Sabina Brevaglieri, Luigi Guerrini and Francesco Solinas eds, *Sul "Tesoro messicano" e su alcuni disegni del Museo cartaceo di Cassiano dal Pozzo* (Rome: Edizioni dell'Elefante, 2007).

<sup>61</sup> Ottaviani (2007) has expounded Colonna’s role in the making of the illustrations.

<sup>62</sup> Freedberg (2002), pp. 349-366.

disseminate knowledge. Galileo was in part responsible for this turnaround. With his *Il Saggiatore*, the scientist stated that any description – be it visual or verbal – depending on the subjective senses is bound to fail.<sup>63</sup> The Lyncean Faber knew it very well: ‘I know this as well: Painters often make big mistakes and I have experienced this. Also Pliny said ... "Painting is indeed deceptive ... and due to the multitude of colours it uses, it fails especially in the imitation of nature."’<sup>64</sup> The next sentence from Pliny, which Faber did not quote, reads: ‘Besides, it is not sufficient to paint a plant as it appears at one period only, as its appearance differs according to the four seasons of the year.’<sup>65</sup> Nature, then, is full of surprises, anomalies and monstrosities. Plants resembling sexual organs or human limbs confirm that everything can look like something else [Figs. 21, 25]. This engendered surprise and puzzlement and brought back the Lynceans to the bizarre theories of Della Porta<sup>66</sup> – morphologic likeness between plants and animals and secret links connecting all beings – which can be traced in the phytosophical tables, as we will see in the next chapter.

One of the most extraordinary moments of modern science took place between Rome and Naples, and occurred thanks to the constitution of the Academy of Lynceans, which was a breeding ground for experimentation. The Lynceans were able to absorb stimuli coming from scholars and philosophers who were willing, each

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<sup>63</sup> Freedberg (2002), p. 356.

<sup>64</sup> Johann Faber, ‘Aliorum novae hispaniae animalium’, in *Accademia dei Lincei* (1651), p. 581: ‘Novi tamen at hoc: non levem saepe numero a pictoribus errorem committi, quod et ego alias expertus sum, et Plinius quoque retulit ...: Verum est, pictura fallax est, inquit, et coloribus tam numerosis, praesertim in aemulatione Naturae, multum degenerat transcribentium fors varia.’ In the modern edition of *Naturalis Historia* the quotation is from the Chapter 4 of the Book 25. Online edition is available at Perseus Digital Library, <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.02.0138>>, consulted 21 July 2015.

<sup>65</sup> *Naturalis Historia*, XXV.4: ‘Praeterea parum est singular earum aetates pingi, cum quadripertitis varietatibus anni faciem mutant.’

<sup>66</sup> See Freedberg (2002), pp. 349-366 on the ambiguity of images.



in their own way, to question the authority of Aristotle: Galileo with his mathematical rationalism, Della Porta and Colonna with their philosophy of nature which was rooted in the ideas of Telesio and Campanella. The Lynceans embraced a method of examining nature that relied on the function of the senses and on Galileo's rigorous methodology. They supported the scientist, and promoted and improved the telescope. The enterprise of the Academy involved scholars and artists who were interested in telescopic observations, including Galileo's close friend, the painter Federico Cigoli. They formed a vast network of people able to discuss the function of the senses and the role of images in the dissemination of scientific knowledge, as proven by the intense epistolary exchange of the Lynceans.<sup>67</sup>

In the next chapter we will finally see how Ribera wittily thematized, through his series of the *Senses* (ca. 1612-16), the aspirations, achievements and doubts of his age with regard to man's sensorial experiences and the possibility to investigate and comprehend the functioning of the senses. By staging the equivalent of the *pícaro*, the shabby protagonist of numerous novels who unceasingly fights for his existence, both assisted and misled by his senses, Ribera's series parodies not only the experimental method set up by, among others, the Roman and Neapolitan members of the Accademia dei Lincei, but also Galileo's contributions to the debate.

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<sup>67</sup> See Gabrieli (1996) for the vast corpus of letters of the Lynceans, and Federico Tognoni ed., *Il carteggio Cigoli-Galileo, 1609-1613* (Pisa: ETS, 2009) for scholars and artists involved specifically in astronomical observations.

## CHAPTER 3

### RIBERA'S THE FIVE SENSES

#### Introduction

The oldest mention of the young Ribera's presence in Rome is credited to Giulio Mancini (1599-1630), physician, art collector and author of the treatise *Considerazioni sulla pittura* (*Thoughts on Painting*, 1617-1621), an important text that includes details of the lives of artists working in the papal city.<sup>1</sup> The biography of the Spanish painter is short but significant. Mancini says nothing about Ribera's personal style and technique, except that he follows in the footsteps of Caravaggio ('schola del Caravaggio'). The biographer seems more interested in the eclectic life of the painter between brothels and taverns, always chased by creditors. At first glance, it seems that Mancini is simply re-proposing the cliché of the daredevil painter, in line with his adventurous predecessor Caravaggio. Yet the sketch is so vivid and full of details as to suggest that Mancini knew the painter personally. I will dwell on this aspect – which has been overlooked by scholars – later, as it might cast a new light on the personal life of Ribera and his acquaintances, thus clarifying his possible connections with the cultural societies of the time and possibly with the Lynceans. Mancini's biography is also extremely important inasmuch as he is the only one who mentions the *Five Senses* series, which Ribera executed in Rome before leaving the city in 1616: 'He made many works here in Rome, and in particular for \*\*\*, Spanish, who owns

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<sup>1</sup> Giulio Mancini, *Considerazioni sulla pittura* [1617-1621], eds Adriana Marucchi and Luigi Salerno (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1956), Vol. 1, pp. 108 and 249-251.

five beautiful half-figures representing the five senses.<sup>2</sup> It will be necessary to briefly summarise the story of the *Five Senses* series [Figs 38, 41, 61, 88, 105]. A great deal has already been written regarding its iconographic novelty, dating, client and the possible influence on Ribera of north-European painters stationed in Rome; I will therefore touch upon all these aspects in order to give the reader the necessary background with which to understand the series.

Apart from the account of Mancini, we do not have coeval sources that mention the series. Moreover, *Considerazioni sulla pittura* was only published for the first time in 1956-1957, while the biography of Ribera drawn from Mancini's treatise was published by José Milicua in 1952.<sup>3</sup> Since then art historians have been searching for the paintings mentioned in the text. Even though the series only became known, initially, through copies [Figs. 36, 37], modern scholars were already able to recognise its radical nature compared to the established iconography of the senses. Roberto Longhi traced the original *Taste* as late as 1966 [Fig. 88].<sup>4</sup> Two years later Erich Schleier attributed a painting representing the *Touch* which was displayed in an exhibition in San Francisco to Ribera [Fig. 105].<sup>5</sup> The *Sense of Sight* was definitely attributed to Ribera by Richard Spear in 1972 [Fig. 41].<sup>6</sup> Fourteen years later, in 1986,

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<sup>2</sup> Mancini (1956), Vol. 1, p. 251: 'Fece molte cose qui in Roma et in particolare per \*\*\*, spagnuolo, quale ha cinque mezze figure per i cinque sensi molto belle.'

<sup>3</sup> José Milicua, 'En el centenario de Ribera: Ribera en Roma. El Manuscrito de Mancini, *Archivo Español de Arte* 25, n. 100 (1952), pp. 309-322.

<sup>4</sup> Roberto Longhi, 'I "cinque sensi" del Ribera', *Paragone Arte* 17, n. 193 (March 1966), pp. 74-78, plate 48.

<sup>5</sup> Erich Schleier, 'Una postilla per i "Cinque Sensi" del giovane Ribera', *Paragone Arte* 19, n. 223 (1968), pp. 79-80, table 56.

<sup>6</sup> Richard E. Spear, 'Unknown pictures by the caravaggisti', *Storia dell'arte*, n. 14 (1972), p. 149, fig. 1. Schleier (1968) affirmed that Martin Soria had already traced the *Sight* in 1945. It seems that the painting was on sale in Paris in 1941, see *Jusepe de Ribera, lo Spagnoletto. 1591-1652* (exhibition catalogue, Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, 4 December 1982 – 6 February 1983), eds Craig Felton and William B. Jordan (Seattle; London: Washington UP, 1982), pp. 98-99. In 1969 Felton published a picture of the painting, with dubious attribution, specifying that the *Sight* was in New York until 1952 when it was transferred to London, see Craig Felton, 'The Earliest Paintings of Jusepe de Ribera', *Wadsworth Atheneum Bulletin* 5 (1969), p. 3, fig. 8.

the painting representing the *Smell* was displayed in London [Fig. 61].<sup>7</sup> The *Sense of Hearing* was presented and attributed by the Italian Giovanni Papi in 2005, during an exhibition on ‘Caravaggio e i caravaggeschi’ [Fig. 38].<sup>8</sup> Although critics agree that the first four paintings should be attributed to Ribera, the *Hearing* is relatively problematic inasmuch as it is not well-preserved and is known through other good copies.<sup>9</sup> I have decided to leave this painting out of my research for the moment, not only because of the condition of the canvas. The major reason is that it seems to lack the originality that characterises the other works, as we will see in this chapter.

Who was the series made for? As already pointed out, Ribera’s *Senses* were first mentioned by Giulio Mancini, who informs us that the client was a Spaniard whose name he does not mention. Recent research has identified the anonymous buyer with Pedro Cussida (or Cossida),<sup>10</sup> who sojourned in Rome permanently from 1602 to 1622 (the year of his death) in his capacity of diplomatic representative for both Philip III (1598-1621) and Philip IV (1621-1665), sovereigns of Spain. Among various properties, Cussida owned a palace in the centre of Rome, in via del Corso, where he received his fellow-countrymen. Cussida took advantage of his position in Rome and became an art collector, as well as being an art dealer who was at the service of the two kings. His personal collection grew considerably and boosted his fame to the point that he became the protector of northern *caravaggisti*. When Pedro Cussida died in 1622 his goods were inherited by his son Gianfrancesco, who in his turn died in 1623. As can be clearly seen in the inventory of Gianfrancesco’s estate,

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<sup>7</sup> *Important Old Master Paintings and Discoveries of the Past Year* (exhibition catalogue, New York, 1 – 29 November 1986), ed. Piero Corsini (New York: Piero Corsini, [1986]), pp. 64-67, plate 19.

<sup>8</sup> Gianni Papi, ‘L’Udito’, in *Caravaggio e l’Europa: il movimento caravaggesco internazionale da Caravaggio a Mattia Preti* (Milan: Skira, 2005), p. 278, cat. entry n. III.14.

<sup>9</sup> On the various attributions see Spinosa (2006), pp. 271-273, cat. entries A41-44, and p. 396, cat. entry C15; see also José Milicua, ‘I cinque sensi’, in *Il giovane Ribera* (2011), p. 155.

<sup>10</sup> The connection between Mancini’s anonymous Spaniard and Cussida was first made by Gianni Papi, ‘Jusepe de Ribera a Roma e il Maestro del Giudizio di Salomone’, *Paragone Arte* 53, n. 44 (2002), pp. 21-43.

the Cussidas were particularly interested in caravaggesque painters, including the Dutch Dirck van Baburen and David de Haen, who did oil paintings in the Cappella della Pietà in San Pietro in Montorio for Pedro (1617-19).<sup>11</sup> Among the works listed in the inventory, there are ‘five paintings representing the five senses’,<sup>12</sup> which could match the paintings which Mancini mentions.<sup>13</sup> If further research confirms that Pedro Cussida was Ribera’s patron, this would testify to the prestige that the painter, although very young, enjoyed in Rome. Cussida was not just one of the ‘*amateurs* and *virtuosi* of all kinds’ who were stationed in papal Rome.<sup>14</sup> He was a diplomat who was tasked with prestigious enterprises, the owner of various properties and a refined art collector, activities that made him a prominent personage in the papal Rome. As to the dating of the series, we can rely in the first place on documentary evidence. Ribera arrived in Rome in 1606,<sup>15</sup> when he was barely fifteen years old, and left for Naples in 1616.<sup>16</sup> If Giulio Mancini is reliable, and so far we have no reason to believe otherwise, and if the anonymous Spanish collector he mentions is Pedro Cussida, it follows logically that the series was done during the Roman sojourn of the painter. The majority of scholars are inclined to think that the paintings were done towards the end of the Roman period, between 1615-1616,<sup>17</sup> although José Milicua

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<sup>11</sup> An account on the Cussidas in Rome is by Cecilia Grilli, ‘Il committente della cappella della Pietà in San Pietro in Montorio in Roma’, *Bollettino d’arte* 79, Ser. 6, nn. 84-85 (March-June 1994), pp. 157-164. The partial inventory is to be found on p. 163, note 26, but see also note 25. The complete inventory has been published by Mario Epifani, ‘Appendice documentaria. Le fonti sul soggiorno romano di Ribera’, in Gianni Papi, *Ribera a Roma* (Cremona: Edizioni del Soncino, 2007), p. 250.

<sup>12</sup> Grilli (1994), p. 163, footnote 26: ‘cinque quadri delli cinque sentimenti.’

<sup>13</sup> Papi (2002), pp. 21-43, has identified other paintings which possibly are by Ribera: ‘un ritratto di un filosofo’, ‘un quadro grande con la Resurrezione di Lazzaro’ (Madrid, Prado), un ‘San Pietro quando negò Cristo’ (Rome, Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Antica), ‘dodici quadri di 12 apostoli con Cristo’.

<sup>14</sup> Francis Haskell, *Patrons and Painters. A Study in the Relations Between Italian Art and Society in the Age of the Baroque*, rev. and enlarged ed. (New Haven; London: Yale UP, 1980), p. 94.

<sup>15</sup> Giuseppe Porzio and Domenico Antonio d’Alessandro, ‘Ribera between Rome and Naples: new documentary evidence’, *The Burlington Magazine* 157, n. 1351 (October 2015), pp. 682-683.

<sup>16</sup> Antonio Delfino, ‘Documenti inediti sui pittori del ‘600 tratti dall’Archivio Storico del Banco di Napoli (A. S. B. N.) e dall’Archivio di Stato di Napoli (A. S. N.)’, *Ricerche sul ‘600 napoletano* (1987), pp. 97-103.

<sup>17</sup> See the most recent catalogue *Il giovane Ribera* (2011).

suggests an earlier date range,<sup>18</sup> while Nicola Spinosa thinks that part of it might have been painted in Naples (in this regard, see my Chapter 3.1).<sup>19</sup>

The period that Ribera spent in Rome also saw the presence of the second generation of Northern caravaggesque artists in the papal city. The second decade of the seventeenth century opened with the arrival of Simon Vouet, Valentin de Boulogne, the aforementioned David de Haen and Dirck van Baburen, and Theodoor Rombouts, with whom Ribera must have been acquainted. The caravaggesque vein of the painter is evident, although some scholars have alleged that Ribera might have adopted Caravaggio's naturalism after the manner of the Northern Caravaggisti, especially because of their attention to minute details.<sup>20</sup> The stylistic influence that it is assumed that such artists had on Ribera has been proposed but never clarified. This issue is not part of my current research, although I aim to deal with it in the future. Be this influence feasible or not, the fact remains that the series as devised by Ribera is extremely original and varied in terms of iconography and content.

The theme of the five senses has been widely investigated since Greek antiquity. We are indebted to Aristotle, as it is well known, for the oldest and most detailed treatment of sensorial perception in ancient Western culture. He treated the topic in numerous writings, dedicating a thorough analysis to the epistemological function of the senses, thus establishing principles destined to be very influential for centuries to come and that were to be debated by his commentators.<sup>21</sup> After Aristotle, writers, philosophers and naturalists, among whom Lucretius, Cicero and

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<sup>18</sup> Milicua (1992), pp. 14-15.

<sup>19</sup> Spinosa (2006), p. 39.

<sup>20</sup> Milicua (1992), p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> Danijela Kambaskovic and Charles T. Wolfe, 'The Senses in Philosophy and Sciences: From the Nobility of Sight to the Materialism of Touch', in Roodenburg (2014), pp. 107-125.

Pliny the Elder, dealt with the topic from their point of view. Lucretius (in *De rerum natura*) and Cicero (in *De natura deorum* and *Tusculane disputationes*) treated the senses as a necessary condition for intellectual life and dealt with the question of sensory perception after death. Pliny the Elder, as a naturalist, instead compared the function of human sensory organs with those of animals. Theologians of the Late Antiquity tried in their turn to reconcile the treatment of the senses developed by philosophers and naturalists with the principles of Christianity. They aimed for a moralisation of the senses – by now described as ‘spirituals or mystic’ – in order to warn the believer against the traps set by sensual love and, on the other hand, to lead him or her to transcend reality and to perceive spiritual love as described in the Bible.<sup>22</sup>

Speculations about the five senses were destined to influence their visual representations according to different periods and places. The oldest visual representations in the Western culture date back no further than to the Early Middle Ages. From around the ninth century until the sixteenth century a varied iconography developed that followed three main traditions. Very broadly speaking, the senses were alternately represented by animals, by human figures associated with various objects or by the sensory organs [Fig. 26]. During the sixteenth century a mixed iconography with charming women elegantly dressed or couples along with animals, gentle flowers and various luxurious objects started to circulate, mainly in the north of Europe thanks to printmaking. These new scenes spread thanks to the engravers George Pencz [Fig. 27] and Cornelis Cort [Figs. 28, 29] after drawings by Frans Floris and Maarten de Vos. In many cases they depicted abstract personifications either referring to sensual love or, when accompanied by scenes from the Old and New Testament, warning the believer against the dangerous traps

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<sup>22</sup> See Louise Vinge, *The Five Senses: Studies in a Literary Tradition* (Lund: CWK Gleerup; Royal Society of Letters, 1975), pp. 29-46.

set by the senses. These iconographies led to a further step, which took place at the end of the sixteenth century in the Netherlands with the engravings of Jan Saeredam after Hendrick Goltzius [Figs 30, 31]. Although they are often accompanied by moralistic inscriptions, the senses are now represented not as personifications of virtues or using complex metaphors, but as tangible human beings dressed in the latest style and caught in their concrete existence.<sup>23</sup>

Ribera placed himself at the forefront of this long and complex elaboration by bringing out the still latent possibilities of the subject. In his paintings, in fact, human figures and objects evoke a sense of concreteness and even of coarseness never reached before for such a theme. The setting is very simple: a narrow space lit diagonally, which could be either the modest studio of a scholar or the inside of a tavern. The only piece of furniture is a very modest table where a few objects are visible, alluding to the sense represented.

The new iconography devised by Ribera spread in Europe in three different ways: copies, paintings that contain details from the series and, finally, re-interpretations derived from a meditated reflection upon Riberesque motifs. As to the copies, there are several of them both in Italy and in Spain, both of the entire series and of the single paintings [Figs 36, 37].<sup>24</sup> The Flemish painter Theodoor Rombouts, when he was back in his country after a sojourn in Italy (1616-1625), remembered Ribera's series in his *Allegory of the Five Senses* (c. 1632), and encapsulated

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<sup>23</sup> Karl Nordenfalk, 'The Five Senses in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 48 (1985) (hereafter referred to as Nordenfalk, 1985<sup>1</sup>), pp. 1-22; Id., 'The Five Senses in Flemish art before 1600', in Görel Cavalli-Björkman ed., *Netherlandish Mannerism. Papers given at a symposium in Nationalmuseum Stockholm* (September 21-22, 1984) (Stockholm: Nationalmuseum, 1985) (hereafter referred to as Nordenfalk, 1985<sup>2</sup>), pp. 135-154; Sylvia Ferino-Pagden, 'Prefacio' to *Los cinco sentidos y el arte* (exhibition catalogue, 1997, Prado, Madrid), ed. Montserrat Sabán Godoy ([Madrid]: Museo del Prado, [1997]), pp. 21-27; Alice E. Sanger and Siv Tove Kulbrandstad Walker, 'Making Sense of the Senses', in *Sense and the Senses in Early Modern Art and Cultural Practice* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 1-16.

<sup>24</sup> José Milicua, 'I cinque sensi', in *Il giovane Ribera* (2011), p. 155 and p. 158. I have to thank Itziar Arana Cobos for the pictures of the copies that I am showing.



in it the glasses, the blind man touching a sculptured head and a bulb of garlic [Fig. 32]. Finally, a more meditated reflection is to be found in Luca Giordano's *Carneade with the Bust of Paniscus* and the *Pasta Eater* [Figs 33-34]. The idea that the half-figures of Ribera exerted some influence on the northern European artists who were in Rome should not be discounted [Fig. 35].

Ribera's *Senses* series has been widely investigated. I think we can exclude Craig Felton's interpretation out of hand, according to whom 'some evident parallels do exist between the paintings of Jusepe de Ribera and the writings of St. Ignatius [of Loyola].'<sup>25</sup> The scholar resorted to some passages from the *Exercitia spiritualia* (1548) by the Spanish Jesuit to contend that the series illustrated Ignatius's *Exercitia* because of the 'one-to-one relationship between the painted drama and the viewer'.<sup>26</sup> The mysticism of Ignatius of Loyola entails a progressive detachment from the material senses within a spiritual dimension. Once that stage has been reached, the trainee, by means of imagination (and through the memory of truly experienced sensations) is conducted towards a transcendent experience and in an abstract temporality in order to feel involved in the Holy Mysteries.<sup>27</sup> Felton's theory would require an interpretation of Ribera's paintings in metaphysical terms, where in fact they are not concerned with the metaphysical, but rather with existential and concrete experiences, as will become clear later.

Other scholars have already identified the affinity of these paintings with themes characteristic of Spanish picaresque literature of the same period and their

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<sup>25</sup> Felton (1969), p. 7. The theory was repropounded by Craig Felton in *Jusepe de Ribera lo Spagnoletto 1591-1652* (1982), pp. 92-93.

<sup>26</sup> Felton (1969), p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Edition consulted: Ignacio de Loyola, *Ejercicios Espirituales*, ed. Candido de Dalmases (Santander: Editorial Sal Terrae, 1990, 2nd edition, first published 1987).

connection with the pioneering research that was led by Galileo.<sup>28</sup> However, neither his ‘picaresque vein’ nor the scientific angle have been examined carefully and in parallel with one another. Ribera’s connection with picaresque literature is often reduced to his predilection for ‘plebeian’ models and to his propensity to explore elevated subject matter by depicting lower-class figures and accessories. In other words, parallels between Ribera’s paintings and picaresque novels have been formulated on the basis of loose thematic comparisons, without analysing the literary or pictorial backgrounds of the texts and paintings, and without reflecting on the methodological implications determined by the examination of paintings in the light of texts. By the same token, the scientific angle has been reduced to references to Galileo’s astronomical investigations, due to the presence of an early telescope in Ribera’s *Sense of Sight*. The connection with the scientific experimentalism of the early seventeenth century is instead much wider and involves other eminent scholars and themes (see Chapter 2). What I will venture to demonstrate is that Ribera employed picaresque strategies and procedures without necessarily adopting its cases, themes or narrative episodes. As I have explained in detail (see Chapter 1), the picaresque genre deals with the lives of lowborn characters and mendicants, called *pícaros*. The *pícaro* is not simply a beggar or a scoundrel. On the one hand, he embodies the modern man, Galilean in a way, who mocks the bookish knowledge and believes, like Cervante’s Don Quijote, that ‘experience is mother of all the sciences’.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, he is a clumsy and solitary anti-hero who is spitefully mocked by a conservative society. He therefore becomes a kind of philosopher, a self-taught man who can rely only on his senses to survive. The *pícaro*, moreover, is aware of the unreliability of sensorial

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<sup>28</sup> The main contributions remains that of Santucci (1992).

<sup>29</sup> Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, ed. Francisco Rico (Madrid: RAE, 2015), Part 1, Chapter 21, p. 188.

perception due to the contrast between appearance reality. Last but not least, one of the aims of the picaresque genre is to bring about a comic effect which is obtained by juxtaposing a lyrical prose style with the vulgarity of everyday life, which is described to its tiniest and unpleasant details with incredible accuracy. Ribera in his turn magnifies the picaresque elements of his paintings through an optical accuracy that perfectly matches seventeenth-century scientific experimentalism. In other words, Ribera's naturalism is a device which incorporates the detailed observation of nature that characterizes the scientific experimentations conducted at the time by, among others, the Roman members of the Accademia dei Lincei. In this regard, it has not been previously noted that Ribera thematises some of the topics of debate specific to the Italian scientific experimentalism by turning them into parody. For instance, through the representation of scientific tools [Fig. 41], Ribera's *Five Senses* series clearly alludes to discussions about the senses, their functions and reliability that lay at the core of the new science of nature. And yet, by juxtaposing the tools of the new science with lower-class props inspired by picaresque literature [Fig. 61], he offers an interpretation of the senses that comically subverts the tenets of scientific experimentalism. Similarly, in his *Philosophers* Ribera depicts the most illustrious representatives of ancient knowledge and paradigms of the scientific interpretation of nature in picaresque terms, bringing about a comic effect of strangeness [Figs 39, 40]. The visual picaresque devised by Ribera, like that utilised by his literary counterparts, is characterised by a serious discourse disguised by a comic undertone, which the learned contemporaries of the painter would have understood. The characters staging the senses, represented with different degrees of shabbiness and accompanied by props that evoke the picaresque taste for the disagreeable, testifies to Ribera's reflection upon the scientific discourse of his time. In all the images of the *Senses*, the

human figure is not necessarily employed as a symbol of the depicted sense, but it is represented in the act of experiencing it and demonstrating his experience in the use of that specific sense. This act of radical experience secures the link of these paintings to the new methodological approach of the early seventeenth-century experimentalism. With the exception of *Sight*, in all of the paintings the experience and usage of a sense is connoted by its most physiological and debasing aspects: it is this visual approach to the experience of the senses that secures the link between the paintings and the picaresque literature. In all the cases, the experimentalism of the senses is explored through an opposition between appearance and reality in a parodic or comedic tone.

At the beginning of my studies, I planned to treat the series as a whole. Yet as a result of my research, I have acknowledged that the painter treated each sense with a different approach, and that each composition is in itself extremely complex, although there is a profound common thread running through all of them, namely that subtle Picaresque undertone that testifies Ribera's comic interpretation. I have therefore decided to dedicate a separate chapter to each of them, which is preceded by a common introduction.

Before concluding this introduction, I need to return to an issue I have previously only touched upon. We do not have any documentary evidence proving the direct engagement of Ribera with the Roman cultural societies, nor do we know his cultural interests. I will therefore venture to show that his *Five Senses* series is rooted in the research of the Lynceans in an interpretation which relies 'solely' on his painting and by highlighting, as we go, the possible connection with the investigation led by the Lynceans. There is, nevertheless, a clue that, although feeble, must be

taken into account for future research into a possible connection with the Lynceans. I am referring to Ribera's first biographer, the physician and art collector Giulio Mancini, who was certainly acquainted with the Lynceans and probably with Jusepe de Ribera, too. When the Sieneſe doctor and art collector Mancini moved to Rome, he worked at the hospital Santo Spirito in Sassia, like the Lyncean Johann Faber, and became chief physician ('archiater') of the Pope Urban VIII. He knew the Lynceans personally, as is testified by some letters and by an anecdote recounted by Johann Faber, who was himself an art collector.<sup>30</sup> In a short passage of *Aliorum novae hispaniae animalium* in the *Novae Hispaniae Thesaurus*, Faber praises Mancini as a physician as well as a fine connoisseur of art.<sup>31</sup> Mancini knew the Lynceans and we have reason to think that he was acquainted with Ribera as well. In describing the licentious life of the Spaniard, Mancini provides a vivid sketch of his habits – the artist was often in companies of prostitutes and did not abide by religious precepts – and describes the miserable furniture of the painter with a bailiff's precision ('one mattress, one blanket ...'<sup>32</sup>). He probably knew the young Ribera and, on account of his own experience, he might have been attuned to observing the low-life elements of Ribera's vicissitudes. From the most important account of Mancini's life – which we owe to Gian Vittorio Rossi, also known as Giano Nicio Eritreo (1645) – we learn that Urban the VIII's personal physician had a very adventurous life. He claimed to be an atheist, encouraged his fellows to neglect religious precepts and saved the three sons of his mistress from prison. Moreover, he did not hesitate to request paintings from

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<sup>30</sup> Letters quoted in Baldriga (2002), p. 35, footnote 70.

<sup>31</sup> Faber (1651), p. 599: 'Erant autem cum Summo Pontifice tunc in Vaticanis curae meae commissis Hortis ... Iulius Mancinus intimus et Cubicularius Pontificius Archiater, vir non aristotelica modo philosophia et hippocratica medicina eminentissimus, sed chymicarum quoque rerum gnarus, anatomicus insignis, et liberalium plurium aliarum artium non tam amator, quam exactissimus iudex et aestimator. Hi dum varia mecum de monstro hoc confabularentur.'

<sup>32</sup> Mancini (1956), Vol. 1, p. 250.

his wealthier patients as a form of payment.<sup>33</sup> This articulated network of professional and personal relationship might prove useful, in the future, to help to further clarify certain aspects of Jusepe de Ribera's Roman sojourn, as well as to shed new light on the lives of the Lynceans.

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<sup>33</sup> Gian Vittorio Rossi (pseudonym Giano Nicio Eritreo), *Pinacotheca altera imaginum illustrium* (Cologne: Iodocum Kalcovium, 1645), Vol. 2, pp. 79-82.

### 3.1 The Sense of Sight: Scholar, Philosopher, Soldier

Among the paintings in Ribera's *Five Senses* series, the *Sight* [Fig. 41] is the one that has most attracted the attention of scholars, and the reason is not difficult to understand. The presence of a refined exemplar of Galileo's telescope, unlike the other paintings, openly evokes the crucial years of the modern scientific revolution [Figs 43, 44], an epochal transition that can be partially credited to the improvement of sight by means of optical tools. In this regard, I will very briefly review the opinions of some art historians who have pointed out an apparent contradiction: a man who does not look like a scholar holds a telescope, an expensive and rare instrument. Nicola Spinosa, convinced that Ribera would necessarily use idlers or beggars as models, has imaginatively seen in this figure a 'tattered peasant or an offal seller who might have borrowed or stolen the refined tool from a disciple of Galileo'.<sup>34</sup> It is clearly an exaggeration to define the man as a tattered character, a description that suits well the *Smell* [Fig. 61]. Yet for the sake of verisimilitude, the man is represented wearing cheap, threadbare clothes, a detail that will prove useful to us later. Ribera's characters staging the *Senses* are presented with different degrees of shabbiness, details worthy of consideration. Giovanni Papi has asserted, in the footsteps of Spinosa, that 'the physiognomy of the man is not that of an intellectual and that he handles the instrument as it were a work tool or even a weapon'.<sup>35</sup> Both Spinosa and Papi have disregarded the ironic vein of the Spaniard and his propensity

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<sup>34</sup> Spinosa (2006), p. 19: 'un torvo figuro, capelli radi, orecchie larghe, volto bruciato dal vento e dal sole, veste sbrindellata, ma dallo sguardo attento, acuto e penetrante —forse un contadino, un rivenditore di carne o frattaglie o un mercante di granaglie?— chiamato a rappresentare la vista e che ora ... regge pensoso, tra le mani rozze e rigonfie, un cannocchiale di finissima fattura, forse preso in prestito, se non furtivamente sottratto, dal laboratorio di qualche convinto sperimentatore dei recenti insegnamenti di Galileo Galilei.'

<sup>35</sup> Papi (2007), p. 165: 'una fisionomia tutt'altro che intellettuale, che maneggia lo strumento quasi che fosse uno strumento da lavoro o addirittura un'arma.'

to lampoon serious themes and the representatives of philosophic and scientific knowledge.

Peter Mason is the author of the most recent (2012) essay on this painting, a contribution preceded by a lecture on the entire series given at the Prado Museum in 2011.<sup>36</sup> He has alleged, on the one hand, that the figure in the *Sight* seems to be a hunter or a Machiavellian strategist rather than an astronomer, also owing to the fact that ‘during the first twenty-five years of its existence the telescope remained primarily an instrument for terrestrial use, usually for naval or military purposes’.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, he has stated that the painting is rooted in the early optical investigations of the Lynceans, although he has not excluded possible connections with Galileo’s investigations. His conclusion is that the work seems to be more related with practical uses of the telescope and less with astronomical observations.<sup>38</sup> When Mason employs the word *porosidad* (porosity) to refer to the *Sight*, he suggests that the painting has multiple layers that overlap, although he does not clarify what the Lynceans’ optical interests consisted of before and after their encounter with Galileo and how it would be possible to reconcile them with hunting and warfare.

Scholars do recognize that the painting is rooted in the investigations of the Roman cultural circles, but at the same time they are puzzled by the non-scholarly setting and by the brutish-looking character. I will set out to show that this contradiction – the telescope constructed by Galileo being held by an incongruously uncouth character – indeed makes the image ambiguous, but that this ambiguity has

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<sup>36</sup> Peter Mason, El catalejo de Ribera. Observaciones sobre "La Vista" de la primera serie de "Los cinco sentidos", *Boletín del Museo del Prado* 30, n. 48 (2012), pp. 50-61; Id., *Los cinco sentidos como pintura de la experiencia* (paper given at the Prado Museum, 23 May 2011), <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cx\\_NzHmZk38](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cx_NzHmZk38)>, consulted 16 October 2015.

<sup>37</sup> Albert van Helden, 'The Telescope in the Seventeenth Century', *History of Science Society* 65, n. 1 (March 1974), p. 42 as quoted in Mason (2012), p. 54.

<sup>38</sup> Mason (2012), pp. 50-61.



its reasons.

It will not be necessary to discuss the quarrel concerning the priority of invention of the telescope at great length, as it has been clearly demonstrated that the instrument was the result of improvements brought about by scholars and amateurs who were often working independently from one another.<sup>39</sup> It will be useful, nevertheless, to briefly reconstruct the stages and the context in which the Galilean and 'Lyncean' telescope was promoted and what it really meant for the Roman cultural circles.

It is known that the Lynceans were concerned with astronomy and optics from the foundation of their sodality.<sup>40</sup> While undertaking the foundation of the Academy, Federico Cesi travelled widely to test the ground and identify potential collaborators for his project. Fascinated by the personality of Giambattista Della Porta, Cesi reached Naples in 1604, where he met the Neapolitan scholar<sup>41</sup> who had been publishing works on optics and refraction.<sup>42</sup> Later on Della Porta (1609), informed by Cesi about Galileo's telescope, wrote several letters to claim that he had invented the telescope long before, thus implying that Galileo was a plagiarist [Fig. 47].<sup>43</sup> It was the beginning of a lasting controversy, but Della Porta was never able to prove his alleged primacy. Moreover, we know that Cesi had already constructed rudimental exemplars of the tool and donated them to several eminent Roman

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<sup>39</sup> Albert van Helden *et alii* eds., *The Origins of the Telescope* (Amsterdam: KNAW press, 2010).

<sup>40</sup> Gabrieli (1989), Vol. 2, Chapter 7, 'Pratica e tecnica del telescopio e del microscopio presso i primi Lincei', pp. 347-371.

<sup>41</sup> Letter from Cesi to [Federico Stelluti], 17 July 1604, in Gabrieli (1996), n. 15, pp. 36-41.

<sup>42</sup> Giovan Battista Della Porta, *Magiae Naturalis libri XX* (Naples: Horatium Salvianum, 1589), Chapter 17, 'De catoptrici imaginibus'; Id., *De refractione optices parte libri novem* (Naples: Io. Iacobum Carlinum, et Antonium Pacem, 1593), Chapter 8, 'De Specillis'.

<sup>43</sup> Letter to Federico Cesi, 28 August 1609, in Galileo, *Opere*, Vol. 10 (1900), n. 230, p. 252; letter to Cesi, 1610, in Ibid., n. 450, p. 508; letter from Keplero to Galileo, 19 April 1610, in Ibid., n. 297, p. 323; letter from Della Porta [1612, to Johann Faber ?], in Gabrieli (1996), n. 202, pp. 308-310; letter from Della Porta to Cesi, 2 June 1612, in Gabrieli (1996), n. 125, p. 232; letter from Della Porta to Galilei, 26 September 1614, in Ibid., n. 358, p. 461; letter from Stelliola to Cesi, 10 April 1615, in Ibid., n. 393, p. 494.

personages before Galileo's arrival in the papal city (1611).<sup>44</sup> In the light of the documentation available for the period 1603-1611 we can conclude that before they met Galileo, the Lynceans' interest in optical tools did not achieve any relevant result.<sup>45</sup> Things changed to a certain extent after their encounter with Galileo in 1611. From that date and for the next twenty years the Lynceans' concern with optical tools, and especially the microscope, was to become a more serious matter in the light of Galileo's research. At this stage, it is useful to point out two things. Firstly, the microscope, and not the telescope, was congenial to the Roman Academy, as it was instrumental in botany and entomology, the fields in which they excelled.<sup>46</sup> In the second place, the Academy backed Galileo as soon as they became aware of the potentialities of the telescope. Their epistolary correspondence proves the Lynceans' genuine interest in the instrument but at the same time reveals that they remained good *dilettanti* (except for a single instance which I will discuss at the end of this chapter) and that they were unskillful handlers of the 'cannone occhiale'. In spite of this, they played a decisive role as sponsors for Galileo and ensured that the 'tubus opticus' remained inextricably linked with the name of the Academy for centuries to come. Let us consider the main stages of this second phase.

Further to the publication of the *Sidereus Nuncius* (1610), in which Galileo had described in detail how to build and use the telescope, Cesi's companions assured the scientist financial and scholarly backing. In 1611 Galileo visited Rome to explain the functions of the device to the local cultural circles and to join the recently-founded

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<sup>44</sup> Faber (1651), pp. 473-474: 'Eodem Romae tempore Lynceorum princeps illustrissimus Federicus Caesius rumore tantum e Belgio audito, idipsum instrumentum composuit et inter complures in urbe Magnates distribuit, nomenque telescopij excogitavit et indidit: quod nomen etiam, cum non multis post mensibus Galilaeus Romam venisset ... omnibus placuit acceptumque fuit.'

<sup>45</sup> On the role played by the Lynceans on the improvement of the telescope see Gabrieli (1989), pp. 347-371.

<sup>46</sup> Olmi (1992), p. 372.

Accademia: an event that marked the beginning of a mutually profitable collaboration and epistolary exchange.<sup>47</sup> The Lynceans were far-sighted enough to understand that sponsoring the tool would bring them prestige and renown and therefore devised a long-term and successful strategy to promote it. In 1613 they published Galileo's *Istoria e dimostrazioni intorno alle macchie solari* at their expense and under their aegis, a controversial text on solar spots that gave rise to heated debate.<sup>48</sup> The eclectic Lyncean Niccolò Antonio Stelliole soon started devising the essay *Ispicillo celeste* in order to give his contribution on behalf of the Academy; it was ready to be printed in 1617.<sup>49</sup> Northern European scholars also claimed the invention of the telescope in this period; the Lynceans swiftly responded with a recognition of the merits of both sides. Johann Faber's introductory poem to Galileo's *Il Saggiatore* is a good example of such diplomacy. Faber flattered potential inventors with couplets that echo the division of the universe between the gods after the fall of the Titans: 'Della Porta paved the way [for the invention of the telescope], the Germans made a step forward, but Galileo has definitely improved it.'<sup>50</sup> Galileo remains for them the real discoverer of 'wonders in the sky through the telescope, which is the new eye of nature',<sup>51</sup> the one who 'has discovered the sky' and 'provided the eyes of the

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<sup>47</sup> The demonstration took place on the 14 of April 1611. Galilei joined the Accademia on the 25 of the same month. See Gabrieli (1996), p. 161, note 4, and p. 157, fig. 18.

<sup>48</sup> Galileo Galilei, *Istoria e dimostrazioni intorno alle macchie solari e loro accidenti comprese in tre lettere scritte all'illustrissimo signor Marco Velsari Linceo* ... (Rome: Giacomo Mascardi, 1613).

<sup>49</sup> Niccolò Antonio Stelliole, *Il telescopio over ispicillo celeste* (Naples: Domenico Maccarano, 1627). From the correspondence we infer that the treatise was at an advanced stage in 1615 and ready to be published in 1617 although it was printed only in 1627, see Gabrieli (1996), n. 365, n. 393 and n. 469.

<sup>50</sup> Johann Faber, introductory poem to *Il Saggiatore* (1616), in Galileo, *Opere*, Vol. 6 (1896), p. 205: 'Porta tenet primas; habeat, Germane, secundas; Sunt, Galilae, tuus tertia regna labor.'

<sup>51</sup> Ibidem, p. 205: 'mirabilium in caelo per telescopium, novum naturae oculum'. The first couplets remind the division of the Universe between Zeus, Poseidon and Hades after the fall of the Titans (see Ovid, *Fasti*, IV.584; Homer, *Iliad*, XV.184-196). See also Stelliole's letter to Galilei, 17 August 1613, in Gabrieli (1996), n. 262, p. 378: 'Come nelle altre grandi invenzioni, bisognava che vi concorressero le due cause datrici delle cose, dico l'una il valore, l'altra la fortuna: la causa fortunale, in esser venuto in uso il telescopio istromento visivo, è stata commune ad altri; l'haverlo applicato alle osservazioni celesti con diligenza ammiranda è obbligo che il mondo deve tutto a V.S.'

Lynceans with such adventurous spectacles'.<sup>52</sup>

Their epistolary correspondence played a propagandistic role that was as important as that played by the official publications. Between 1613 and 1617 Galileo's correspondence with people connected to the Lynceans became very conspicuous: men of science, dilettanti, artists and prelates developed a genuine interest in the debate on solar spots and the telescope.<sup>53</sup> Some of them asked Galileo for suggestions on how to build a home-made telescopic device; others gave the scientist their advice or solicited Cesi to intercede with him to get an exemplar of the instrument.<sup>54</sup> The Academy consequently became the go-between of this cultural exchange. A significant example is represented by the joint contribution of Federico Cesi and the painter Ludovico Cigoli, who was in Rome from 1604 to 1613. Although the latter was not a member of the Academy, he became a close collaborator of Cesi and helped him, among other things, to select the engraver for the illustrations of Galileo's *Istoria e dimostrazioni intorno alle macchie solari* (1613). Cigoli and Galilei, in contrast, had met years before in Florence, and their friendship grew stronger during the period Cigoli spent in Rome. They had many interests in common – from geometry to music, art and literature – and mutually benefitted from their fellowship.<sup>55</sup> Galileo availed himself of Cigoli's astronomical observations, while the latter showed his appreciation in the fresco *Immaculate Conception* (1612) [Fig. 48] in the dome of the Pauline Chapel in Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome: the moon

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<sup>52</sup> Letter from Johann van Heeck to Galileo, 1614 (?), in Gabrieli (1996), n. 372, p. 473: 'Grande donché [sic] è la sorte di V. S. et ch'abbi a lincei occhi gionto sì avventurosi occhiali, per che passano tutte le sottilità d'una infinità di cervelli Aristotelichi.'

<sup>53</sup> Among these Giovan Battista Agucchi, Michelangelo Buonarroti the young, the Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte, the painter Domenico Cresti known as il Passignano, see Tognoni (2009), pp. 13-26.

<sup>54</sup> By way of example, the Bishop of Bamberg, Johann Gottfried von Aschhausen, repeatedly asked Cesi to intercede with Galileo, see Gabrieli (1996), letters nn. 200, 207, 209, 212, 222.

<sup>55</sup> Lucia Tongiorgi Tomasi, 'Cigoli e Galileo: cronaca di un'amicizia', in Tognoni (2009), pp. 13-26.

beneath Mary's feet is exactly as Galileo had seen it through the telescope.<sup>56</sup> Yet Cigoli was not the only artist interested in telescopic observations. Thanks to recent studies we know that the German painter Adam Elsheimer, in Rome between 1600 and 1610, developed a passion for scientific research through the Lyncean Faber, who was an art collector and acquainted with several artists stationed in Rome.<sup>57</sup> The most impressive by-product of his interest is the *Flight into Egypt* (c. 1608) [Fig. 49], which contains the first representation of the Milky Way as seen through a telescope. As we have seen so far, the name of the Academy recurs with a certain frequency, either in correspondence or in publications, along with that of those who were concerned with the application of the telescope for speculative and artistic purposes. As far as Galileo is concerned, then, Mason is right when he writes that the scientist tried to sell exemplars of the instrument for military purposes, but he disregards that the attempts, made to subsidize his research, were neither successful nor determinant.<sup>58</sup> We can therefore leave the martial use of the instrument to the irony of a Ben Jonson play: 'They write, was found in Galileo's study a burning glass ... to fire any fleet that's out at sea.'<sup>59</sup> If the painting is rooted in the Lynceans' cultural circles, as it is thought, I think it unreasonable to see any military or Machiavellian undertone in it in the light of the aforementioned documents. I will now proceed to analyze the painting itself, in order to argue the case for an alternative interpretation.

The subject of the *Sense of Sight* holds in his gnarled and robust hands an

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<sup>56</sup> Federico Cesi to Galileo, 23 December 1612, in Gabrieli (1996), n. 193, p. 301: 'Il s. Cigoli s'è portato molto bene nella cupola della cappella di S. S.tà a S. Maria Maggiore, e come buon amico leale, ha, sotto l'immagine della Beata Vergine, pinto la luna nel modo che da V. S. è stata scoperta con la divisione merlata e le sue isolette.'

<sup>57</sup> On the relationship between artists and the Lyceans see Baldriga (2002), especially Chapter 5, 'Ritratto di un eclettico: Giovanni Faber linceo, collezionista e mecenate, pp. 171-234.

<sup>58</sup> See Clelia Pighetti, *Atomi e lumi nel mondo spagnolo* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1993). The Lynceans were indeed conscious of the practical applications of the telescope, 'a tutti già utilissimo in uso, e d'osservationi, e di governo, e di guerra' (Olmi (1992), p. 359), nevertheless, we can reasonably conclude that within the Academy it was used for highly speculative purposes.

<sup>59</sup> Ben Jonson, *The Staple of News* [1625] (New York: Henry Holt, 1905), III.2, p. 61.

exemplar of an extendable telescope which was constructed by Galileo around 1609 [Figs. 43-44].<sup>60</sup> The item, held at the Museum Galileo, Florence, is around 92 cm long and consists of two wooden tubes covered with leather which are decorated with golden ornaments. The item painted from life by Ribera seems to be no less than 70 cm long, in proportion to the arm of the man, and is of a dark brown colour. The tube has three golden decorations, two at the extremities and one almost in the middle, probably close to the joint of the tubes. The man wears coarse and threadbare garments. Over a long-sleeved white shirt he wears a brown jacket made of rough fabric with cuffs tightened by means of white laces. A dark brown cloak, not quite visible owing to the darkening of the canvas, covers his right shoulder. His skin is tanned and stained with brownish freckles [Fig. 42]. The beard and the hair are extremely dark; the forehead is wide and bald, with a bump in the middle and plowed with wrinkles that enhance the intense and bright gaze of the man. The aquiline nose has a sharp bridge and a swelling in the middle. His unrefined clothes and rugged facial features confer on him a feral and serious air, except for the large and sticking-out ears that lessen the character's gloomy gait. On the table there are some objects connected with sight which are visibly worn out: a mirror suspended above the table and a pair of pince-nez with their open case. On the right side lies a brown hat with two small 'wings', adorned with a red bow and two feathers, of which one is white and the other brownish [Fig. 46]. The hat with those peculiar small 'wings' does not help qualify the man's social status. A similar one, without feathers, is to be found, for example, in the portraits of Andrea Cesalpino and Ludovico Cigoli [Figs 50, 51], respectively a naturalist and a painter. The feathers might be a synecdoche alluding to

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<sup>60</sup> The specimen is held by the Museo Galileo. Istituto e Museo di Storia della Scienza, Florence, inventory number 2428. A full description is available at: [http://catalogo.museogalileo.it/oggetto/CannocchialeGalileo\\_n01.html](http://catalogo.museogalileo.it/oggetto/CannocchialeGalileo_n01.html), consulted 20 October 2015.

the eagle, also associated with sight.<sup>61</sup> As to the spectacles, Ribera depicts a common type of pince-nez [Fig. 52], although glasses with frames were already in use at that time.<sup>62</sup> They were worn not only out of necessity, but also as a sign of social distinction, especially in Spanish contexts [Fig. 53].<sup>63</sup> They became popular at the beginning of the seventeenth century and it was not uncommon to have them mentioned in literature. For example, in a novel by Rodrigo Fernández de Ribera, *Los anteojos de mejor vista* (*The Spectacles to Improve the Sight*, 1620-25), the glasses are protagonist of a long dialogue in which they are praised for their ability to ‘unmask deceit and allow us to see things as they really are.’<sup>64</sup> Some years before they had appeared also in Giovan Battista Della Porta’s *Chiappinaria* (1609), a comedy of errors dedicated to his Lyncean companion Francesco Stelluti. Here Della Porta ironically shows how spectacles can also be detrimental in ambiguous situations. The possessive captain Gorgoleone is incensed, as he is sure he has seen his daughter Drusilla flirting with a suitor:

DRUSILLA Did you see it with or without glasses?

GORGOLEONE With glasses, the ones I use when I want to see better.

DRUSILLA Maybe with those glasses that distort, and make you see one thing

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<sup>61</sup> Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia* [1603], eds Sonia Maffei and Paolo Procaccioli (Turin: Einaudi, 2012), P. 528, n. 348.1a (‘Viso’): ‘L’Aquila ha per costume, come raccontano i diligenti Osservatori, di portare i suoi figliuoli vicino al Sole per sospetto che non gli siano stati cambiati, e se vede che stanno immobili, sopportando lo splendore, li raccoglie e li notrisce, ma se trova il contrario, come parto alieno li scaccia.’

<sup>62</sup> Benito Daça de Valdes, *Uso de los anteojos para todo genero de vista* (Seville: Diego Perez, 1623).

<sup>63</sup> Ana María Rueda Sánchez, ‘La optometría en el Renacimiento Español’, in Francisco Javier Campos and Fernández de Sevilla eds, *La ciencia en el Monasterio del Escorial* (proceedings of the Symposium, 1 - 4 September 1993) (Madrid: Real Centro Universitario Escorial María Cristina, 1993), Vol. 1, pp. 667-704.

<sup>64</sup> Rodrigo Fernández de Ribera, *Los anteojos de mejor vista* [1620-25] and *El Mesón del Mundo*, ed. Victor Infantes de Miguel (Madrid: Legasa, 1979), p. 55: ‘Ni estos anteojos sirven de injuriar, sino de advertir y verlo todo sin engaño ni malicia’; p. 47: ‘Hágame merced de ponerse estos anteojos: verá las cosas en el mismo ser que son, sin que el engaño común le turbe la luz de la vista más importante.’

instead of something else.<sup>65</sup>

Shortly after, glasses had to share their popularity with the telescope, which was destined to be celebrated in numerous writings too.<sup>66</sup> Even our man has left aside his spectacles, and the mirror, opting for the new tool, probably ready ‘to abandon’, like Galileo, ‘the terrestrial speculations and devote himself to searching the sky’.<sup>67</sup> Displaying these three tools connected with sight is particularly ingenious, for they spur us on to reflect on their respective functions and on the development or progress of knowledge. The tools indicate three different types of vision. According to a tradition that can be traced back to the letters of Saint Paul the Apostle, the mirror acts as a filter which reflects an indirect and therefore unreliable vision. Our knowledge, Saint Paul says, is imperfect and can be compared to an image reflected in a mirror.<sup>68</sup> Glasses, in contrast, are to be used for correcting refractive errors and thus allow us to see what we should normally be able to see with the naked eye. The telescope, finally, empowers our sight and allows us to see things that in normal conditions we cannot.

The painting is the only one of the series to include a window, a significant detail that establishes a connection between the inside and the outside, between a closed space and an open one [Fig. 45]. The cloudy sky visible through the window is

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<sup>65</sup> *La Chiappinaria*. All’illustre signor Francesco Stelluti T. Linceo (Rome: Bartolomeo Zannetti, 1609). I quote the original Italian from a later edition, *Commedie*, Vol 2 (Naples: Gennaro Muzio, 1726), III.2, p. 54: ‘DRUSILLA L’avete voi visto con gli occhiali, o senza? – GORGOLEONE Con gli occhiali, i quali adopero quando vo’ veder meglio. - DRUSILLA Forse con quegli occhiali che fanno travadere e mostrano una cosa per un’altra?’. The English translation, slightly modified by me, is in Eileen Reeves, *Galileo’s Glasswork. The Telescope and the Mirror* (Harvard: Harvard UP, 2008), p. 77.

<sup>66</sup> For a number of writings celebrating scientific tools see Fulvio Pevere, ‘La macchina delle parole. Strumenti scientifici e tecnologici nella poesia del Seicento’, in Giorgio Barberi Squarotti ed., *Luoghi e forme della lirica* (Turin: Tirrenia Stampatori, 1996), pp. 119-148.

<sup>67</sup> Galileo (1610), p. 6r: ‘Sed missis terrenis, ad coelestium speculationum me contuli.’

<sup>68</sup> St. Paul, Corinthians, I.13.9, 12: ‘Ex parte enim cognoscimus et ex parte prophetamus ... Videmus enim nunc per speculum in aenigmate, tunc autem facie ad faciem.’



an indistinct aggregate of light and shadow. The man has probably already pointed, or is about to point, the telescope towards the firmament. His vivid and inquiring gaze seems to suggest that he is totally absorbed in his thoughts, like a pioneer that is either wondering how to use the instrument or pondering upon the object of his previous observations ‘through the eyes of reason’.<sup>69</sup> Modern scholars would probably have expected, instead of this feral-looking man, a properly qualified academic such as the serious German Simon Mayr surrounded by tools, diagrams and spheres [Fig. 54]. In this regard it is interesting to note that Mayr was probably a pupil of Galileo, with whom he had been at daggers drawn for some time.<sup>70</sup> In his treatise *Mundus Iovialis (Jupiter and its Moons, 1614)*,<sup>71</sup> Mayr claimed to have discovered the moons of Jupiter before Galileo by using a telescope invented by a Belgian in 1609.<sup>72</sup> Soon after the publication of *Mundus Iovialis*, the German scholar was accused of plagiarism by the Lynceans, who urged Galileo to make the appropriation known.<sup>73</sup> Now an academic like Simon Mayr, whose reputation was compromised due to such questionable practices, embodied the paradigm of the scholar with whom the Lynceans were at odds. Overtly in contrast with the isolation of the traditional universities and their representatives, they planned the constitution of a ‘militia filosofica’ dedicated both to a contemplative and to an active life.<sup>74</sup> The philosophical soldier (‘miles philosophicus’) theorized by Cesi was midway between a meditative academic and an adventurous explorer, ‘now philosopher and thinker,

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<sup>69</sup> Galileo clarifies this aspect in the first pages of his *Nuncius*. But see also Piccolino and Wade (2014).

<sup>70</sup> Gabrieli (1996), p. 434, note 4.

<sup>71</sup> Simon Marius, *Mundus Iovialis anno MDCIX detectus ope perspicilli belgici, hoc est quatuor Iovialium planetarum* (Nuremberg: Iohannis Lauri, 1614).

<sup>72</sup> Marius (1614), cc. 3r-v.

<sup>73</sup> See the letters addressed by Stelluti and Cesi to Galileo in Galilei, *Opere*, Vol. 12 (1902), n. 1014, pp. 68-69; n. 1016, pp. 70-71; n. 1029, pp. 85-86. For Marius’s rehabilitation, see Josef Bosscha, ‘Simon Marius. Réhabilitation d’un astronome calomnié’, *Archives Néerlandaises des sciences exactes et naturelles*, Ser. 2, Vol. 12 (1907), pp. 258-307 and 490-528.

<sup>74</sup> Cesi [1616] (1988), p. 124.

now hunter and peasant'.<sup>75</sup> If we have to give credence to their epistles, the Lynceans organized exhausting expeditions in unsafe places in order to 'read the book of the world'.<sup>76</sup> Exposed to the elements, they returned to their *studioli* weary and ragged. The image of a scholar engaged in such excursions might seem a *topos*, inasmuch as they availed themselves of the 'rizotomo', that is a herb collector that had a good knowledge of the topography of the places in which research was conducted. Nevertheless, we have various letters by Federico Cesi describing his expeditions,<sup>77</sup> while Colonna in his treatises frequently refers to the various mountains which he had to climb.<sup>78</sup> Yet the most significant reports are those of the German naturalist Johan Baptist Winther, who was personal physician to Cesi's family and who was engaged in an intense programme of plant collection. In the letters he addressed to his companion Faber, Winther says: 'I am looking forward to going [up to the mountains], but I think I will become disheartened for I will have a hard job climbing those frightening and majestic mountains ... and I will have to hoe and work hard when it comes to tearing out roots'.<sup>79</sup> Elsewhere he describes the frustration of an unfruitful expedition: 'I have come back from Norcia completely unsatisfied. The assistant *rizotomo* did not walk fast and we covered in five days a distance that we could cover in a day and a half... Apart from that, my clothes were torn ... and I lost

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<sup>75</sup> Letter from Cesi to Stelluti, 17 January 1607, in Gabrieli (1996), n. 46, p. 105: 'hora filosofo et speculante, hora cacciatore et ruricolo.'

<sup>76</sup> Federico Cesi (1988), p. 114.

<sup>77</sup> Letter from Cesi to Galileo, 21 October 1611, in Gabrieli (1996), n. 78, pp. 175-176; letter from Cesi to Faber, 29 June 1612, in Ibid., n. 133, pp. 242-243.

<sup>78</sup> I have mentioned these treatises in Chapter 2.

<sup>79</sup> Letter from Winther to Faber, 8 June 1624, in Gabrieli (1996), n. 755, pp. 890-891: 'io per me ho gusto grande d'andare, ma credo che mi se ne passerà, quando ci bisognerà durar fatica in rampigar quei horride et eminentissime montagne ... che bisogna zappare et travagliare dove bisognerà in cavare radiche.'

my tunic.<sup>80</sup> Yet there is another aspect to be taken into consideration. One of the most innovative objectives of the Lyncean sodality was to disclose scientific knowledge to 'the illiterates' in order to promote the progress of the entire humanity without distinction, an ambitious project which was aimed at the 'popularization' of science.<sup>81</sup> This might explain why Ribera's character has been identified as an outdoor type (open-air man) or a non-scholar. I will later show that the mendicant staging the *Sense of Smell* ingenuously conceals some tenets of the scientific investigation conducted by the Roman cultural circles. If this interpretation is realistic, the reason why the man with the telescope is not apparently qualified as an academic, at least not in the traditional way academics were usually represented, will become clearer. Rather than a soldier or a hunter in the strict sense of the words, I believe that the character painted by Ribera represents the paradigm of the modern man as embodied by the Lynceans. On the one side, he is a scholar escaping academic confinement; on the other, an 'ordinary' man who is gaining access to the fruits of the progress of science and technology. The Lynceans were essentially practical men facing the radical changes taking place at the dawn of the seventeenth century. Unlike others who considered the telescope infallible or a mere entertainment, they realized not only its importance but also the necessity to subject it to the scrutiny of the intellect.<sup>82</sup> When they thanked Galileo for having empowered their eyes with such 'avventurosi occhiali', they did not simply mean the bodily sight, because thanks to the telescope 'things never seen before will finally be revealed both to the sight and to

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<sup>80</sup> Letter from Winther to Faber, 17 July 1624, in Gabrieli (1996), n. 766, pp. 925-926: 'Son tornato da Norcia con imperfettissima sodisfattione, poi che siamo stati cinque giorni per strada non potendo camminare quell'herbariolo ... Mi sonno strapato tutto ... oltre che della sottana persami.'

<sup>81</sup> Olmi (1992), p. 360.

<sup>82</sup> Marco Piccolino, 'L'occhio di Galileo. Part 2, Il "candor lunare" e "gli occhi della mente"', *Naturalmente* 20, n. 3 (September 2007), p. 18.

the intellect'.<sup>83</sup>

An awareness of the revolutionary changes brought about by these new discoveries deeply marked the conscience of the modern man, and traces of this unprecedented transition are to be found in artistic production. In a chapter of *La fortuna con seso y la hora de todos* (*Fortune in Her Wits, or, The Hour of All*, 1630), Francisco de Quevedo tells of the fortuitous encounter between Dutch pirates and an indigenous population somewhere in Chile. The pirates attempt to befriend the natives by offering them products from Holland, such as 'swords, hats, mirrors' and other wonders. When they finally hand out 'an optical tube that enhances the sight ... and that will show the stars as they had never seen them before', an indigenous man grasps the tool and brings it near to his eye. Astonished, the man gives a shout of admiration, but later comes to an important realisation: the telescope does not only allow him to scan remote distances, but also means he can equally be spied upon from a distance.<sup>84</sup> A refined example of the Spanish 'agudeza conceptista', Quevedo's text conveys an important message. While for the astute pirates the telescope is just a bargaining tool, for the unsophisticated indigenous population it means opening up

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<sup>83</sup> Galileo (1610), p. 5r: 'Magna equidem in hac exigua tractatione singulis de natura speculantibus inspicienda contemplandaque propono. Magna, inquam, tum ob rei ipsius præstantiam, tum ob inauditam per ævum novitatem, tum etiam propter Organum, cuius beneficio eadem sensui nostro obviam sese fecerunt. Magnum sane est, supra numerosam inerrantium Stellarum multitudinem, quæ naturali facultate in hunc usque diem conspici potuerunt, alias innumeras superaddere oculisque palam exponere, antehac conspectas nunquam, et quæ veteres ac notas plusquam supra decuplam multipliciter superent'; p. 5v: 'Altercationes insuper de Galaxia, seu de Lacteo circulo, substulisse, eiusque essentiam sensui, nedum intellectui, manifestasse, parvi momenti existimandum minime videtur; insuperque substantiam Stellarum, quas Nebulosas hucusque Astronomorum quilibet appellavit, digito demonstrare, longeque aliam esse quam creditum hactenus est, iocundum erit atque perpulcrum.'

<sup>84</sup> Francisco de Quevedo, *La Fortuna con seso y la hora de todos. Fantasía moral*, Chapter 36, 'Holandeses en Chile', ed. Lía Schwartz, *Obras completas en prosa*, ed. Alfonso Rey (Madrid: Castalia, 2003) (hereafter referred to as Quevedo, 2003), Vol. 1.2, pp. 753-754: 'Hízose así y el holandés, conociendo la naturaleza de los indios ... los presentó barriles de butiro, quesos, frasqueras de vino, espadas y sombreros y espejos y, últimamente, un tubo óptico que llaman antojo de larga vista ... diciendo que con él verían en el cielo estrellas que jamás se habían visto y que sin él no podrían verse; que advertirían distintas y claras las manchas que en la cara de la luna se mienten ojos y boca y en el cerco del sol una mancha negra; y que obraba otras maravillas porque con aquellos dos vidrios traía a los ojos las cosas que estaban lejos y apartadas en infinita distancia ... El indio le aplicó al ojo derecho y, asestándole a unas montañas, dio un gran grito que testificó su admiración a los otros'.

new possibilities and becoming conscious that reality is specular, as they are both observers and observed at the same time. The new experience of the indigenous population brings us back to Febvre's 'hommes de plain air', who, due to new scientific tools, had to cope with an uncomfortable sense of scepticism about the function of the senses. The Lynceans were dramatically conscious of this condition, which they often brought out in their writings: 'reason would reassure me if it were not in contrast with what the sense [of sight] shows'.<sup>85</sup>

Unlike other artists, Ribera did not depict a self-confident academic or the depths of the firmament as revealed through the telescope. He painted instead an ordinary yet doubtful man holding a rare tool, and in the background an indiscernible section of sky visible through a very narrow window. These devices make the reading of the image multifaceted. Seventeenth-century beholders, familiar with the usual refined figures staging the *Sense of Sight* or distinguished scholars, could not have missed the glitches in the image: an unexpectedly shabby man, and familiar devices along with the latest brand-new instrument. The recipient would then be required to adjust his perspective: the figure's clothes do not correspond either to the canonical representation of *Sight* or of eminent academics. The modest garments do not fit either image. Yet something deeper can be acknowledged. The man with the telescope is devoid of that abstract temporality characterizing certain representations. He is instead a concrete and ordinary person. The object of the painting is, therefore, not just the sense of sight but also modern man between tradition and innovation, as embodied by the members of the Lyncean Academy. Ribera seems to have represented this moment of transition that unreels according to the recipient: while the nebulous burst of firmament is probably unraveling to the thoughtful man, the

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<sup>85</sup> Letter from Cigoli to Galileo, 23 March 1612, in Galilei, *Opere*, Vol. 10 (1901), n. 666, p. 287: 'la qual ragione mi quieterebbe, se però non fusse in contrario a quel che il senso mi mostra'.

viewer has in his turn to unfold the message concocted by the painter. The hat on the table, as well as the way in which the man is portrayed, could indeed characterize an aspect of the Lyncean philosophy: ‘hunting’ as the paradigm for the close investigation of nature. The reversal of accoutrements (from the erudite to the hunter) would then be consistent with Lyncean philosophy. The apparent shabbiness of the explorer is thus provocative in terms of science, but also in terms of social convention. By the same token, Ribera’s painting is also a parody of sight as a social and cultural practice. At first, the beholder is led to believe that what he sees is just another beggar. And yet this figure is armed not only with a telescope and pince-nez, but also with a mirror, which is a symbol of prudence and self-awareness.<sup>86</sup> Whilst giving the impression of a parody of knowledge, Ribera’s *Sight* is also the opposite: it is a parody of the beholder, or an invitation to sharpen the sight to acknowledge this new reality of observation. Painting can be misleading, like the mirror mentioned by Saint Paul, inasmuch as it can act as a smokescreen. Yet painting can also act as an optical device that, employed in just the right way, helps the beholder to scrutinize his own deceptive bodily vision with the eyes of the mind.

If the *Five Senses* series is rooted, as I believe, in the cultural environment associated with the Lyncean scholars, then the addressees of the *Sight* must have been able to appreciate a different degree of irony underlying the painting. No scholar, and least of all the Lynceans, was supposed to be represented in humble clothes. Therefore, the shabbiness of the man qualifies him as a comic figure and Ribera has played with the registers of mockery and human empathy at the same time.

Did the Lynceans agree with, or were they aware of Ribera’s playfulness? The

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<sup>86</sup> Ripa (2012), p. 492, n. 312.1 (‘Prudenza’): ‘Lo specchiarsi significa la cognizione di se medesimo, non potendo alcun regolare le sue azioni se i proprii difetti non conosce.’

answer is in the affirmative if we recognize that we are already familiar with the man holding the telescope, and the Lynceans alike. This further passage allows me to return to an aspect that I have left open. As I have mentioned before, the Lynceans remained good *dilettanti* as far as the use of the telescope is concerned; this was with, however, one notable exception, the Neapolitan naturalist Fabio Colonna [Fig. 55]. In this regard, the role of this Lyncean has in fact been overlooked, probably due to the fact that he was mainly a botanist. We owe to Nicola Faraglia the most important account on Colonna.<sup>87</sup> Although quite dated, the essay remains as yet unsurpassed. Faraglia's biography is not just a detached report on Colonna's scientific activity but also an insight into the tormented personal life of the scholar. All this is even more impressive if we think that financial difficulties made his entire life a misery ('anguish and suffering distract me from my beloved studies'<sup>88</sup>). Pertinacious and industrious, he faced the adversities of life with philosophical equanimity relying on his own virtue.<sup>89</sup> The Neapolitan scholar stood out, among his Lyncean companions, for his competence in optics. He was likely the one best able to converse properly on this subject with Galileo. The letters he addressed to the scientist between 1612 and 1619 corroborate his commitment as well as his ongoing proficiency in these issues.<sup>90</sup> Unfortunately, we do not have Galileo's replies, but from the correspondence of the latter with Federico Cesi we can gather that Colonna enjoyed Galileo's respect. Colonna not only suggested to the astronomer how to adjust the tool, but himself improved the manufacture of optical lenses, built a prototype of the telescope at

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<sup>87</sup> Nicola Faraglia, 'Fabio Colonna Linceo', *Archivio Storico per le Province Napoletane* 10 (1885), pp. 665-749.

<sup>88</sup> Letter from Colonna to Cesi, 29 March 1624, in Gabrieli (1996), p. 856, n. 726: 'La poca salute et li guai della lite ... m'hanno levato dalli studiosi.' Colonna's correspondence is interspersed with touching personal issues.

<sup>89</sup> Letter from Colonna to Cesi, 9 June 1623, in Gabrieli (1996), n. 672, p. 804: 'ho patito questo anno tante disgrazie, che mi è necessario valermi della virtù.'

<sup>90</sup> See letters from Colonna to Galileo in Gabrieli (1996).

least as early as 1613 and was close to discovering the formula for the production of lenses for telescopes.<sup>91</sup> The reason why I have emphasized the role of this academic will become clear shortly. The so-called *Gentleman of Locko Park* (1620s) [Fig. 56], a portrait attributed to a Neapolitan Riberesque painter, has recently been identified as Fabio Colonna, whose portrait opens the treatise *Minus cognitarum stirpium* (1606) [Fig. 55].<sup>92</sup> According to the inscription, the etching portrays the scholar in 1605, when he was thirty-eight. As to the identification of the Locko Park man in black tunic and white collar, it has been substantiated not only because of his physiognomic resemblance with Colonna portrayed in the etching, but also through the analysis of the necklace of seashells. It has convincingly been proven, in fact, that these marine specimens can be identified as those specifically described by Colonna in his *De purpura*, a short and well-known treatise published as an appendix to *Minus cognitarum pars altera* (1616) [Fig. 57]. The unusual string of shells seems to be made of two different specimens. Those smaller and spirally coiled have been identified as common sea snails; while the others, bigger and oval-shaped, as spiny bonnets (in Latin *Galeodea echinophora*), from which it was extracted a pigment for the making of the colour purple. As to the resemblance between the two men (in the etching and in the Locko Park portrait), this seems feasible inasmuch as they are extremely similar except for their ears [Figs 55-56, 59-60]. Taking into account that the etching was probably made by the same Colonna, this might explain the fact that the ears are less prominent in the Locko Park portrait.<sup>93</sup> Now, if we compare these two images with Ribera's character, we might infer that they are the same person: it appears that all of

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<sup>91</sup> Letter from Colonna to Galilei, 25 September 1613, in Galileo, *Opere*, Vol. 11 (1901), n. 927, p. 567.

<sup>92</sup> The identification has been proposed by Miriam Di Penta, "The "Gentleman of Locko Park". A curious portrait of Fabio Colonna Linceo (Naples 1567-1640)", paper given at ENBach General Conference, 28 March 2014, DOI code 10.14615/enbach11.

<sup>93</sup> Fabio Colonna was also an engraver. Di Penta (2014) suggests that the scholar made his own portrait that opens the *Minus cognitarum* (1606).



them have in common the peculiar bump on the forehead and a bridge of the nose that is swollen in the middle [Figs 58-60]. Moreover, after having acknowledged the scholar's eclectic interests, I believe plausible that the man with the telescope is just Fabio Colonna, a key figure in the new science of nature and one of Galileo's most qualified correspondents in the field of optical devices.

If we return to the Locko Park painting, we see that a severe-looking Colonna wears, instead of refined clothes, a cap and a modest tunic; while the unusual necklace replaces the lavish golden chains which were worn as insignia of orders of knighthood or other affiliation.<sup>94</sup> The string of shells instead of a golden chain reflects not only the academic interests of Colonna, but also qualifies him in a very specific way. The noble Fabio Colonna has here given up the family emblems present in the etching and, with a certain degree of self-irony, flaunts the more prosaic signs of his unconditional devotion to science. The painting thus convey the image of a scholar who has totally embraced an auster and sober lifestyle, and reflects a facet of the new philosopher of nature as conceived by the Lynceans and as shown by Ribera's man with the telescope.

Finally, another aspect must be highlighted. When Cesi died in 1630, it seems that the Lynceans wanted to elect Colonna as a successor.<sup>95</sup> The tunic in the picture, therefore, could testify to Colonna's nomination as a new President, with the

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<sup>94</sup> Di Penta (2014) has suggested that the clothes qualify Colonna as a Neostoic philosopher, namely one who firmly and patiently faces the difficulties of life. The idea is fascinating inasmuch as some Lynceans were interested in Neostoicism, whose principles might have inspired Cesi's project. Nevertheless, we do not have any proof as to the alleged Neostoicism of Colonna. The clothes and the philosophical attitude of the scholar toward life are not sufficient to surmise his involvement in such philosophic doctrine. The subject is still a matter of debate but I cannot discuss it here. Neostoicism – born in part as a revival of Stoic philosophy which was initiated by Zeno of Citium (III BC) – was founded by the Flemish humanist Justus Lipsius and had converts especially in seventeenth-century Rome and Naples. On the Neostoics see Mark Mumford, *Stoics and Neostoics: Rubens and the Circle of Lipsius* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991).

<sup>95</sup> Nevertheless, we do not know if in the end the Neapolitan scholar was nominated head of the Academy. See Augusto De Ferrari, 'Colonna Fabio', in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (Rome: Istituto della enciclopedia italiana, 1960-), Vol. 27 (1982), pp. 286-288.

necklace of shells highlighting one of his scientific interests. In this case, we have to postdate the painting from the suggested 1620s to around 1630s, that is, after Cesi's death.

If my identification is right, we have then three portraits of Colonna: the 1605 etching, Ribera's *Sense of Sight* of about 1612-16, and the Riberesque portrait dated around 1620-1630, in which Colonna would be aged respectively thirty-eight, between forty-two and forty-six, and between fifty and sixty. If the identification of the man is confirmed by other visual or written sources, this will definitely prove that the painting is rooted in the Lynceans circles. This would shed new light on the period Ribera spent in Rome and, incidentally, on Colonna's travels between Rome and Naples and on the realization of the series. We know, on the one hand, that from 1592 onward Colonna was often outside Naples and that he moved between the two cities several times. Undoubtedly, he was in Rome in 1610 and in 1619, but we do not have evidence to prove where he was residing when the series was painted.<sup>96</sup> On the other side, Spinosa has since long surmised that part of the series was made in Naples and sent to Ribera's patron in Rome.<sup>97</sup> If Colonna and Ribera really met, the painting would testify to the encounter of two great personalities of the time, a scientist and an artist fated to revolutionize their respective fields. Both indigent and indebted, the one doomed to die in poverty, the other about to conquer the favour of the Spanish establishment in Naples. Both ingenious and at the dawn of a new era.

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<sup>96</sup> Faraglia (1885), pp. 695 and 703.

<sup>97</sup> Spinosa (2006), p. 39.

### 3.2 The Sense of Smell: Pícaro or Academic?

#### A Picaresque Palimpsest

If we compare Cesare Ripa's iconological recommendation for the *Sense of Smell* with Ribera's foul-smelling vagrant [Figs 61, 62], we can try to understand the amused or disappointed reaction of viewers of the painting:

'A young man holding a vase in his left hand and a bunch of flowers in the right. He will wear a green cloak and will have a hound at his feet ... Dogs are in fact endowed with a very refined sense of smell and particularly the hound. Hounds are able to drive out, solely by smell, wild beasts hidden in the most secret places; and when they smell their owner, they fawn on him ... The young man will be dressed in green clothes because from the leafy branches we pick tender and sweet-smelling flowers.'<sup>98</sup>

Ribera's choice of composition does not simply fail to comply with the *Iconologia*, but sounds like a polemical subversion of Ripa's prescriptions. The idyllic atmosphere and the delicate scents which emanate from the pages of the *Iconologia* seem to belong to a remote era compared to the irreverent creativity of the painter. They leave room for a less pleasant reality: a canine-looking and elderly man instead of a youth [Figs 63, 64]; we spot remnants of green clothes amongst the rags; the

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<sup>98</sup> Ripa (2012), p. 529, n. 348.1d ('Odorato'): 'Giovanetto, che nella mano sinistra tenga un vaso, e nella destra un mazzo di fiori, con un Bracco a' piedi, e sarà vestito di manto verde, dipinto di rose et d'altri fiori ... Il cane Bracco si pone perché la virtù di questo sentimento, come in tutti i cani è di molto vigore, così è di grandissimo ne' Bracchi, che col solo odorato ritrovano le fiere ascose molte volte in luoghi secretissimi, et all'odore si sono veduti spesso far allegrezza de' Padroni vicini ... Si veste di color verde, perché dalla verdura delle frondi si tolgono i fiori teneri et odoriferi.'

delicate fragrance is overcome by pungent odours and the bucolic atmosphere replaced by a pared back setting. In order to familiarise ourselves with the painting and have a taste of what Ribera was aiming for, the best thing to do is to read the words of one who knows about begging:

‘My condition was intolerable ... I had been eating vegetables for two days, to the point that, if I had not had them in my stomach, I could have got a stall in the fruit market and sold more vegetables than the most credited green grocer, for I could cover the shop with onions, radish and lettuce. My stomach was a sort of hanging garden ... Everything seemed to me appetizing: hunger is in fact the best sauce ... My eyes and even my stomach desired all that I came across.’<sup>99</sup>

The protagonist of this anecdote, the *guitón* (vagabond) Onofre, aware that sensorial perception is unstable and affected by certain conditions and needs, introduces us to one of the leitmotifs of the picaresque genre: the relationship between appearance and reality and the deceptive nature of the senses.

This painting has aroused the genuine interest of art historians and, owing to the lowly subject matter, no one of them has missed its picaresque undertone. Yet, as has often happened, Ribera’s work has only loosely been mentioned in relation with picaresque literature. At best the beggar has been defined as an ‘incunabulum of the

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<sup>99</sup> González (1988), p. 215: ‘Terrible era mi condición ... había dos días que me sustentaban las güertas de la vega, tanto que, a no tenerla en cuerpo, creo, si me pusieran en la plazuela de San Martín, pudiera vender más hortaliza que la verdulera mejor acreditada según la tienda podía entapizar de cebollas, rábanos y lechugas. El estómago tenía hecho un huerto pensil. ... Cualquiera cosa me sabía bien, porque el tenerla es la verdadera salsa del más insipido mantenimiento ... Cuanto alcanzaba de vista apetecían mis ojos y aun mis estomago.’

picaresque imagery<sup>100</sup> or a 'landscape of cloth'<sup>101</sup>, witty definitions that do not grasp the alternation of irony and seriousness underlying such artistic genre. I believe, instead, that the *Sense of Smell* is one of Ribera's most successful and complex picaresque paintings, conjured up through visual parallels: inner and outer appearance, the human and the botanical, pleasant and unpleasant sensations. Although such a formula harks back to a typical picaresque pattern, the ambivalences of the literary genre are necessarily enhanced in the painting. The visual intrigue devised by Ribera in fact has several layers that conceal an unsuspected scientific discourse rooted in the Lyncean Academy. I will venture to reveal all these aspects in the next few pages.

Owing to the complexity of the work, I shall need to be very schematic and analyse all its implications separately before reaching a possible interpretation. Firstly, I will give a detailed description of the painting, interspersing it with some short illustrative quotations drawn from picaresque novels. Secondly, I will draw comparisons with literary extracts that will allow the reader, by now more familiar with the image, to appreciate the interactions at play between visual and literary sources. On the basis of this analysis, I will scrutinize the multifaceted meaning of the painting for Ribera's contemporaries. Finally, I will examine the painter's reflection upon contemporary scientific thought.

This threadbare beggar, a walking mélange of smells, tatters and stitching, appeals to our perspicacity to decipher the message he is bearing. The man might be either in a squalid inn or in an unlicensed apothecary, trying natural remedies. On the table are some vegetables, perhaps intended to be used in a medicinal concoction, or leftovers destined for unpretentious customers [Fig. 66]. A soft afternoon light

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<sup>100</sup> Papi (2007), p. 163: 'incunabolo per immagini picaresche.'

<sup>101</sup> *Important Old Master Paintings* (1986), p. 66.

spreads out at a slanting angle and gently illuminates the objects. It flatters the surfaces and highlights the chromatic rhymes between the beggar and the vegetables.

Ribera dressed the decrepit mendicant in innumerable fragile layers ranging from the dirty white to the brownish, from the green to the brown of the external crust. Such chromatic range alludes to the colours of the vegetable samples [Figs 65-66]. The external skin and the yellowed leaves of the onion, the garlic and the orange blossom, as well as the rags, seem to be made of the same perishable matter. Inexorably on the brink of senescence, their feeble consistency produces a tactile sensation of autumnal foliage in the process of desiccation. Nevertheless, from the rags of the sleeve protrudes, surprisingly, a sort of pulpy vegetable protuberance producing the sensation of an ongoing process, of a still lasting animation under the clothes [Fig. 67]. The light lingers pitilessly over the emaciated face of the man ploughed with thick wrinkles and ‘as dry as the leather of a tambourine’.<sup>102</sup> The red fox-like beard, an uncultivated bush interspersed hither and thither with white tufts, confer on him a feral appearance [Fig. 63].

The small and watering eyes require our particular attention. The man, like a priest in front of an altar, has raised the onion of his passion with coarse and dirty hands, thus involving us in his sensory drama. The hands are of a red-copper colour and the skin seems as fragile and dry as the external layer of the onion [Figs 68-69]. The latter is held gently, as if it were a rare specimen. Its core, in contrast, painted with a more granulated texture, conveys a sense of still lasting freshness. The sensory experience draws our attention to the still-life on the table, a rough board with innumerable plugs, veins and cracks. A second onion and a wrinkled garlic bulb pose

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<sup>102</sup> López de Úbeda (2012), p. 598: ‘La cara pensé que era hecha de pellejo de pandero ahumado; la fación del rostro, puramente como cara pintada en pico de jarro.’ The word ‘ahumado’ (literally ‘smoked’), here translated as ‘dry’, refers to the process of desiccation and preparation of leather.

humbly next to their nobler neighbour, an orange blossom whose white and green colours rhyme with the range of colours of the holed sleeve [Figs 65-66]. Such chromatic and textural juxtaposition invites us to move our gaze from the man to the vegetables and vice versa.

The shirt is in such a condition that could be put on ‘in twelve moves, as many as the pieces it is composed of’.<sup>103</sup> Colander-like, it is riddled with holes through which we can catch a glimpse of the innumerable tatters striving to shield the poor man. While the left arm is in shade and requires our imagination to fill out its hanging tentacles, the right unveils all the commitment made to envisage such a tangle [Figs. 67, 70]. Among the numerous details, there is one that cannot be disregarded. The sleeve is made of several superposed layers of cloth embellished with the same undulated pleats, all aligned with incredible accuracy: professional beggary has its own fashion rules and this man clearly keeps up to date with them. The tears of the sleeve might allude sarcastically to the so called *acuchilladuras* (i.e. stabs), that is the slashes made to the clothes to reveal the fabric underneath [Figs 72, 73]. Such fashion was appreciated in Europe at that time and yet is mocked by this picaresque irony.<sup>104</sup> The tears, which are also called *ventanas* (windows), *bocas* (mouths) or *acuchilladuras* by the *pícaros*, are *à la mode* among the confraternities of beggars. Another interesting detail is the green layer visible through the holes and ideally terminating in that strange hanging protuberance [Fig. 67]. The latter, as I have already pointed out, has the appearance of a vegetable sample. There is no lack of accessories. On the right shoulder there is a kind of knapsack with some appliqués,

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<sup>103</sup> Quevedo (2011), p. 106: ‘Era de ver a uno ponerse la camisa de doce veces, dividida en doce trapos.’

<sup>104</sup> J. Anderson Black and Madge Garland, *A History of Fashion*, updated ed. (London: Macdonald & Co, 1990, first published 1975), pp. 99, 103 and 125; Rosita Levi Pisetzky, *Storia del costume in Italia* (Milan: Istituto Editoriale Italiano, 1964-1969), Vol. 3 (1966), p. 197.

some sort of pockets or loops for belts [Figs. 63, 65]. Nearby, a red epaulette-like cloth under which there is a roll. Be it a roll of paper or a scrap of fabric for mending, it must in any case be something valuable for the man, for it is secured with black thread. The shabby hat, ‘as droopy as a wet chicken’<sup>105</sup>, has some seam around the crown, while the threadbare brim lets us glimpse a kind of white sweatband around the forehead of the man. A band fastened around his waist supports the brownish garment.

In the course of this long description I have dwelled upon tiny details and tried to highlight the subtle, and so far unnoticed, agenda pursued by Ribera. On the one hand, the cocooned beggar echoes the layered and fragile structure of the onion. On the other, textural and chromatic likenesses between rags and vegetables highlight their common process of decay. Finally, I have alluded to the feral aspect of the beggar. All these elements will come in useful later, in the second part of this essay, but in the meantime I want to emphasize that the strategy employed by Ribera might have a parallel in its literary counterpart. An intriguing aspect of picaresque literature is its propensity to degrade the human being to the rank of sub-human. This process, defined *cosificación* (objectification) in relation to Francisco de Quevedo’s grotesque figures, consists in presenting the characters ‘as fragmented, grotesque ensembles’<sup>106</sup> and by comparing them with animals, vegetables or objects. It has been argued that the aim of this rhetorical device is to bewilder the recipient and ‘produce the uncertain relationship of appearance and reality’.<sup>107</sup> For the sake of accuracy, Quevedo is not the only seventeenth-century author that experimented with this technique. Giovan Battista Della Porta’s comedies and Giambattista Basile’s

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<sup>105</sup> López de Úbeda (2012), p. 747: ‘un sombrero tan alicaído como pollo mojado.’

<sup>106</sup> William H. Clamurro, ‘The Destabilized Sign: Word and Form in Quevedo’s *Buscón*’, *Modern Language Notes (MLN)* 95, n. 2, *Hispanic Issue* (March 1980), p. 297.

<sup>107</sup> Clamurro (1980), p. 304.



*Lo cunto de li cunti* contain cases of objectification, although they are not comparable with the subtle complexity of Quevedo.<sup>108</sup> Let us consider some examples.

The examples of objectification that can be drawn from picaresque authors other than Quevedo are innumerable, but a few will suffice to give a taste of this rhetorical device: ‘When I arrived at the inn I saw a semi-human being who looked like a billy-goat because of the raggedness of his clothes’<sup>109</sup>; or, ‘I met a friend of mine, graduated. He had so many rags that he seemed a handcart with a skirt [i.e. overflowing with rubbish], a sort of graduated octopus’<sup>110</sup>. The same rhetorical device also involves clothing, which is compared to food or to human beings. Here is another amusing example:

‘[His] trousers ... would drop like filaments of well-cooked salted meat. The doublet, which was made of taffeta in the time of the Catholic kings ... has now only a few pieces left, and from a distance it seems rather made of meat and turnip ... During public holidays he [wears] a more appetizing dress ... a velvet garment more threadbare than an indecent woman.’<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> On the analogies between Giambattista della Porta’s plays and physiognomic studies see Sirri (1982), pp. 130-141. As to Basile, to my knowledge nothing has yet been written that discusses this aspect of his work.

<sup>109</sup> Juan de Luna, *Segunda parte de Lazarillo*, ed. Pedro M. Piñero (Mexico: REI, 1990), p. 275: ‘llegando a la posada, vi a un semihombre, que más parecía cabrón según las vedijas e hilachas de sus vestidos.’

<sup>110</sup> Quevedo (2011), pp. 112-113: ‘topo con un licenciado ... amigo mío, que venía haldeando por la calle abajo, con más barros que la cara de un sanguino, y tantos rabos, que parecía chirrión con sotana, pulpo graduado.’

<sup>111</sup> Juan Cortés de Tolosa, *Novela de un hombre muy miserable llamado Gonçalo*, in *Lazarillo de Manzanares con otras cinco novelas*, ed. Giuseppe E. Sansone (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1974), Vol. 2, p. 200: ‘Los calçones fueron agora sesenta años de paño de mezcla: ya por mucha antigüedad no se rompían, como gregüescos de bien, antes, como hebras de bien cozida cezina, se dexavan caer. El jubón fue de tafetán en tiempo de los Reyes Católicos: éste no tenía de jubón más que el *fomes peccati*, con unos pedazitos de tafetán, que, visto de lexos, por descubrirse los forros blancos, parecía de chicha y navo ... Éste fue el trage de los días de trabajo. El de lo de fiesta era mucho más apetitoso ... [un] terciopelo con cuatro dedos de faldilla, más rayda que una muger deshonesta.’ I have changed the past tenses into the present tense to adapt the quotation to the text. Moreover, I have taken care to preserve the references to food which were present in the original text when translating it into English.

Results achieved through the use of simile, as in the above examples, are also achieved in a more subtle way. Through a simple slippage, for instance, verbs and adjectives that are used to describe animate objects are instead used to describe inanimate objects, and vice versa. In the following example ‘the clothes passed away’ (‘acabaron su vida las ropillas’<sup>112</sup>), the garments act as they were human. Similarly, characters wearing tattered garments are called ‘piebald mended bodies’ (‘cuerpos pías remendados’<sup>113</sup>), two adjectives that are respectively associated with animals and clothing. Let us see some further examples before summarising what has been explored so far. Ribera’s way of clothing the beggar finds a parallel in an intriguing passage of Francisco de Quevedo’s *El Buscón* (1626). The hilarious ‘genealogy of clothes’ recounted by the idle protagonist of the novel, Pablos, is very revealing, as it casts a light on the ingenious results that can be achieved by two different mediums such as visual art and literature:

‘Everything I wear has already been something else and has its own story ... At the beginning these clothes were a pair of trousers, grandchild of a cape and great-grandchild of a hood, which now hope to become an insole or even something else. The socks have previously been a nose rag, having already been towel and shirts, daughters of sheets. Later I will use them as writing paper, and then again I will make powder out of the paper to resuscitate the shoes that, even when they were incurable, I have seen brought back to life thanks to such medicine.’<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Quevedo (2011), p. 127: ‘Acabaron su vida las ropillas. No quedaba andrajo en pie ... [él hombre] tenía ... más golpes en la cabeza que una ropilla abierta.’

<sup>113</sup> Quevedo (2011), p. 122: ‘eran de ver unos cuerpos pías remendados.’

<sup>114</sup> Quevedo (2011), p. 98: ‘No hay cosa en todos nuestros cuerpos que no haya sido otra cosa y no tenga historia. *Verbi gratia*: bien ve V. Md. – dijo- esta ropilla; pues primero fue greguescos, nieta de una capa y bisnieta de un capuz, que fue en su principio, y ahora espera salir para soletas y otras cosas. Los escarpines, primero son pañizuelos, habiendo sido toallas, y antes camisas, hijas de sábanas; y,

Such witticism springing from the description of tattered clothing is a leitmotiv of the picaresque genre and allows innumerable and ludicrous combinations, as confirmed by the *pícaros* of a notorious novel, the *Guzmán de Alfarache* (1599):

‘He had an outfit that to be arranged required some thousand pieces of paper. To wear it it was necessary to use maps and a rope to enter into it like a labyrinth’,<sup>115</sup> ‘because no one of the pieces was in the right place and it was impossible to tell the difference between the jacket and the trousers.’<sup>116</sup>

Now, amusement for the sake of amusement is alien to the genuine picaresque genre. If that were not the case, everything would just be a mere exercise in rhetoric. It has been said that, in a world undermined by turbulent changes, picaresque authors experimented with new forms of language that reflected the disruptive nature of life in a society in continual flux. Therefore, by making everything look like something else and by enhancing the contrast of appearance and

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después de esto los aprovechamos para papel y en el papel escribimos, y después hacemos dél polvos para resucitar los zapatos, que, de incurables, los he visto hacer revivir con semejantes medicamentos.’

<sup>115</sup> Alemán (2012), p. 189: ‘Llevó un vestido que para poderlo concertar y ponérselo eran menester más de mil cedulillas y albalá de guía o entrarle con una cuerda, como en el laberinto.’

<sup>116</sup> Alemán (2012), p. 255: ‘Llevaba un vestido que aun yo no me lo acertaba a vestir sin ir tomando guía de pieza en pieza, y ninguna estaba cabal ni en su lugar, de tal manera que fuera imposible discernir o conocer cuál era la ropilla o los calzones quien lo viera tendidos en el suelo. Así desaté algunos ñudos con que lo ataba por falta de cintas y lo dejé caer a los pies de la cama ...’. Other similar examples: Ibid., p. 260: ‘Comencé con mis trapos viejos, inútiles para papel de estraza, los harapos colgando, que parecían pizuelos de frisas, a pedir limosna, acudiendo al mediodía donde hubiese sopa; y tal vez hubo que la cobré de cuatro partes’; Luna (1990), p. 280: ‘El remedio que por entonces tomé ... fue veer si los vestidos de aquel matasiete me podrían servir ... pero era un laberinto: ni tenían principio ni fin; entre las calzas y sayo no había diferencia. Puse las piernas en las mangas, y las calzas por ropilla, sin olvidar las medias, que parecían mangas de escribano; las sandalias me podían servir de cormas, porque no tenían suelas; encasquetéme el sombrero poniendo lo de arriba abajo, por estar menos mugriento; de la gente de a pie e de a caballo que iban sobre mí no hablo. Con esta figurilla fui a veer a mi amo.’

reality, writers tease the reader by undermining their certainties.<sup>117</sup> Whereas writers employ figures of speech to convey such puzzlement, the painter play subtly with the comic figure of the beggar, his clothes and vegetables. Ribera wrapped the beggar in a tangle of undistinguishable tattered pieces of which we cannot make head nor tail, a sort of barrier that prevents us from going beyond appearances. It is like standing on the threshold of a labyrinth without being able to enter it. The accumulation of detail and visual clues is such that the beholder, overwhelmed, is prevented from having an immediate understanding of the possible interpretations. Yet the painting implies comic and serious issues, too, and these must be closely examined one by one.

We have seen (Chapter 1) that between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, begging in Europe reached unbearable proportions.<sup>118</sup> As a consequence, a heated debate took place between those who wanted to reduce poverty and those who considered it essential to keep the social order as it was.<sup>119</sup> In Spain, for example, the public health official Cristóbal Pérez de Herrera, who was a close friend of the picaresque writer Mateo Alemán<sup>120</sup> and was very knowledgeable about the pauperism in his country, published a treatise that aroused the greatest interest across Europe. His *Discursos del amparo de los legítimos pobres, y reduccion de los fingidos* (1598) had a very idealistic objective: firstly to devise a strategy to unmask the false poor, and secondly, to help those really suffering.<sup>121</sup> The text contains important recommendations on what we can call the ‘iconography of poverty’. Herrera followed in the footsteps of Italian legislators that had already taken measures in the main cities, such as Naples

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<sup>117</sup> Clamurro (1980), p. 311 and note 29.

<sup>118</sup> Bronislaw Geremek, *La potence ou la pitié. L'Europe et les pauvres du Moyen Âge à nos jours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), especially Chapters 2 and 4.

<sup>119</sup> Maravall (1986), pp. 22-33.

<sup>120</sup> Maravall (1986), p. 29.

<sup>121</sup> Pérez de Herrera (1598).

and Turin.<sup>122</sup> He aimed to introduce a visible mark on the clothes of beggars and a yearly renewable license of mendicity, written and signed by an officer.<sup>123</sup> In France, to give another example, mendicants had to wear a red sign near the breast.<sup>124</sup> The license of mendicity and other signals were indeed common in Europe and circulated in Italy in the form of papal bulls, although such measures were often ineffective.<sup>125</sup> The attempts of the authorities to take control of the situation took in fact an unexpected turn: false poor took remedial action by bearing counterfeit documents to get away with it, expedients worthy of *pícaros*.

Mendicants and vagrants were part of the collective imagination to the point that they became an obsession. When Ribera moved to Italy, indeed, the conditions of the country were much the same as in his native Spain. It is therefore plausible that, in placing the roll of paper under the red epaulette [Fig. 71], the painter wanted to allude to a very well known and debated concern of the time. Yet probably he did not mean to reveal whether the man was actually a real or fake mendicant. Thus the figure itself becomes elusive and has some further layers that we can discover. It has also been argued that the epaulette and the roll might indicate that the man was a

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<sup>122</sup> Pérez de Herrera (1598), c. 153r.

<sup>123</sup> Pérez de Herrera (1598), c. 23r: 'alguna insignia al cuello'; c. 8v: 'bula de limosna.'

<sup>124</sup> Decree of the Parliament of Bordeaux, 1578, quoted by Léon Lallemand, *Histoire de la charité* (Paris: Alphonse Picard, 1902-12), Vol. 4.1: *Les temps modernes* (du XVIe au XIXe siècle) (1910), p. 134: 'un signal rouge à la poitrine en forme de pied de gait (canard).' On the license of mendicity see also Charles James Ribton-Turner, *A History of Vagrants and Vagrancy and Beggars and Begging* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1887), pp. 60-62. The juxtaposition between threadbare beggars and leprous might have derived from the Old Testament. The leprous had to rip his clothes off in order to show the signs of his illness. A sort of priest-physician had then to verify, by analysing the clothes, the possible appearance of red or green spots. It is likely that the signs to identify the beggars derive from such *avant la lettre* diagnoses: 'Leprosus hac plaga percussus habebit vestimenta dissuta comam capitis excussam, barbam contectam; clamabit: "Immundus! Immundus!". Omni tempore, quo leprosus est immundus, immundus est et solus habitabit extra castra. Si in veste lanea sive linea lepra fuerit, in stamine sive subtemine lineo vel laneo aut in pelle vel quolibet ex pelle confecto, si macula pallida aut rufa fuerit, lepra reputabitur ostendeturque sacerdoti' (Cfr. *Leviticus* XIII.45-49).

<sup>125</sup> See Camporesi (2003), pp. 110-112.

soldier of fortune carrying military orders.<sup>126</sup> If this were the case, this would be a very early iconography, as it seems that the modern military epaulette was in use only from the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>127</sup> Rather than the single details, it is the ripped dress that might evoke the uniform worn by some soldiers<sup>128</sup> [Figs 61, 72, 73]. At that time, in fact, soldiers did not yet have a standard uniform in many countries. Therefore, relying on their sense of fashion and using any cloth available, they ended up with rather eccentric outfits, to the point that they became stock characters of Spanish literature.<sup>129</sup> By the same token, soldier returning from war ‘with more soldered joints than an old cauldron’<sup>130</sup> became the object of amusing jokes within picaresque literature [Fig. 74]:

‘I met a soldier ... a very amusing figure. He wore ... torn and unstitched trousers; very cheap and stale garments, which seemed like discarded paper; a hat as droopy as a wet chicken ... a collar more withered than the leaves of an overripe radish and dirtier than a cloth used for dyeing.’<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> *Important Old Master Paintings* (1986), p. 66: ‘Under an epaulet-like detail is a tube which informs us that our figure must be a soldier of fortune who would carry his orders rolled up in such a device.’

<sup>127</sup> John Mollo, *Military Fashion* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1972), p. 49, states that the modern military epaulette dates back to the end of the 17th century and derived from the transformations ribbons used to hold the braces.

<sup>128</sup> Carmen Bernis, *Indumentaria española en tiempos de Carlo V* (Madrid: Instituto Diego Velázquez, 1962), p. 74 and figs. 98 and 99.

<sup>129</sup> Some amusing examples on the extravagant clothes of soldiers: Miguel de Cervantes, *Novela del casamiento engañoso*, in *Novelas ejemplares*, ed. Juan Batista Avallé-Arce (Madrid: Castalia, 1987) Vol. 3, pp. 223-224: ‘Estaba yo entonces bizarrísimo, con aquella gran cadena ... el sombrero con plumas y cintillo, el vestido de colores, a fuer de soldado.’; Alonso de Castillo Solórzano, *Aventura del Bachiller Trapaza. Quinta esencia de embusteros y Maestro de embelecaadores*, ed. Jacques Joset (Madrid: Catedra, 1986), p. 45: ‘Acabó de vestir un vestido de color, de lama de oro parda, guarnecido con alamares bordados; dióle aderezo de espada y daga bordado, sombreco con muchas plumas pardas y doradas, y muy a lo soldado, se volvió a presentar a los ojos de las tres damas.’

<sup>130</sup> *La vida y hechos de Estebanillo González* (2012), Vol. 1, p. 286: ‘Y viéndome que que por causa de ser soldado estaba con más soldaduras que una caldera vieja.’

<sup>131</sup> Lopez de Úbeda (2012), p. 747: ‘Encontrame un soldadillo leonés, donosa figura. Traía ... un greguesco de sarga (o, por mejor decir, arjado de puro roto y descosido); una ropilla fraileña, que, de puro manida, parecía de papel de estraza; un sombrero tan alicaído como pollo mojado; una capa española, aunque, según era vieja y mala, más parecía de la provincia de Pícardía; un cuello más lacio que hoja de rábano trasnochado y más sucio que paño de colar tinta.’ Another example in Luna

Yet the conditions of impoverished soldiers turned into a serious social issue, and in some countries governments settled plans to assist destitute people forced to ask for alms.<sup>132</sup> Once again, for Ribera's contemporaries the man staging the *Smell* might recall circumstances and anecdotes belonging both to real life and to fiction, according to the beholder's cultural baggage. Those acquainted with the literature of roguery, for example, could easily remember the ingenious expedients employed by the *pícaros*. The roll might in fact be a piece of cloth, part of a sewing kit that mendicants brought with them should be any raise.<sup>133</sup> Last but not least, such visual signals could instead be part of a non-verbal communication system in use among beggars and scoundrels: 'Every fellow of the company bears his emblem and secret signals. Through these he is immediately recognized by his friends, who know what is happening in every place.'<sup>134</sup>

The type of mendicant painted by Ribera indeed reflects the anxieties of his age, but also casts the mendicant as a comic figure of rogue literature. Piero Camporesi, an expert in this field, has compared treatises and legislative measures

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(1990), pp. 275-276: 'llegando a la posada, vi a un semihombre, que más parecía cabrón según las vedijas e hilachas de sus vestidos: tenía su sombrero encasquetado, de manera que no le podía veer la cara ... el sombrero a lo picaresco, sin coronilla, para evaporar el humo de su cabeza; la ropilla era a la francesa, tan acuchillada de rota, que no había en qué poder atar una blanca de cominos. Su camisa era de carne, la cual se veía por la celosía de sus vestidos; las calzas al equipolente; las medias, una colorada y la otra verde, que non le pasaban de los tobillos; los zapatos eran a lo descalzo, tan traídos como llevados. En una pluma que cosida en sombrero llevaba, sospeché ser soldado.'

<sup>132</sup> Pérez de Herrera (1598), c. 168r: 'Y assí, señor, pues todo esto es necessario que padezca el soldado para el buen gobierno de la guerra, y que en todo guarde mucha puntualidad, se echara de ver, que es la gente que casi mas merece por sus trabajos, de cuantos ay en este suelo, y mas desamparados de todos, pues en esta Corte he visto pedir limosna a algunos, que delante de mis ojos les vi llevar de palas las piernas y braços, y pelear con mucho valor y animo.'; Ibid., cc. 161v-162r: 'Estos son, señor, los soldados, que professando la milicia, y defendiendonos con valor y virtud, sirviendo a V. M. pusieron, y ponen de ordinario a riesgo sus vidas; y dellos los quedaron con ellas, estan de suerte, que por las heridas, que en sus cuerpos recibieron, y trabajos que han padecido, los vemos estropeados e inútiles, o tan cargados de la edad, que por no estar para servir, obliga a darles el remedio que merecen sus obras.'

<sup>133</sup> Quevedo (2012), p. 108: 'Diéronme una caja con hilo negro y hilo blanco, seda, cordel y aguja, dedal, paño, lienzo, raso y otros retacillos, y un cuchillo.'

<sup>134</sup> García (1998), p. 162: 'Cualquier oficio de la compañía lleva su insignia y señal segreta, con que, en un instante, es conocido de los nuestros, sabiendo por este orden cuántos hay de un oficio en cada calle y puesto.'

with fictional sources and has showed that reality and fiction sometimes overlap to the point that the boundaries are not clear. Picaresque writers drew inspiration from official reports on mendicity and devised amusing anecdotes to ridicule the strict measures taken by the authorities. Moreover, Camporesi has showed that official reports often contain, for the purpose of propaganda, anecdotes and stories which are certainly taken from the literature of roguery. Both are, on the one hand, the result of a social concern that had reached unbearable proportions. On the other, they contributed to the shaping of the collective imagination by developing an iconography of poverty, originating in the combination of true and imaginary stories.<sup>135</sup> Stereotypes of *personae non gratae* had by now taken a firm hold. Some legislative measures that dictated the life of mendicants were called in Spain *ordenanzas mendigativas*. These were bylaws that beggars had to observe in order to avoid upsetting the public with their smelly presence and inappropriate behaviour.<sup>136</sup> Legislators meant to regulate the life of mendicants systematically and were even concerned about their sexual and religious habits. The modern reader cannot help laughing over certain unintentionally comic anecdotes. When the already mentioned Herrera asked a beggar how many people the Trinity consists of, the dismayed and naïve inquirer received the answer ‘five!’.<sup>137</sup> Picaresque writers were conscious that some measures tended to the ridiculous and therefore conceived a sort of humorous counter-bylaw to mock the activity of the legislators.<sup>138</sup> A brilliant example is represented by the counter-*ordenanzas* contained in the *Guzmán de Alfarache*

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<sup>135</sup> An interesting essay on the role of historical sources in novels, and especially in the *Guzmán de Alfarache* by Alemán, is that of Edmond Cros, *Contribution à l'étude des sources de Guzmán de Alfarache* ([s.l.: s.n., s.d.]).

<sup>136</sup> Pérez de Herrera (1598), cc. 121r-125v.

<sup>137</sup> Pérez de Herrera (1598), c. 12r.

<sup>138</sup> On the counter *ordenanzas mendigativas* see Gomez Canseco in Alemán (2012), p. 262, note 35, and pp. 1271-1272, note 262.35 (mistakenly numbered as 261.35).



by Mateo Alemán, who was very sceptical about lawmaking to control beggars.<sup>139</sup>

The very long text, of which I will quote only an excerpt, combines a moderate use of verbs and an accumulation of nouns connected by means of the omission of conjunctions (asyndeton), to create a crescendo culminating in the final passage where Alemán merges technical terms derived from fencing with the description of lowly food:

‘We order that the poor of every country have at their disposal taverns and inns ... where they can discuss, give opinions ... tell personal or other people’s anecdotes and talk about the wars which they did not fight ... No beggar is allowed to wear new or half-used clothes, for they would give a bad example; everyone has to wear torn and mended garments ... They can wear a dirty rag around the head and carry scissors, knife, awl, thread, thimble, needle, bowl, gourd, haversack and travelling bag ... They can wear a bag, purse and have internal pockets in their clothes and must collect alms in their hats ... We allow them to have breakfast every morning and to have plenty to eat and drink ... as long as they wipe their mouths and do not go around playing with points [stench] of garlic, cuts [chops] of leek and thrust of wine.’<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Michel Cavillac, ‘Mendigos y vagabundos en 1596-1597: la carta del L<sup>o</sup> Francisco Valles a Cristóbal Pérez de Herrera’, in *Bulletin Hispanique* 101, n. 2 (1999), pp. 387-414.

<sup>140</sup> Alemán (2012), p. 263: ‘[Mandamos] que los pobres de cada nación, especialmente en sus tierras, tengan tabernas y bodegones conocidos ... disputamos para que allí dentro traten de todas las cosas y casos que sucedieren, den sus pareceres y jueguen al rentoy, puedan contar y cuenten hazañas ajenas y suyas y de sus antepasados y las guerras en que no sirvieron, con que puedan entretenerse ... Que ninguno pueda traer ni traiga pieza nueva ni demediada, sino rota y remendada, por el mal ejemplo que daría con ella; salvo si se la dieron de limosna, que para solo el día que la recibiere le damos licencia, con que se deshaga luego de ella ... Que puedan [los mendigos] traer un trapo sucio atado a la cabeza, tijeras, cuchillo, alesna, hilo, dedal, aguja, hortería, calabaza, esportillo, zurrón y talega, como no sean costal, espuerta grande, alforjas ni cosa semejante, salvo si no llevare dos mulas y la pierna mechada. Que traigan bolsa, bolsico y retretes y cojan la limosna en el sombrero. Y mandamos que no puedan hacer ni hagan landre en capa, capote, ni sayo; pena que, siéndoles atisbada, la pierdan por necios.’; p. 265; ‘Permitímosles que puedan desayunarse las mañanas echando tajada ... con tal que el olor de boca se repare y no se vaya por las calles y casas jugando de punta de ajo, tajo de puerro,

Legislators needed certainties, they did not like anarchy. They wanted to classify, regulate and control begging. Herrera theorized about the institution of places where the false and true poor could be gathered. The purpose of this was to arouse dissension and provoke deferment among the guests in order to unmask the false poor. The name of such buildings was ‘palaces of disillusion’ (*Palacios del desengaño*).<sup>141</sup> However, the results were completely different from their expectations. Mateo Alemán responded with his provocative and hilarious jokes, which epitomized what legislators were scared about. Ribera, in turn, conceived a figure of deception that embodied the uncertainties of his contemporaries in an era of social and economic turmoil. Whether his character is a false or real mendicant, an ex-soldier or a rascal displaying secret signals to communicate with his accomplices, the painter was able to conjure up several facets in a single character. He made the figure ambiguous and elusive, endowed with polysemic signs evoking anecdotes belonging both to real life and to fiction. The beholder, gazing over tiny and innumerable details skilfully disseminated by the painter, is asked to react to such visual stimuli on the basis of his expectations and store of knowledge. He might simply enjoy the playfulness of the work or appreciate the subtle alternation of serious and comic. Where he is able to uncover the deeper meaning of the work, however, he will be amazed by an unexpected surprise.

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estocada de jarro.’; p. 265: ‘Permitímosles que puedan desayunarse las mañanas echando tajada ... con tal que el olor de boca se repare y no se vaya por las calles y casas jugando de punta de ajo, tajo de puerro, estocada de jarro.’

<sup>141</sup> Pérez de Herrera (1598), c. 154v.

## Lynceans' issues

Thus far, I have purposely quoted passages that dwell on the descriptions of clothes in order to give a taste of a typical picaresque pattern, that is a rhetorical strategy that interpolates amusing sub-episodes into the main plot to divert the reader from the main plot of the story.<sup>142</sup> However humorous these sketches might be, they conceal a very serious message that we can unravel when we read between the lines of the *pícaro's* plea:

‘Maybe my inner appearance is better than my outer appearance; maybe under a humble dress there is an ingenuity that is not enough appreciated; and those who declare their love for knowledge should not mind their clothes: *because the philosopher disregards clothes.*’<sup>143</sup>

And again:

‘Although I am a *pícaro*, I am an ingenious one ... No one can enjoy the senses as the poor can ... As to the sense of smell, then, nobody is superior to me ... For me, the more beneficial the odour, the better. Therefore, my amber and my musk fragrance is the garlic, the best and the most truthful smell. I never run out of garlic, effective protection against infections.’<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> On this topic see George Shipley, ‘A Case of Functional Obscurity: The Master Tamburine-Painter of *Lazarillo*, tratado VP, *Modern Language Notes (MNL)* 97, n. 2, *Hispanic Issue* (March 1982), pp. 225-253.

<sup>143</sup> *Segunda parte de la vida del pícaro Guzmán de Alfarache* (2007), p. 315: ‘Pero quizá tengo mejores interiores que exteriores, y debajo la mala capa, hay latinidad mal acreditada; y los que profesan amor de ciencia no habían de reparar en vestidos: *Quia corporis habitum contemnit philosophus.*’

<sup>144</sup> Alemán (2012), p. 177: ‘Y aunque de pícaro, cree que todos somos hombres y tenemos entendimiento.’; p. 276: ‘¿Quién hay hoy en el mundo que más licenciada ni francamente goce de ellos [los sentidos] que un pobre, con mayor seguridad ni gusto?’; pp. 276-277: ‘El Oler, ¿quién pudo más

With such statements, the protagonist introduces us to one of the key motifs of the genre, which is the contrast between appearance and reality that inevitably undermines our judgment. By appealing to our mental faculties and sensorial experiences, the *pícaro* challenges us to put our certainties into question, thereby acknowledging the philosophical learning beneath what we see. In the light of this, we can finally venture to reveal how Ribera, in his turn, disguised a reflection upon contemporary scientific discourses in his *Sense of Smell*.

So far art historians have neither focused on the cause and effect principle proposed by the painting (the onion-tear), nor on the way the vegetables are displayed. These two aspects are extremely important. They allude, on the one hand, to the established pharmaceutical practice of ‘seeing, smelling, touching and tasting botanical specimens (*semplici*)’.<sup>145</sup> The olfactory analysis of the *semplici* was in fact part of the examination taken to become a chemist. Moreover, due to the increase of quacks that sold cheap remedies to the have-nots, health officers took remedial action by visiting the apothecaries to check the quality of samples.

On the other hand, the vegetables evoke the more sophisticated botanical classification set up by the Lyncean Academy. In order to appreciate this, we need to refer back to what has been explained in detail in the previous chapter on scientific experimentalism. In the light of the premises on the primary and secondary qualities

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que nosotros ... ? Demás que si el olor es mejor cuanto nos es más provechoso, nuestro ámbar y almizque, mejor que todos y más verdadero, era un ajo - que no faltaba de ordinario -, preservativo de contagiosa corrupción.’

<sup>145</sup> Andrea Russo, *L’arte degli speziali in Napoli* (Napoli: [s. n.], 1966), p. 68: ‘il quale semplice ... si vede, odora tocca e gusta’, in order to verify that it is ‘buono, verditiero, e legittimo’; pp. 68-69: ‘Quando si vuole fare lo speziale di nuovo in Napoli, ha da comparire [l’aspirante speziale] davanti al Protomedico ... et in sua presenza si esamina detto speziale ... nella cognizione de’ semplici, dove se li appresentano semplici veri, e falsi per vedere come li conosce.’ A similar example is in Antonio Maria Cospi, *Il giudice criminalista ...* (Florence: Stamperia di Zanobi Pignoni, 1643), Chapter 46, ‘De Medici falsi’, p. 549: ‘se bene i medicamenti composti malamente si possono conoscere, tuttavia al colore, al sapore, all’odore molte cose si possono conoscere.’ See also Leonardo Colapinto and Antonino Annetta, *Ciarrlatani, mammane, medici ebrei e speziali conventuali nella Roma Barocca* (Arezzo: Aboca Museum edizioni, 2006, 2nd ed., first published 2002), p. 29.

of bodies, it becomes clearer how Ribera's *Sense of Smell* conjures up, in a very subtle way, the investigative tenets which had been set up within the Lyncean Academy. At this stage, it is necessary to summarise the main aspects resulting from such a complex analysis. By placing the onion bulb in the hands of the weeping beggar and diverse samples isolated on the table, the painter cunningly evokes the mechanistic principle of cause and effect, but also re-enacts Galileo's epistemological theories of the potential and limits of the sensory organs [Figs 65, 66]. The samples on the table, isolated from the man, are here 'classified' according to their physical characteristics, dimension, shape and position, categories valid both for Galileo and for the Lynceans (primary qualities). With the onion bulb in the hands of the beggar Ribera alludes, instead, to smell and to the mechanistic principle of cause and effect, a complementary means of classification employed by the Lynceans to set up a new record of specimens (secondary qualities). The arrangement of the vegetal samples – and especially the representation of the onion, whole and dissected and seen from two different points of view – can be better appreciated if analysed along with some drawings that Cesi made, either independently or with the help of draughtsmen<sup>146</sup> [Fig. 75, 76]. Although these drawings were not included in the *Thesaurus*, they ideally complete and clarify the meaning of the phytosophical tables. The peculiarity of these sheets is that they bear on the margins notes on colour, smell, taste and so on, and that they display the samples from different points of view. 'The Lynceans' methodology, based on the comparison rather than on the accumulation of data, framed the canons of modern scientific illustration. After the death of Cesi, Cassiano dal Pozzo acquired the manuscripts of the Lynceans in bulk. His close collaborator, the illustrator Vincenzo Leonardi, made a series of drawings that show the success of

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<sup>146</sup> The drawings have been published by David Pegler and David Freedberg, *The paper Museum of Cassiano Dal Pozzo. Fungi* (London: Royal Collection and Harvey Miller Publishers, 2005), 3 vols.

the new scientific method of illustration [Figs 77, 78].<sup>147</sup>

Moreover, Ribera's choice of samples may be intended as a parody of seventeenth-century botanical illustrations, where in general we find more illustrious and less banal representatives of the vegetable kingdom [Figs. 68, 69, 78]. This parodic aspect is enhanced as garlic and onion – two very picaresque objects – might refer to their use in the pseudo-scientific practices of the time, as they are very often mentioned in botanical treatises. Such vegetables, in fact, despite a lack of empirical evidence for this, were attributed properties which apparently were magical and that the new science would reject.<sup>148</sup> If this were the case, they would ironically allude, by contrast, to the fact that the Lynceans were on the brink of a cultural revolution in which the new science of nature was progressively replacing traditional beliefs.

The scientific aspect of the painting is further imbued with a comic undertone that is worth noting. The very fact that the heavily-wrapped beggar in the painting echoes the layered structure of the onion reminds us of the theory of *signatura*, which the Lyncean Giambattista Della Porta exposed in the aforementioned treatise *Phytognomonica* (1588).<sup>149</sup> In the second part of the treatise the scholar asserts that plants resembling human limbs and organs can be used to cure diseases affecting those specific parts. This principle of similitude exerted an enduring impact on Federico Cesi, although the latter began to stray progressively away from Della

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<sup>147</sup> On Cassiano and the Lynceans see Francesco Solinas, 'Cassiano dal Pozzo Linceo e alcuni fogli del Museo Cartaceo', in Brevaglieri, Guerrini and Solinas (2007), pp. 93-137.

<sup>148</sup> Regarding the medicinal virtues of garlic and onion and their use for various purposes see: Juan de Pineda, *Diálogos familiares de agricultura cristiana* [1589], ed. Juan Meseguer Fernández (Madrid: Atlas, 1963-1964), Vol. 1 (1963), pp. 184 and 190; Giovanni de' Rinaldi, *Il mostruosissimo mostro. Nel primo de' quali si ragiona del significato de' colori. Nel secondo si tratta dell'erbe, et fiori* (Venice: Lucio Spineda, 1602); Giovanni Battista Ferrari, *Flora overo coltura di fiori* (Rome: Facciotti, 1638), pp. 279 and 282. An example of the combination of garlic and onion-flowers, in order to enhance the latter's fragrance, is to be found in Ferrari (1638), p. 503.

<sup>149</sup> Giovan Battista della Porta, *Phytognomonica* (Naples: Horatium Salvianum, 1588).

Porta's old-fashioned doctrine.<sup>150</sup> The *signatura* and the works of Della Porta are in fact explicitly mentioned in a sheet of the seventh numbered table of the *Thesaurus* [Fig. 79, 80], and the *signatura* is somehow present in the conceptual scheme of the first table reproduced above [Fig. 14].<sup>151</sup> Della Porta kept searching for the missing link between the human being and the entire creation in his most important works. His *Coelestis physiognomonica*<sup>152</sup> and *Humana Physiognomonica*<sup>153</sup> are rooted in the same ground, and even in his plays the characters are often described, indeed with an ironic undertone, by means of zoological and phytological similitudes.<sup>154</sup> I have included some drawings from the *Phytognomonica* to show the ingenious passages that help the reader follow Della Porta's reasoning. In the first four tables the scholar compares vegetable samples with parts of the human body [Figs 81-84]. In the fifth table he repeats the same scheme, replacing the human body with animals [Fig. 85]. Finally, he combines the head of a man with a vegetable and the skull of an animal [Fig. 86]. A sort of visual syllogism leads the reader through the original theory of *signatura*. In addition, I have reproduced a table from *Humana physiognomonica* which compares the head of a hound with that of a man [Fig. 63, 64]. Those who have a canine-like head are, says Della Porta quoting Aristotle, as ingenious and sagacious as dogs, which are endowed, of course, with the most refined sense of smell.<sup>155</sup> A possible relationship between Ribera's paintings and Della Porta's original investigations has been proposed but never pursued.<sup>156</sup> It seems that the painter was

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<sup>150</sup> On Della Porta's doctrine of signatures (which dates back to Galen and Paracelsus) and on its influence on Colonna and Cesi, see Ottaviani (1997), pp. 47-53.

<sup>151</sup> Accademia dei Lincei (1651), p. 916.

<sup>152</sup> Giovan Battista della Porta, *Coelestis physiognomoniae libri sex* (Naples: Baptistae Subtilis, 1603).

<sup>153</sup> Giovan Battista della Porta, *De Humana Physiognomonica libri IIII* (Vico Equense: Iosephum Cacchium, 1586).

<sup>154</sup> On this unexplored and promising field, see Sirri (1982), pp. 139-140.

<sup>155</sup> Della Porta (1586), p. 30: 'Aristoteles ait. Qui caput magnum habent, canum instar [unitelligible word] sunt, idest sensati, vel sagaces, qui acerrimo narium sensum viget.'

<sup>156</sup> Francesco Abbate, *Storia dell'arte nell'Italia meridionale. Il Secolo d'oro* (Rome: Donzelli, 2002), p. 34.

able to do even more and grasp the core of the studies conducted between Rome and Naples: the innovative and multidisciplinary methodology which Cesi employed by merging Galileo's investigations with those led by the Neapolitan Fabio Colonna, without excluding the old-fashioned theories of Della Porta.

## Conclusion

The *Sense of Smell* is evoked by means of parallels and oppositions (the human, the vegetable and the animal, inner and outer appearance, pleasant and unpleasant smells) that push the viewer towards the awareness of the implications of such analogies. By depicting a tear dropping from the man's eye, Ribera forces us to fathom the intensity of the onion's smell, but he is also playing both with the beholder's senses and with the limits of painting in conveying sensory effects other than the tactile and visual. Furthermore, the way Ribera represents the man's distress seems a parody of the theories about how emotion can be nobly conveyed by painting.<sup>157</sup> According to these theoretical principles, the purpose of painting is the depiction of human actions (*istoria*) and therefore of the passions or 'affetti' of the soul. Since these are elusive, the painter's task is to represent those motions of the body that convey certain inner emotions, such as anger and joy, laughter and crying. Here Ribera seems to lampoon this noble concept. The tears, an element of apparent compunction and pain, are in fact the result of a mechanistic synesthesia. Subsequently, the 'affetto' of the beggar has been turned into a 'non affetto', the mere interaction between the open onion and the sense of smell in conformity with a

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<sup>157</sup> On the theory of 'affetti' see, for example, Leon Battista Alberti, *De Pictura (Redazione volgare)*, ed. Lucia Bertolini (Florence: Polistampa, 2011), Book 2, especially Chapters 17-20, pp. 278-286.



picaresque mode: a visual trick that puzzles the viewer as to the 'affetti' of the represented mendicant.

Finally, the fact that the vagrant is displayed together with the vegetables of the botanical plate turns him into the object of scientific observation. The juxtaposition is extremely subtle. Regarding the open onion, for instance, we are allowed to run an eye over its fragile layers and then glance through its inner veins and shades. As to the mendicant, his evasive appearance lures the viewer into going beyond the layers of his clothes and attitude, but to no avail: key features of his comic *persona* (his intense smell) can be imagined by the viewer but cannot be physically re-enacted. It is on this basis that Ribera introduces a discourse on the scepticism of the senses. We are unable to come to a decision as to whether the beggar's appearance and essence are the same or not, as suggested by the picaresque genre. The *Sense of Smell* becomes, in this light, an invitation to experience nature and its baser aspects, but low life becomes here an object of observation only through the image: a screen that allows the beholder to observe without being contaminated. Painting, in the end, through the experimental lenses and the limits of the senses, lends itself to reproducing the low life, but the reproduction is fictitious and does not enhance our knowledge. The failure of the image brings us back, once again, to a crucial problem that troubled the life of the Lynceans: the impossibility to grasp the variable and ambiguous 'nature' of Nature.

Whilst sojourning in Rome during years crucial for the new science of nature, Ribera had a brilliant intuition: depicting the themes and the most illustrious representatives of knowledge and paradigms of the scientific interpretation of nature in picaresque and antiheroic terms, bringing about an effect of comic strangeness. In the *Sense of Smell*, Ribera adopts a pattern commonly used for the portraiture of

eminent scholars [Fig. 87], but he makes the setting bare and deprives the character of the usual scholarly aura and abstract atemporality, portraying instead the picaresque and miserable counterpart to the naturalist: a sort of falsely weeping Heraclitus epitomizing the potential failures of scientific investigation and the pitfalls of the sensory faculties. Be that as it may, Ribera presents the intricacies of sensory perception and the limits of knowledge in a calculated alternation of irony and seriousness, conveying scepticism through subtle parody, himself remaining on the brink of ambiguity with his picaresque smile.

### 3.3 The Sense of Taste

According to the definitions in old Spanish dictionaries, the *bodegón* is a tavern where food and wine are served to the most ordinary and humble people. Its etymology, according to the incorrect explanation of some lexicographers, can allegedly be traced back to the Italian *budella* (intestine, tripe), a term indicating a type of food which is within everybody's means [Fig. 88].<sup>158</sup> Yet the dictionaries' concise entries do not even convey the faintest idea of the illicit dealings that took place there, or of the perils to which *bodegón*-goers would be exposed. A watering hole for wayfarers, pilgrims, workers, and wanderers, a place where one could have the strangest encounters and listen to the most incredible stories, the tavern became a den of iniquity frequented by every kind of idler: the lair of cardsharps, harlots and swindlers, representatives of a diverse humanity perpetually at the mercy of fortune. The place par excellence for forming social relationships but also of ambiguity and deception, it was a real microcosm that became a literary and artistic *topos*, an ideal setting for amusing tales or to alert the gullible to the potential traps of the hostelryes:

'The tavern 'Bad Weather' is in a miserable place and built with worm-eaten wood ... it is so bare that only Discomfort and Suffering lodge there ... The emblem on the door bears a charming and smiling Cupid that holds a glass of red wine and the motto *Intus* [Enter!]. He persuades the gullible wayfarer that he would

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<sup>158</sup> The word comes in reality from the ancient Greek *apothēke* (which resulted in boutique, bottega, and son on). For the definition of the term *bodegón* see Sebastian de Covarrubias y Orozco, 'Bodegón', in *Tesoro de la lengua Castellana, o Española* (Madrid: Luis Sanchez, 1611), c. 143v: 'Bodegon, el sotano, o portal baxo, dentro del qual està la bodega, adonde aquel que no tienen quien le sigue la comida la halla alli adereçada, y juntamente la bebida: de manera que se dixo de bodega. Algunos quieren se diga bodegon, quasi budellon, de budello, que en Italiano vale asaduras, y tripas, o coraznadas, porque lo mas que alli se vende es deste genero de vianda.'

find comfort and rest there thanks to the wine; yet he alerts the canny that they would be risking their life in entering ... The tavern owner is the giant Lucifer, who rented it to Deceit and his wife Astuteness.<sup>159</sup>

Giovanni Battista della Porta set one of his most tangled plays, *La Tabernaria* (*The Tavern*, 1616), in a fake tavern, an expedient that enhances the effect of fictitiousness. Here two uncommendable fellows, Cappio and Lardone (Noose and Fatty), respectively a servant and a scrounger, temporarily turn a house into the inn ‘Cerriglio’ – a well-known and disreputable tavern of Naples haunted by Caravaggio – to arrange a complex fraud to entrap foreigners based on the simultaneous use of eight different languages.<sup>160</sup> Taverns and inns became bywords for corruption and deceptiveness to such extent that a famous Italian preacher who railed against the falseness of the human being lamented that: ‘the entire world has now turned into a tavern and the mortals into gluttonous customers.’<sup>161</sup>

Needless to say, hostelries are thoroughly congenial to the picaresque genre, where they are praised with a series of epithets drawn from underworld slang: ‘Oh, inn, inn! You are the sponge of goods, a challenge for the generous, the school of the shrewd, the university of the world ... the purgatory of bags, enchanted cave ... a

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<sup>159</sup> Antonio Mirandola, *Hosteria del mal tempo, opera morale* (Bologna: Per Niccolò Tebaldini, 1639), pp. 1-2: ‘L’Hosteria del mal tempo [è] in luogo miserabile, fabricata di legni tarlati ... è così mal provveduta delle cose necessarie, che sol qui vi soggiorna il Disaggio e l’Patire ... Sopra la porta era l’insegna dell’Hosteria ... In questa scorgevasi un vezzoso e ridente Cupido, figlio di Venere, che teneva una tazza di vin rosso in mano col motto *Intus*. Accennando a i poco accorti che dentro all’Albergo i viandanti proveriano ogni ristoro e conforto, di cui il vino è cagione; ma divisando a gl’intelligenti che nell’Hosteria soprastava a passeggeri pericolo di sangue e di vita ... Padrone del castel è il crudo Gigante Luciferone, che l’ha affittato con longa locatione all’Inganno, la cui moglie è l’Astutia.’

<sup>160</sup> Giovan Battista della Porta, *La Tabernaria* (Ronciglio: Domenico Dominici, 1616). In the classical Latin tradition the word ‘tabernaria’ indicates a comedy based on a trivial subject.

<sup>161</sup> Francesco Fulvio Frugoni, *De’ ritratti critici abbozzati, e contornati. Ripartimento secondo* (Venice: Combi et La Nou, 1669), p. 72: ‘Tutto il Mondo è divenuto hormai una Hosteria, perche i Mortali, che son Viandanti, si fermano à crapulare, e tanto si van caricando lo stomaco di vivande mortifere, che co’ fumi nel capo perdono il diritto sentiero, che conduce alla vera Patria. S’incontrano ad ogni passo intemperanti Gnosippi, ma non gli Efori, che li comprimano.’

gentle shearer.<sup>162</sup> For the disinherited, the *bodegón* is the place of an illusory social equality and the wine is the means by which this is achieved:

‘As to wine, God made us equal without exception, and this was his greatest present to us ... The world was created for everyone and no one is the master. We have taverns, tables and jugs.’<sup>163</sup>

Here the marginalized *pícaro* can consider himself privileged – ‘Yours is the best tavern, where you get the best wine and the best mouthful’<sup>164</sup> – and indirectly participate in what is happening around the world, for in the tavern

‘what has previously been discussed at Court is commented upon, its rooms are great halls [*aulae magnae*] where issues are discussed and put into question ... There everything is known and dealt with, everything is legislated for everyone talk under the influence of Bacchus, having Ceres [i.e. food] as an ascendant’.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> López de Úbeda (2012), p. 353: ‘¡Oh, mesón, mesón!, eres esponja de bienes, prueba de magnánimos, escuela de discretos, universidad del mundo, margen de varios ríos, purgatorio de bolsas, cueva encantada, espuela de caminantes, desquiladero apacible, vendimia dulce.’

<sup>163</sup> González (1988), pp. 221-222: ‘O no ha de beber vino, o lo habemos de beber; que, pues Dios no puso excepción de persona, no ha de haber excepción de vino. Iguales nos hizo, que fue una de las mayores muestras de su magnificencia ... Para todos es el mundo, para todos se crió; que ninguno es dueño universal. Tabernilla hay, tabladillo hay; jarro tenemos.’

<sup>164</sup> Alemán (2012), p. 187: ‘Tuya es la mejor taberna, donde gozas del mejor vino, el bodegón donde comes el mejor bocado.’

<sup>165</sup> Alemán (2012), pp. 218-219: ‘Demás que no había bodegón o taberna donde no se hubiera tratado de ello y lo oyéramos, que allí también son las aulas y generales de los discursos, donde se ventilan cuestiones y duda ... Últimamente allí se sabe todo, se trata en todo y son legisladores de todo, porque hablan todos por boca de Baco, teniendo a Ceres por ascendente.’ See also another example in Jerónimo de Alcalá Yáñez y Ribera, *Alonso, mozo de muchos amos (primera y segunda parte)*, ed. Miguel Donoso Rodríguez ([Madrid]: Iberoamericana; [Frankfurt am Main]: Vervuert, 2005), p. 327: ‘Bien echaba de ver el gusto que había de tener por algunos días sabiendo nuevas de Italia, de Costantinopla, de las Indias; el modo que se ha de tener en el Real Palacio para buen gobierno de todo el reino; pues todas estas cosas los pobres las tratan y comunican cada día en los hospitales y tabernas como cuento de horno.’

The *bodegón* is, then, a world within a world, endowed with its own rules, where the client is robbed and served adulterated food which is skilfully counterfeited in order to trick his usually unrefined senses. Yet it is also a preparation for life, as we see in *The Story of the Ogre*, the tale that opens Giambattista Basile's *Lo cunto de li cunti* (*The Tale of Tales*, 1634-36). The protagonist of the story is Antuono, a fat and obtuse fellow – ‘as round as an ox ... as red as a lobster ... as large as a whale, sturdy and stocky’<sup>166</sup> – who learns the business of life only after having been tricked three times in a tavern by a mischievous innkeeper.

I have started this chapter with an unusual introduction, as Ribera's *The Sense of Taste* [Fig. 88] has not been paid the attention it deserves, probably owing to its apparent simplicity. Apart from the thorough analysis of the technical and stylistic features carried out by Craig Felton, this corpulent fellow has generally been the object of only cursory examination focused on the identification of the food he is eating.<sup>167</sup> Only once has it been attempted, using a different approach, to situate the character in a precise, yet questionable, social background through the examination and comparison of the man's diet and clothes.<sup>168</sup> It is rather interesting that the identification of certain items from the still-life has led to contrasting opinions among scholars and that none of them have ever wondered whether these ambiguities are fortuitous or were intentional on the part of the painter. By the same token, I do not believe that a clear-cut identification of the man's social class would be fruitful, for even in this respect the painter might have created a play of subtle

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<sup>166</sup> Basile (2013), I.1, p. 34: ‘tunno comm’a boie ... russo comm’a gammaro, verde comm’aglio e chiatto comm’a ballena e cossi ’ntrecenuto e chiantuto che non ce vedeva.’ The English translation is taken from *The Pentamerone*, translated by Norman Mosley Penzer (London: John Lane the Bodley Head, 1932), Vol. 1, p. 18.

<sup>167</sup> Felton (1991), pp. 71-81.

<sup>168</sup> Lisa Vergara, ‘Il Gusto: Jusepe de Ribera's Personification of Taste’, *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* 12, n. 3 (Fall 2012), pp. 8-10.

ambiguities, which I will venture to unfold. As a result, the eater has been included within the broad category of genre painting and has been loosely associated with Annibale Carracci's *Bean Eater* [Fig. 89].<sup>169</sup> In this chapter I venture to propose alternative sources that might have provided Ribera with a framework and a set of props that the painter reassembled in his own original style, thus rendering an apparently easily accessible image a complex one.

As far as Italian genre painting is concerned – which dates back mainly to Vincenzo Campi, Bartolomeo Passarotti, the Carracci, as well as the Bassano family from Veneto – it has been proposed that the visual tradition representing food sellers, eaters and tavern scenes stems from Northern European works of art.<sup>170</sup> The peculiarity of the Italian tradition compared to the Northern one, according to some critics, lies in the removal or reduction of sacred scenes from the background and the lack of deeper allegorical meaning.<sup>171</sup> Others, instead, argue that symbols of lust and eroticism or complex theological discourses underlie these scenes.<sup>172</sup> The scholarly approach has been not dissimilar regarding Spain, where a considerable number of *floreros* and *bodegones* paintings were produced after the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>173</sup> Scholars have generally acknowledged that the genre flourished thanks to the early presence of both Italian and Flemish works of art in Spanish collections.<sup>174</sup> Indeed, it is not my intention to discuss the relationship of the Northern European painting

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<sup>169</sup> *Josepe de Ribera lo Spagnoletto* (1982), pp. 92-95; Michael Scholz-Hänsel, *Josepe de Ribera 1591-1652* (Cologne: Könemann, 2000), pp. 18-21.

<sup>170</sup> Sheila McTighe, 'Food and the Body in Italian Genre Painting, about 1580: Campi, Passarotti, Carracci', *The Art Bulletin* 86, n. 2 (June 2004), pp. 301-323.

<sup>171</sup> McTighe (2004).

<sup>172</sup> Barry Wind, 'Pitture Ridicole: Some Late Cinquecento Comic Genre Paintings', *Storia dell'Arte*, n. 20 (1975), pp. 25-35.

<sup>173</sup> It is necessary to clarify that the Spanish term 'bodegón' in modern history of art corresponds to the still-life genre.

<sup>174</sup> Among the others, Pieter Aertsen and Bartolomeo Passarotti. See *Pintura española de bodegones y floreros de 1600 a Goya* (exhibition catalogue, Prado Museum, Madrid, November 1983 – January 1984), ed. Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez ([Madrid ?]: Ministerio de Cultura, Dirección General de Bellas Artes y Archivos, [1983 ?]), pp. 13-19.

genre with that of Italy or Spain, a topic on which much has been written.<sup>175</sup> It must be pointed out, nevertheless, that in focusing on the northern European visual tradition that has contributed to the origin of genre painting in Italy and Spain, art historians have at times neglected the role played by other sources, both visual and literary. In this regard, my contention is that Ribera's corpulent eater has a main 'text' and several layers or subtexts. I will venture to demonstrate that the picaresque undertone has provided the painter with the main text, while other 'minor' sources might have acted as a framework.

I shall start with some carnivalesque texts that stage the exile of the potbellied Carnival (*Sbandimento di Carnevale*). The genre also has visual parallels, especially in the popular prints that accompanied the texts or were circulated in loose sheets. Subsequently, I will consider some pseudo-scientific treatises that alleged that there was a direct relationship between the consumption of food and social status. Finally, I will come to Picaresque literature and will clarify how Ribera devised a picaresque tavern scene.

I have just mentioned some diverse sources that might be related to the *Sense of Taste*, and as such could have been significant for the beholders. I will start with those connected to the dispute between the fat Carnival and the emaciated Lent, a motif that reached a varied and large public of recipients.<sup>176</sup> The oldest works seem to date back, at least in Italy, to the fifteenth century. They are quite numerous, but in most cases remained anonymous until Giulio Cesare Croce published his versions of *Lawsuit and Banishment of Carnival* (*Processo ed esame di Carnevale*) [Figs 90-92]. The

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<sup>175</sup> Marcus B. Burke and Peter Cherry, *Collections of Painting in Madrid, 1601–1755 (Part 1 and 2)*, ed. Maria L. Gilbert (Los Angeles: Provenance Index of the Getty Information Institute, 1997). The text is available online at <<http://www.getty.edu/publications/virtuallibrary/0892364963.html>>, consulted 11 July 2016.

<sup>176</sup> Luigi Manzoni, *Libro di Carnevale dei secoli XV e XVI* (Bologna: Gaetano Romagnoli, 1881).



pattern is very simple and repetitive: Carnival, ‘fat, greedy, drunkard and lazy’<sup>177</sup>, is caught by *Madonna Quaresima* (Lent) while he is carousing, usually in a tavern. He is then questioned about his gluttony and the confession is followed by the endless list of food he has wolfed down. This type of popular script was widespread in France and Spain as well and also had visual counterparts.<sup>178</sup> Apart from itinerant performances that staged this lawsuit in the main European cities, illustrations accompanied the texts or circulated in loose sheets as well. Very occasionally the pictures show Carnival and Lent together while fighting ‘armed’ with their respective provisions [Fig. 93]. Even less common is the representation of the victorious Lent alone. For some reason the most frequent image became that of the sole glutton seated and surrounded by food [Figs 90-92]. It is feasible, as Mikhail Bakhtin surmised, that this type of fat character evolved over the centuries turning into the Gros-Guillaume (Fat William) [Fig. 94], a notorious character of the French farce played by the actor Robert Guérin (1554-1634). Guérin would sprinkle his face with flour and fasten his prominent belly with belts, as if it were a wine barrel, two expedients that evoked bread and wine.<sup>179</sup> Interesting in this regard are the popular prints of the period, of which I am reproducing one from the mid-sixteenth century [Fig. 90]. It shows, according to the inscription on the *verso*, the banishment of Carnival, seated on a large bench that works as a table decked with some foodstuff and pottery.<sup>180</sup> A chicken and sausages hang from the wall on the background, while a carafe lies on the floor. The man, who has a rather dull expression, has grabbed a

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<sup>177</sup> Giulio Cesare Croce, *Processo overo esame di Carnevale* (Bologna: Fausto Bonardo, 1588), p. [1].

<sup>178</sup> Manzoni (1881), pp. VII-XXVII.

<sup>179</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, translated by Helen Iswolsky (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana UP, 1984), p. 292.

<sup>180</sup> Max Sander, *Le livre à figures Italien depuis 1467 jusqu'à 1530: essai de sa bibliographie et de son histoire* (Lodi: Giampiero Zazzera, 1996), Vol. 6, figure n. 852, listed under the section ‘Messina e Palermo’. The inscription is reported at pp. 313-314.

bottle and a glass. The buttons and the tight-fitting garment accentuate the man's flabby corpulence. Were it not for the coeval inscription, the woodcut could stage either the sense of taste or the gluttony, one of the seven deadly sins. Now, I am not inferring that Ribera's *Sense of Taste* is a representation of Carnival *strictu sensu*. I rather believe that such popular images, connected with the consumption of food and deeply-rooted in the cultural background of the recipients, might have provided the painter with a framework, a structure as simple as it is evocative which the artist made more sophisticated by superimposing different layers.

Connected with the consumption of food, although for different reasons, are some pseudo-scientific texts that allege a strict relationship between nutrition, temperament and social status. One of the most successful treatises known throughout Europe was the *Examen de ingenios para las ciencias* (*The Examination of Men's Wits*, 1575), which was published by the Spanish physician Juan Huarte de San Juan (1529-75). During his analysis Huarte arbitrarily laid down the difference between coarse and noble foods. He therefore prescribed the diet that he claimed helped the highborn to conceive more intelligent children. On the other hand, he warned against the diet common to the lower classes which was, he asserted, responsible for the procreation of obtuse and bestial children. However ingenuous the author might appear to be, his text is rooted in a precise socio-political concern of the period, which is the preservation of social structures and hierarchies and the related distribution of duties and responsibilities. The subject was on the rise and therefore the text went through several revised editions, was translated into other languages and was also abundantly plagiarized by other scholars, including the Italian physician and geographer Giuseppe Rosaccio (1530-1620), who included entire passages from

Huarte's book in his *Microcosmo* (1600), adding a chaotic section on physiognomy.<sup>181</sup> The food present in Ribera's *Taste* – the bread, olives, wine and even the foodstuff in the dish (if it is tripe<sup>182</sup>) – is analysed by Huarte, Rosaccio and other authors as being characteristic of lower-class people.<sup>183</sup> Artists might have been acquainted with this type of source, but we cannot be sure, as is posited, that they would necessarily peruse them as prescriptive guides.<sup>184</sup> After all, the connection between certain types of common food and humble characters are also indicated by a variety of visual and other literary sources. Ribera's diner is either low-born or, presumably, impoverished, and it is clear that he is not going to eat delicacies in the strict sense of the word. As a matter of fact, the relationship between diet and social class was already present in proverbial sayings and in picaresque literature.<sup>185</sup> The aforementioned Guzmán de Alfarache, protagonist of the novel of the same name, is a *pícaro* that brags about his wealthy ancestors. He is with a companion in a cheap tavern where they are served a disgusting dish of tripe. Guzmán turns up his nose to dissociate himself from his

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<sup>181</sup> Giuseppe Rosaccio, *Microcosmo, nel quale si tratta brevemente dell'anima vegetabile, sensibile, et rationale. Dell'huomo sua complessione, et fisionomia. Delle infermità, che nascono in tutte le parti del corpo, et loro cura* (Florence: Francesco Tosi, 1600).

<sup>182</sup> Tripe is suitable for the working classes, according to Baldassarre Pisanelli, *Trattato della natura de' cibi et del bere* (Venice: Gio. Alberti, 1586), p. 89: 'La trippa è veramente cibo da persone che faticano, e travagliano assai il corpo.'

<sup>183</sup> Juan Huarte de San Juan, *Examen de ingenios para las ciencias* [1575], ed. Mariela Szirko (Buenos Aires: Electroneurobiología, 1996), p. 275: 'De vaca, macho, tocino, migas, pan trujillo, queso, aceitunas, vino tinto y agua salobre, se hará una simiente gruesa y de mal temperamento. El hijo que desta se engendraré terná tantas fuerzas como un toro, pero será furioso y de ingenio bestial. De aquí proviene que entre los hombres del campo por maravilla salen hijos agudos ni con habilidad para las letras: todos nacen torpes y rudos por haberse hecho de alimentos de gruesa sustancia. Lo cual acontece al revés entre los ciudadanos, cuyos hijos vemos que tienen más ingenio y habilidad.' See also Ibid., 'Noticia preliminar by Szirko, pp. 2-9, for the following editions of the text and its translations into other languages. The text is available at

<[http://electroneubio.secyt.gov.ar/Juan\\_Huarte\\_de\\_San\\_Juan\\_Examen\\_de\\_ingenios.pdf](http://electroneubio.secyt.gov.ar/Juan_Huarte_de_San_Juan_Examen_de_ingenios.pdf)>, consulted 11 July 2016. The following is one of the numerous passages that prove the 'loan' of Rosaccio (1600), p. 44: 'La carne di vacca, di manzo, di porco, il pane di grano rosso, le fave, il cascio, l'olive, il vino negro, e altri cibi grossi fanno il seme grosso, e di cattivo temperamento, il figliuolo, che si genererà haverà forza per un toro, ma sarà furioso, et d'ingegno bestiale. Di qui avviene che tra gli uomini di villa, è miracolo che uno riesca acuto d'ingegno, o atto alle lettere, massime dove s'usano cibi così rozzi. E perciò nascono tardi, e rozzi per essere stati generati, se cibi tali.'

<sup>184</sup> McTighe (2004) instead proposes this analytical approach using both visual and literary sources.

<sup>185</sup> See, for instance, the collection of Giovanni Florio, *Giardino di recreatione ...* (London: Thomaso Woodcock, 1591).

associate, while criticizing him for wolfing down the food: 'I will not talk about my companion, as he was born among savages; his parents were brutes and accustomed him to cloves of garlic.'<sup>186</sup> Guzmán's apparently innocent joke about garlic refers, broadly speaking, to low food and is present in other Spanish novels, among others in Cervante's *Don Quijote* and Solorzano's *Teresa de Manzanares*<sup>187</sup> The joke in reality conceals a concern of the period about the division of social classes. The difference is that while scholars discussed these issues seriously, novels did so with the use of a subtle irony that mocked social hierarchies according to the picaresque mood. I will return to this passage from the Guzmán later, quoting it in full.

I can finally turn to the eater painted by Ribera [Fig. 88]. The stout character is thick-haired, with a beard formed by scattered tufts of hair. He has large ears, a big head on a bull-like neck and stares at us with a slow-witted expression as if he were already under the influence of alcohol. Only the simple earrings confer the air of a trickster on him. The hands and the fingers are so robust and coarse that the bottle and the glass seem small and fragile objects in comparison. The shirt, as showed by the stitches that have become loose, is so tight-fitting as to reveal the flabbiness of pectorals and belly. Although worn out and torn, the shirt is clearly finely tailored. It has an elegant collar with frayed embroideries and numerous buttons, some of which are missing. If we pay careful attention we notice that the left part of the collar is

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<sup>186</sup> Alemán (2012), p. 92: 'De mi compañero no hay tratar de él, porque nació entre salvajes, de padres brutos y lo paladearon con un diente de ajo; y la gente rústica, grosera, no tocando a su bondad y limpieza, en materia de gusto pocas veces distingue lo malo de lo bueno. Fáltales a los más la perfección en los sentidos y, aunque veen, no veen lo que han de ver, oyen, y no lo que han de oír.'

<sup>187</sup> *Teresa de Manzanares* by Alonso de Castillo Solórzano: 'Criose la muchacha en todo lo que acostumbaban allá a los hijos de la gente común. Paladeáronla con ajos y vino, y salió una de su linaje', in *Picaresca femenina: Teresa de Manzanares y La garduña de Sevilla*, ed. Fernando Rodríguez Mansilla (Madrid: Iberoamericana; Vervuet, 2012), p. 184; Cervantes (2015), Part 1, Chapter 10, p. 94: 'Aquí trayo una cebolla y un poco de queso, y no sé cuántos mendrugos de pan – dijo Sancho –, pero no son manjares que pertenecen a tan valiente caballero como vuestra merced.'; Ibid., Part 2, Chapter 43, p. 872: 'No comas ajos ni cebolla, pero no de manera que parezca que te escuchas a ti mismo, que toda afectacion es mala.'

wider than its right counterpart and, moreover, terminates with a right angle instead of an acute one [Fig. 95]. This asymmetry is accentuated by the embroidery on the collar, which is more worn through on the right side. Besides, the buttonholes on the left side, almost imperceptibly, are not aligned with their counterparts: the calculated shabbiness devised by the painter makes us imagine the man buttoning up the garment either in a great hurry or absent-mindedly. In the neckline there are two small warts (were it not for the brownish colour, one could take them for buttons that have been sewn on wrong), while the protuberance between the collar and the pectoral on the left suggests a swelling or pustule [Figs 95-96]. All in all the condition of the shirt is acceptable, displaying only a few tears, but its colour is doubtful. The bust is in fact various shades of opalescent grey, with streaks of grease and sweat and splashes of white. The sleeves, that in fact have a pearl greyish undertone, are a different story entirely. It is clear that the shirt is the result of patient and laborious collage [Fig. 97].

The man has poured himself a beverage that must be wine. The meal, which might be going to be eaten without cutlery, includes small black and brown olives spilled out of a paper cone, a loaf and a large soup plate – chiselled with concentric circles, the only decorative element in the bare squalor of the setting – which is overflowing with that ‘mystery food’ that has puzzled many a scholar [Figs. 99-100].<sup>188</sup>

At this stage it is worth briefly reviewing the opinions of scholars on the menu of this corpulent eater [Fig. 100]. At first the effort that has been put into identifying the foodstuffs appeared to me to be misleading. Subsequently, after a thorough analysis of the work accompanied by the reading of picaresque sources, I

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<sup>188</sup> Vergara (2012), pp. 92-94.

have reflected on the fact that there might be a reason that the still-life on the table has misled so many scholars. The painting is well-preserved and therefore its condition does not affect the correct reading of the painted surface. The bread and olives do not present any problems at all. The wine is unanimously considered to be red, although its transparency casts doubt upon this point and allows the painter to show off his masterly ability. The white truncated cone on the right might be a saltcellar, a pepper pot, the cork of the bottle or even cheese. That flat brownish oval near the cone has been mistaken for a bay leaf to season the food. Now it is clear that some of these interpretations are far-fetched and naïve and might depend on an inferred vision of the work, while others are absolutely feasible. The alleged bay leaf is nothing more than a plug, while the truncated cone is likely to be a cork or a salt cellar. The ‘mystery’ food overflowing from the dish has been the object of debate. It is as problematic as it is interesting and doubts of its identification are justifiable. The food has variously been identified as pasta or more specifically noodles resembling worms, tripe, cuttlefish or squid generously sprinkled with cheese and finally vegetables.<sup>189</sup> This is an unpleasant heap of short grey cylinders with veins of white. Whatever they are, those white tufts render them vibrantly like lizard tails which have just been chopped off and are ready to leap out. What seems beyond question is that the painter succeeded in rendering the food particularly uninviting and puzzling. The crust of bread is masterly executed as well. It has all the shades of colour – from

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<sup>189</sup> Longhi (1966), p. 75; Nicola Spinosa, *Ribera. L'opera completa* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1978), p. 91, cat. entry n. 2, and p. 92, plates 2a-f; Craig Felton, in *Jusepe de Ribera lo Spagnoletto* (1982), p. 101, cat. entry n. 3; Denise Maria Pagano, ‘Taste’, in *Painting in Naples 1606-75: from Caravaggio to Giordano* (exhibition catalogue, 2 October – 12 December, 1982), eds Clovis Whitfield and Jane Martineau (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1982), pp. 226-227, cat. entry n. 119; Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez, in *Jusepe de Ribera 1591- 1652* (1992), p. 64; Gabriele Finaldi, ‘Aspects of the Life and Work of Jusepe de Ribera: 1591-1652’, Phd thesis (The Courtauld Institute of Art, London University 1995), Vol. 1, p. 101; Scholz-Hänsel (2000), p. 28; Spinosa (2006), p. 19; Vergara (2012), p. 8; Mason (2011).

golden to pale yellow – that indicate different stages of desiccation, a scrap recovered from who knows where.

It is no surprise that there is no cutlery. Even if the major items of tableware were already in use in the Western world, they were not yet that common. On the contrary, the man is fortunate enough to have a stem glass, which he might likely share with other table companions.<sup>190</sup>

The palette employed by Ribera is almost as restricted as that employed for the other paintings of the series, although the technique is different. For the anatomical parts and for the bread the painter used a set of colours ranging from the pale pink to the copper. Brown and grey tones are instead employed both for the garments and the foodstuff. The brushstrokes are in general quite large and oily. Ribera plays with textural similarities in a very subtle way. The face and the bust are constructed with similar strokes [Figs 95-96]. The face is of an intense ‘winey’ pink that becomes lighter towards the top and is even pale on the forehead. Splashes of shimmering white and opaque grey stains show that the face is impregnated with dust and sweat. A similar effect is achieved in the garments, where iridescent streaks of grey intermingled with splodges of white convey the same unctuous sensation. The large waistband, which interrupts the predominant grey tone with its intense brown, enhances the flabbiness of both the belly and the food in the plate with its undulating pattern [Fig. 99-100]. The frayed embroidery on the collar is instead made with graphic strokes that make it reminiscent of the vibrant filaments of the food [Figs 98-99]. Finally, the same dusty patina covers the old cone of multipurpose paper as well as the stale bread. That unpleasant sensation of grossness that the composition exudes is enhanced by the textural similarities between the still-life and the man, as

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<sup>190</sup> On the use of cutlery and dishes see Raffaella Sarti, *Europe at home: family and material culture, 1500-1800*, translated by Allan Cameron (New Haven: Yale UP, 2002), pp. 150-153.

everything were uniformly shrouded in the same greasy squalor. The effect is reached by dwelling on tiny and unpleasant details and by means of chromatic and textural ‘rhymes’, a technique that seem to evoke the picaresque taste for the disagreeable. If we peep at the inside of a tavern – its structure, customers and food – as conceived by the picaresque genre, we might have a good sense of the strategy underlying Ribera’s ploy. Let us proceed step by step, starting with the interior and the food that is served to clients there: ‘Its tables are old remnants of butchers’ chopping boards, the seats are big stones previously used to cover sewers ... the crockery is made of the same clay used to forge Adam.’<sup>191</sup> The price is commonly know, but the ingredients are not,<sup>192</sup> any kind of meat can be served up, according to the inn-keeper’s instructions: ‘if it is a dead cat, honour it and pass it off as a hare; call capon the cock; pigeon the raven; trout the carp ... peacock the duck.’<sup>193</sup> The result is an indecipherable mélange and even the cook ignores ‘its name, because it is neither fish nor fowl ... [for] the pot contains leftovers of innumerable herbs and revolting meats ... It is like Latin, no one knows it’.<sup>194</sup> The bread is ‘so stale and dry that the sight of

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<sup>191</sup> *La vida y hechos de Estebanillo González* (2012), Vol. 1, p. 283: ‘era sus mesas retazos viejos de tajones de cortar carne, sus asientos de grandes y torneadas losas, que habían servido de tapaderos de caños, sus ollas y cazuelas de cocido y no de vidriado barro, y su vajilla de pasta de primer hombre.’

<sup>192</sup> Cortés de Tolosa (1974), Vol. 1, p. 26: ‘... si de un pastel se sabe la ganancia señalada, no se sabe de qué es tal pastel, y yo lo sabía, como el que ayudó a alguna empresa.’

<sup>193</sup> López de Úbeda (2012), p. 367: ‘si viene a vuestra casa un gato muerto, honradle, y decid que es liebre; al gallo llamadle capón; al grajo, palomino; a la carpa, lancurdia; a la lancurdia, trocha; al pato, pavo.’ Further example: Francisco de Quevedo, *El sueño del juicio final*, ed. Ignazio Arellano, in *Obras completas en prosa* (2003) (hereafter referred to as Quevedo, 2003<sup>2</sup>), Vol. I.1 pp. 229-230: ‘La primera acusación decía no sé que de gato por liebre, tantos de güesos (y no de la misma carne, sino adevenedizos), tanta de oveja y cabra, caballo y perro.’

<sup>194</sup> *La vida y hechos de Estebanillo González* (2012), Vol. 1, pp. 283-284: ‘Hacía cada día un potaje que aun yo mismo ignoraba cómo lo podía llamar, pues ni era jigote francés ni almodrote castellano ... porque tenía la olla en que se guisaba tantas zarandajas de todas yerbas y tanta variedad de carnes, sin preservar animal por inundo y asqueoso que fuese, que sólo le faltó jabón y lana para ser olla de romance, aunque lo fu de latín, pues ninguno llegó a entenerla, ni yo a explicarla’. I have adapted this passage turning the third person into the first, and the verbs from past into present. The phrase ‘ni era jigote francés ni almodrote castellano’ literally means ‘it was neither French stew nor Castilian hotchpotch/pot-pourri’, but I have translated it as ‘neither fish nor fowl’, in order to render in English that the food is something unidentifiable.



it arouses pity'.<sup>195</sup> The picaresque genre and Ribera alike dwell on unpleasant details – 'the soup is impregnated with sweat', 'the tripe is served with ruminated parsley'<sup>196</sup> – and shove the recipient into a disagreeable setting. Indeed, disgusting the recipient is not the main purpose of the picaresque genre. It aims to achieve a more subtle objective, which is to ironically plunge the human being to the bottom of a list of rotten stuff. The goal is achieved through the enumeration of items and people followed by unflattering adjectives: 'the oil is as black as to seem the sediment of an oil lamp, the pan is filthy and the innkeeper bleary-eyed.'<sup>197</sup> Looking at Ribera's painting we can really say, in unison with the dejected Guzmán de Alfarache, that 'bread, jug, water, salt-cellar, capes and the inn-keeper, everything is made of the same stuff'.<sup>198</sup> In the tavern it is easy to trick the unrefined senses of the customers: they arrive 'tired, sweat and dusty, the mill [mouth] empty and sharp-set'<sup>199</sup> and 'they are so drunk that they would not be able to say if they are in a tavern, inn or prison'.<sup>200</sup> Taverns are, then, the places where the senses are put to the test and the *pícaro* is aware that perception is affected by needs. 'Hunger is the best sauce and renders everything edible',<sup>201</sup> says again the *pícaro* Guzmán de Alfarache echoing an old and universally known proverb. He is, as usual, with a companion in a cheap tavern where they are served a disgusting dish of tripe. Being very hungry, everything

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<sup>195</sup> Lopez de Úbeda (2012), p. 362: 'cuando estuviéredes en la mesa delante de los huéspedes, sacaréis de la vuelta del delantal, o de entre corpiño y saya, un mendrugo de pan ... Y sea el pan tan duro y seco, que solo el verlo provoque a lástima.'

<sup>196</sup> *La vida y hechos de Estebanillo González* (2012), Vol. 1, p. 73: empapada y avahada sopa'; p. 64: 'mondongo verde con perejil rumiado'.

<sup>197</sup> Alemán (2012), p. 75: 'el aceite negro, que parecía de suelos de candiles, la sartén puerca y la ventera legañosa.'

<sup>198</sup> Alemán (2012), p. 71: 'Ellos, el pan, jarro, agua, salero, sal, manteles y la huésped, todo eran de lo mismo.'

<sup>199</sup> Alemán (2012), p. 71: 'Llegué a una venta sudado, polvoroso, despeado, triste y, sobre todo, el molino picado, el diente agudo y el estómago débil.'

<sup>200</sup> *La vida y hechos de Estebanillo González* (2012), Vol. 2, pp. 16-17: 'Yo iba tan herido de las estocadas de vino que ni supe si la cárcel era carcel, mesón o taberna.'

<sup>201</sup> Alemán (2012), pp. 91-92: 'las premisas engañaban cualquiera discreto juicio, emborrachando el gusto de hombre hambriento ... ¿No has oído de decir que a la hambre no hay mal pan? Digo que se me hizo almíbar y me dejó goloso.'

at the beginning seems to him delicious, but once his appetite has been satiated the prospective changes:

I will not talk about my table-mate, as he was born among savages; his parents were brutes and accustomed him to cloves of garlic [i.e. coarse food]; as to taste, rustic and coarse people [*gente grosera*]... are very rarely able to distinguish between good and bad. The majority of them are devoid of the perfection of the senses ... I ordered something else ... and they brought a roulade of tripe. I became suspicious as it smelt like rotten straw and I therefore passed it to my table-mate who wolfed it down.<sup>202</sup>

Here '*gente grosera*' does not mean the populace, but people that, incapable of taking advantage of experience, do not refine their senses and therefore lack in discernment. Whereas Guzmán is able to recognize that his sensory perception changes according to different situations, his rustic companion seems to be hopeless. The less-celebrated senses of taste and smell secure the physical survival of the *pícaro* more than the other senses, and as such they are ranked the same as or above intellectual wits. It is certainly a change that subverts the established hierarchy of the senses. Similarly, Ribera employed characters with a different degree of shabbiness in his series. The threadbare *Taste* and *Smell*, the lower and 'bodily' senses, are then put along with their nobler companion, the 'cognitive' or 'intellectual' sense (sight),

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<sup>202</sup> Alemán (2012), pp. 92-93: 'De mi compañero no hay tratar de él, porque nació entre salvajes, de padres brutos y lo paladearon con un diente de ajo; y la gente rústica, grosera, no tocando a su bondad y limpieza, en materia de gusto pocas veces distingue lo malo de lo bueno. Fáltales a los más la perfección en los sentidos y, aunque veen, no veen lo que han de ver, oyen, y no lo que han de oír ... Pregunté si había otra cosa ... [y] nos dió un paseo de revoltillos hechos de las tripas, con algo de los callos del vientre. No me supo bien: olióme a paja podrida. Dile de mano, dejándolo a mi compañero, el cual entró por elo como en viña vendimiada.'

which is represented as being slightly worn-out. This juxtaposition is made not only to bring about a contrasting effect, but also to make the case for the importance of sensory experience as a whole. Both the experienced Guzmán and his rude companion can be tricked by senses, with the sole difference that the first is aware of the drawbacks of the sensory faculties, while the second is not. Ribera's viewers are in a similar situation; they can either be Guzmán or belong to the 'gente grosera'.

Now something must be said about the possible social status of the man, about which conflicting alternatives have been suggested. I will briefly summarise them and will then try to focus not on the social position but on the identity of the elusive character. Lisa Vergara has tried to situate him in a precise social context. According to the analysis conducted by the scholar on the seventeenth-century Roman census and on the diet of the man, the man allegedly falls in the category of 'comfortable' – one of the four into which Roman society was divided – immediately after the rich and before the poor. The fine and tight shirt would prove that he was once better-off and slimmer, and even the refined way the eater holds the stem glass would account for an imaginary prosperity of far-gone days.<sup>203</sup> Interesting, although not corroborated by examples, is Scholz-Hänsel's assertion that the man is indubitably a Gypsy because of his earrings.<sup>204</sup> Although these premises are intriguing, they must be taken *cum grano salis*. My impression is, in fact, that in channelling their efforts into socioeconomic analysis, and therefore taking Ribera too seriously, scholars have overlooked the comedic side of the story. The *Taste* is not, or at least not simply, documentary evidence of seventeenth-century Roman society or a visual parallel of the rigid schemes of the census. These premises will nevertheless allow me to unfold the subtle ambiguities of the painting. Let us start from the

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<sup>203</sup> Vergara (2012), p. 9.

<sup>204</sup> Scholz-Hänsel (2007), p. 28. The author does not provide any source.

beginning and analyse the misleading clues – the shirt, gesture and earrings – and see, at the very end, how they all contribute to the same visual plot.

Self-concealment – a key concept of the picaresque genre – entails the ability to change one's 'costume' if need be. The *pícaro* is equipped with a 'kit including cotton, silk, strings and needle, thimble, remnants of cloth and satin and other scraps'.<sup>205</sup> Thanks to his 'tailoring skills' he is able to turn into an elegant suitor:

'The first thing I did ... was to alter doublet, shoes and hat. Then I had the collar of the cape replaced by another of different colour. I changed the buttons of the shirt and replaced the sleeves of cotton with sleeves of silk, therefore with little money I made it unrecognizable.'<sup>206</sup>

And, vice versa, to reinvent himself as a shabby comedian:

'Do not you know that any excess in the costume is suspect? ... Rub your face with a damp but not soaked cloth, in this way you will be neither dirty nor clean; do some mending in your garments.'<sup>207</sup>

Another interesting aspect is the way the man holds the foot of the glass, between the forefinger and the thumb, while the other three fingers are tightly bent.

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<sup>205</sup> Quevedo (2011), p. 108: 'Diéronme una caja con hilo negro y hilo blanco, seda, cordel y aguja, dedal, paño, lienzo, raso y otros retacillos, y un cuchillo.'

<sup>206</sup> Alemán (2012), p. 225: 'Lo primero que hice ... fue reformarme de jubón, zapatos y sombrero. Al cuello del herreruelo le hice quitar el tafetán y echar otro de otra color. Trastejé la ropilla de botones nuevos, quítele las mangas de paño y púselas de seda, con que a poca costa lo desconocí todo.'

<sup>207</sup> Such is the advice that Morcón, a very experienced *pícaro*, gives the apprentice Guzmán, see Alemán (2012), p. 268: '¿No ves que haces mal en exceder de la costumbre? ... Friégate las mañanas el rostro con un paño, antes liento que mojado, porque no salgas limpio ni sucio; y en los vestidos echa remiendos, aunque sea sobre sano, y de color diferente; que importa mucho ver a un pobre más remendado que limpio, pero no asqueroso.'

It is highly likely that this was considered to be the appropriate way to do it. Numerous paintings show a similar gesture, [Figs 101-104], while only few written sources prescribe something in this regard. The Italian humanist Giovanni Sulpizio recommends, in his fifteenth-century *Libellus de moribus in mensa servandis*, holding one's glass with three fingers and to drink gently.<sup>208</sup> The later *Het groot schilderboek* (*The Book of Painting*, 1707), a treatise addressed to artists by the Dutch painter and art theorist Gérard de Lairese, provides interesting details and illustrations on this aspect<sup>209</sup> [Fig. 101]. An image from the treatise shows the possible polite ways of holding a glass according to shape and occasions. The fifth gives two alternatives to hold the stem glass by the foot, and the one on the left suits Ribera's eater well. The gesture, present in numerous paintings, is not in itself a sign of good manners and can even be rendered dissonant and ridiculous when it is counterbalanced by other inappropriate gestures and demeanours. Such is, for example, Annibale Carracci's *Boy Drinking* [Fig. 103], who has gulped down the wine tossing his head back, or Staveren's gracelessly grimacing drunkard [Fig. 102].

The last interesting thing concerns the earrings, a new fashion that likely took root in other European countries but began in Spain [Fig. 95]. Earrings became a stereotypical trait in gypsy iconography, although they had also been worn by well-born men since the sixteenth century.<sup>210</sup> Nevertheless, while there are plenty of literary sources that confirm that Gypsy men wore two earrings, I have not been able

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<sup>208</sup> Giovanni Sulpizio da Veroli, *Libellus de moribus in mensa servandis* (Lyon: Stephanum Doletum, 1542), p. 45 (mistakenly numbered as 54): 'Sume pocula tribus digitis.' The text, originally in Latin, had several translations and adaptations in French. See also Alfred Franklin, *La civilité, l'étiquette, la mode, le bon ton du XIII au XIX siècle* (Paris: Émile-Paul, 1908).

<sup>209</sup> Gérard de Lairese, *Het groot schilderboek* (Amsterdam: Willem de Coup, 1707), the illustration comes after page 54.

<sup>210</sup> Levi Pisetzky (1964-1969), Vol. 3 (1966), p. 173; George Montandon, Goffredo Bendinelli and Maria Accascina, 'orecchino', in *Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani*, <[http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/orecchino\\_%28Enciclopedia-Italiana%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/orecchino_%28Enciclopedia-Italiana%29/)>, consulted 24 November 2015.

to find other contemporary visual sources confirming this habit.<sup>211</sup> This might mean that Ribera's character represents a very early iconography, which is not surprising, for the painter was the first to come up with many new iconographic ideas.<sup>212</sup> The earrings themselves are not, of course, an indubitable sign of the man's cultural affiliation, but are possibly an additional sign of the fact that he is an impostor. When Ribera painted the *Taste*, stereotypes about gypsy clothing and behaviour had long since been consolidated. Gypsy women were often presented as treacherous and enticing. The poet Gaspare Murtola, for instance, composed a madrigal, *Per una cingana* (*For a Gypsy Woman*), to celebrate Caravaggio's *The Fortune Teller*. In praising the cunning skills of the Gypsy woman, who is able to enchant the beholder, the poet means to extol the painter's ability to make the woman look alive.<sup>213</sup> The *commedia dell'arte* also staged characters disguised as gypsies, namely chameleon-like adventurers and rascals, in a word *pícaros*, who change their identity to suit their circumstances.<sup>214</sup> Yet the gypsy disguise does not only belong to fiction. In real life men and women would dress as gypsies for the sake of snubbing social rules.<sup>215</sup> In

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<sup>211</sup> On the use of the earrings and stereotypes on gypsies see Erwin Pokorny, 'The Gypsies and their Impact on Fifteenth-Century Western European Iconography', in *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration and Convergence* (The Proceedings of the 32nd International Congress of the History of Art), ed. Jaynie Anderson (Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2009), pp. 597-601; Ian Hancock, *Danger! Educated Gypsy. Selected essays*, ed. Dileep Karanth (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire, 2010), see in particular the Chapter 'The 'Gypsy' Stereotype and the Sexualization of Romani Women', pp. 212-222.

<sup>212</sup> I have discussed this issue with Professor Scholz-Hänsel and he agrees that the man might be a very early representation of a male Gypsy with earrings.

<sup>213</sup> See Gaspare Murtola, 'Per una cingara del medesimo [Caravaggio]', in *Rime ... cioè sonetti* (Venice: Roberto Meglietti, 1604), madrigal 477, c. 226v (mistakenly numbered as 216): 'Non so qual sia più maga / O la donna, che fingi, / O tu, che la dipingi. Di rapir quella è vaga / Co i dolci incanti suoi / Il core, e 'l sangue a noi. / Tu dipinta, che appare / Fai, che viva si veda. / Fai, che viva, e spirante altri la creda.' On Murtola and Caravaggio see Lorenzo Pericolo, *Caravaggio and Pictorial Narrative: Dislocating the Istorya in Early Modern Painting* (London: Harvey Miller, 2011), pp. 135-142.

<sup>214</sup> For sources on the Gypsies in Spanish literature see Richard J. Pym, *The Gypsies of Early Modern Spain, 1425-1783* (Basingstoke [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 77-85.

<sup>215</sup> On this aspect see Domnica Radulescu, 'Performing the Female Gypsy', in *"Gypsies" in European literature and culture*, eds. Valentina Glajar and D. Radulescu (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), pp. 193-215.

other cases, every sort of idlers would mix with Gypsy people, thus creating counterfeit Gypsies, a new category of impostors that alarmed the authorities.<sup>216</sup>

Fictional examples of gypsy camouflage can be drawn from the works of Miguel de Cervantes. In *La gitanilla* (*The Gypsy Girl*), one of the *Novelas ejemplares* (1613), the noble Juan de Cárcamo agrees to become a Gypsy for love of the *gitanilla* Preciosa. Pedro de Urdemalas, protagonist of the *entremese* of the same name (1615), alternately student, Gypsy and hermit, defines himself ‘a second Proteus’<sup>217</sup>. He ends up as a comedian, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Malgesí, a magician who had foretold that Diego would be a friar, pope, Gypsy and so on. It is, in any case, the gypsy initiation that introduced Diego to his new life of *farsante* (comedian). Another significant case is that of the crook Ginés de Pasamonte, one of the key characters in *Don Quijote* (1605-14). Ginés appears and disappears at various points in the novel in different guises. Once he reinvents himself to try to sell the horse he has stolen from Sancho Panza.<sup>218</sup> When Ginés reappears concealed as a Gypsy with Sancho’s horse, the latter does not recognize Pasamonte. He recognizes the horse instead, and consequently understands the real identity of the Gypsy. The reader is made to see through Sancho’s eyes. He does not know of Gines’s new disguise, as it is never mentioned before. Yet as soon as the horse reappears rode by a Gypsy, the attentive reader has a clue to recall the theft at the same time as Sancho. Ribera’s recipients are also provided with clues that will help them to decipher the painting, although they are in a much more complicated situation, characterised by the dissemination of several clues that do not necessarily lead to a solution. Now, in the light of all the

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<sup>216</sup> Miriam Eliav-Ferlon, *Renaissance Impostors and Proof of Identity* (Basingstoke [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), Chapter 5, ‘Gypsies, or Such as Do Counterfeit’, pp. 121-136.

<sup>217</sup> Miguel de Cervantes, *El rufián dichoso* [and] *Pedro de Urdemalas*, eds Jenaro Talens y Nicholas Spadaccini (Madrid: Cátedra, 1986), p. 371, v. 2675.

<sup>218</sup> Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quijote*, Part 1, Chapter 30.

elements discussed, I wonder if it is reasonable to situate the man in a precise social class, or rather let him perform the elusive role he has been entrusted with. It has been said that he wears a fine tailoring garment and that he hold the glass in a fashionable manner. Are these indubitable signs that he is impoverished and that he was once better-off and used to the rules of etiquette? Considering the squalid and bare setting, the elegant way in which he raises his glass seems a jarring note and adds an ironic vein. Among other things, the crude way he holds the bottle counterbalances the gentle gesture. The man might be playing with us and be acting an alleged far-gone comfortable life. The once refined shirt is probably just a second-hand or altered garment and the eater an ingenious scoundrel trying to put on airs like his literary counterpart, Guzmán. Finally, he might be a true Gypsy, one of the thousands that lived in the alleys of Rome, or a Cervantine character ready to perform for us. Even the foodstuff in the dish is tricky and, even if only for a moment, it leaves us hesitant. In the end, we are unable to decide, for the painter keeps us on the edge and urges us to recognize that it is not possible to come to a conclusion. Like Rosaura, a character of Calderón de la Barca's *La vida es sueño* – a play focused on the theme of the unreliability of perceptions – we have to admit: 'I do not dare to tell you / that this outer dress / is an enigma, for it is not what / it seems.'<sup>219</sup>

In the course of this essay I have pointed out the possible sources that might have inspired the painter, yet I have omitted to say how personal experience might have provided him with stories from real life. The young *pícaro* Ribera left the native

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<sup>219</sup> Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *La vida es sueño*, in *Comedias*, ed. Luis Iglesias Feijoo (Madrid: Biblioteca Castro, 2006-2010), Vol. 1 (2006), p. 42: 'que no me atrevo a decirte / que es este exterior vestido / enigma, pues no es de quien / parece'. The English translation, slightly modified by me, is in Eliav-Ferlon (2012), p. 166.



Spain, addressed to as ‘cruel stepmother’,<sup>220</sup> in search of fortune elsewhere. Before reaching Naples he sojourned in Rome, ‘whence he departed without the cloak, which he had to pawn in a tavern’.<sup>221</sup> Then he headed south, by now turned into an experienced man ready to step up the social ladder in the Neapolitan microcosm. By that time he completed the *Five Senses* series and turned into ‘a rascal, whoremonger and guzzler’<sup>222</sup> – this is the tenor of Giulio Mancini’s unflattering sketch. During the Roman sojourn creditors were never off his back.<sup>223</sup> The description of his accommodation and the inventory of his scarce goods are, although unintentionally, a sketch worthy of the picaresque genre: ‘several people lying on one mattress put on the floor; one dish used for salads, soups and every sort of food; one pot, one bottle, no glasses or table napkins, the drawing paper of the week used on Sundays as a tablecloth’.<sup>224</sup> It seems, moreover, that he was able to sway and trick his creditors with his rhetorical ability.<sup>225</sup> By the same token, Ribera, like the most mischievous innkeeper, concocted a ‘mystery food’ and an elusive figure: an unattractive and smiling anti-Cupid deceiving the gullible viewer while alerting the canny. Instead of offering us the representation of a banquet of delicacies, the painter has provided us

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<sup>220</sup> Spain is a ‘cruelísima madrastra’ for the young and embittered Ribera, who is forced to emigrate in search of fortune elsewhere. See Jusepe Martínez, *Discursos practicables del nobilísimo arte de la pintura*, ed. Maria Elena Manrique Ara (Zaragoza: Pressas Universitaria de Zaragoza, 2008), p. 51.

<sup>221</sup> Antonio Palomino de Castro y Velasco, *El museo pictórico y escala óptica*, Vol. 3, *El parnaso español pintoresco laureado* [1796], ed. Juan A. Cén y Bermúdez (Madrid: Aguilar, 1988), p. 182: ‘pasó a Nápoles, saliendo de Roma sin capa, por dejarla empeñada en una hostería.’

<sup>222</sup> Letter from Giulio Mancini to his brother Deifebo, Rome 7 April 1617, published by Epifani (2007), pp. 248-249.

<sup>223</sup> Mancini (1956), Vol. 1, pp. 250-251: ‘Ma li osti, fornari, pizzicaroli, fruttaroli et hebrei gli facevano un gran tirar di faraiolo con gran romoreggiar alla porta et mandargli nell’un’hora di notte certe poliziette di ricordo che si dicono citazioni.’

<sup>224</sup> Letter from Giulio Mancini to his brother Deifebo, Rome 7 April 1617, see Epifani (2007), pp. 248-249: ‘si chiama lo Spagniolietto, quale adesso si ritrova in Napoli con gran fasto et reputatione et non ha tant<eccesso> nel arte quanta manigoldaria nel costume di puttane, di magniare, sbricconare ... in casa sua continuamente puttane numero tre, senza camicia, sozze, <laide> ... letti numero uno, disteso in terra, dove tutti dormivano, chi mettendovi il capo et chi un po’ il corpo; piatti numero uno, et lì si faceva l’insalata, la broda et ogni cosa, alla quale corrispondeva pignatte numero uno; un fiasco senza bichiere et senza salvietta, et la tovaglia la domenicha erano le carte del disegno della settimana.’

<sup>225</sup> Mancini (1956), Vol. 1, p. 250: ‘Nondimeno con questa sua semplicità haveva congiunta, nei bisogni, una gran rettorica.’

with this makeshift food, which is the virtual negation of the function of taste. Its consumption transforms 'Carnival' into either the anti-glutton or the ultimate glutton: the anti-glutton because he does not care for meat (whether it be pork or poultry); the ultimate glutton because he would content himself with every sort of food. In a sense, Ribera's glutton is, paraphrasing Croce, a 'Carnivale fallito' (given his questionable diet), already overcome by Lent. Food is here both poor and fake. It is not even a source of pleasure because gluttony comes with sensual pleasure. There is a radical aspect in the ways taste is deprived here of any positive value. It is sheer appetite: a physiological function that neither offers knowledge nor gives pleasure. Perhaps, alongside the picaresque aspects of the image and its comedic tones, the painting raises the most radical of questions: what is taste? The Lynceans asked themselves the same question during the years in which they were expanding upon the taxonomy of the senses. The extraordinary diagrams of the phytosophic tables seem in fact to suggest, if thoroughly examined, that the sense of taste is deceptive and, much more than the other senses, eludes every verbal and visual classification. After all, the social evanescence of this *Signor Gusto* almost embodies the evanescence of the sense he is called upon to represent.

### 3.4 The Sense of Touch and the Paragone of the Senses

Discussion of the reliability of the senses dominated the age-old *paragone* debate on the primacy of painting and sculpture over one another, a dispute that concerned not only technical and aesthetic principles, but which was also based on an interpretation of the nature of the senses and on the related dichotomy between appearance and reality.<sup>226</sup> Ribera opened up a new angle on the debate with the *Sense of Touch* [Fig. 105], a subject he returned to in a later composition now at the Prado, Madrid [Fig. 106]. The Pasadena *Touch* depicts an apparently blind man holding a sculptured head, while on the table there is a small painted canvas. Scholars have rarely discussed the painting and only two contributions stand out for holding conflicting opinions. Peter Hecht was the first to highlight the connection between Ribera's painting and the *paragone* dispute and to notice that the painter treated the subject with a subtly ironic undertone. Nevertheless, the scholar did not subject those sources that would have clarified the relevance of the issue to detailed examination.<sup>227</sup> Hecht's promising notion has been ignored to the point that, years later, Aragò Strasser categorically excluded that Ribera, 'neither ignorant nor a painter-philosopher', could have been able to deal with such an intellectually complex

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<sup>226</sup> As has been pointed out, the term *paragone* that we use nowadays to refer to the rivalry between painting and sculpture appeared, although very rarely, in sixteenth and seventeenth-century sources. The word, moreover, was not necessarily used in artistic contexts and did not always imply competition. In many cases, in fact, the *paragone* was meant as a comparison to highlight the differences between two things, qualities or procedures. The current meaning of the term in art scholarship dates back to modern research on Leonardo da Vinci. Previously Guglielmo Manzi, who published in 1817 on Leonardo's *Treatise on painting*, and then Irma Richter, who reedited part of it in 1949, contributed to the extension of the meaning of the word, which is now used to refer to the rivalry between painting and sculpture regardless of the period. See Claire J. Farago, *Leonardo de Vinci's Paragone. A Critical Interpretation with a New Edition of the Text In the Codex Urbinas* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), pp. 8-17. From now on I will refer to the comment of Farago as Farago (1992), and to the treatise of Leonardo as Leonardo (1992). All the translations of the treatise quoted in the following notes are by Farago.

<sup>227</sup> Peter Hecht, 'The Paragone Debate: Ten Illustrations and a Comment', *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 14, n. 2 (1984) pp. 125-136.

problem, especially during his youth.<sup>228</sup> There is of course a lack of documentation on the personal life, habits and cultural interests of the painter, but this does not mean we should believe that he was excluded from the major topics debated in his lifetime. In the absence of other sources we have to rely upon works of art. Even though we do not have any documentary evidence proving Ribera's direct engagement with the Academy of the Lynceans, I have previously maintained that his *Five Senses* series is rooted in the sophisticated debate on sensory perception which arose amongst the Roman academic societies. If this interpretation is feasible, there is no reason to exclude the idea that the *Touch* represents Ribera's personal reflection on the widely discussed comparison of the arts. Indeed, the scholarly debate on the subject became at times extremely sophisticated, but it was not always necessary to be a philosopher in order to grasp the key points of a subject that was in practice the daily bread and butter of artists, as well as being the object of theoretical dispute. Moreover, several artists took part in the discussion, whether willingly or unwillingly. Ribera likely executed his series when he was in his mid-twenties. He was certainly young, but was also original enough to show off his ingenuity, as he did with the other paintings of the series. Before analysing the *Touch*, I shall first need to give a short account of the *paragone* dispute. It will then be clear how some aspects of the discussion are at the core of Ribera's interpretation of the subject. Lastly, I will try to establish a possible ironic tone underlying the painting.

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<sup>228</sup> Daniel Aragó Strasser, 'Acerca de la presencia del motivo del paragone en dos pinturas de Ribera', *Boletín del Museo e Instituto 'Camón Aznari'*, n. 64 (1996), p. 130: 'sería caer en un error muy grave atribuir alegremente a Ribera discursos de elevado orden intelectual –y muy especialmente en su juventud– así como buscar complejos razonamientos filosóficos a la base de la iconografía de sus primeras obras: si el joven Ribera no fue desde luego un "ignorante" tampoco debemos en absoluto pensar que constituyese un ejemplo de pintor-filósofo, ni que su formación se lo permitiese ni que fuese esa su aspiración.'

At the dawn of the fifteenth century artists claimed, and obtained, a place for painting and sculpture among the liberal arts. As a result, a learned and lasting discussion on the primacy of the two visual arts over one another arose.<sup>229</sup> The debate reached its climax first with Leonardo's *Treatise on painting* (at the end of the fifteenth century) and then with Benedetto Varchi's inquiry on the 'supremacy of the arts' ('maggioranza delle arti') in 1546. After a number of more or less relevant contributions that kept the debate lively in the following years, the debate was readdressed in the well-known letter written by Galileo Galilei to the painter Ludovico Cigoli in 1612, an artist close to the Lyncean circles. While the first two sources were reasonably well-known and discussed among the cultural societies of the time, Galileo's original contribution remains problematic, for we cannot ascertain the extent of its circulation. I will discuss the letter last, for it might be an important subtext of the painting.

With the first book of his *Trattato di pittura*, Leonardo, who first set out the debate, supported the primacy of painting over sculpture with a theoretically-grounded argument. It is useful to mention at least some of Leonardo's tenets, as they became *topoi* of the following artistic literature. First and foremost, Leonardo undermined the traditional *schema* of knowledge and redefined which arts were liberal and which mechanical, according to a new classification that allowed him to praise painting by belittling sculpture.<sup>230</sup> Leonardo argues that painting is a science, and as

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<sup>229</sup> The pioneers that to different degrees prepared the ground for the future quarrel started by placing the painter on an equal footing with the poet (Cennino Cennini), and then claiming that painting, sculpture and architecture required sound theoretical knowledge of perspective and optics (Leon Battista Alberti and Piero della Francesca). Once their intellectual background had been ascertained, their 'admittance' to the liberal arts was acknowledged, although not unanimously. For further sources see Farago (1992), pp. 63-78.

<sup>230</sup> Leonardo (1992), Chapter 33, *Quale scientia è meccanica et quale non è meccanica*, pp. 250-254. See also the comments of Farago (1992) on Leonardo's Aristotelian and Scholastic reclassification of the liberal arts on the basis of their mathematical background, pp. 64-72 and 297-299. From now on I will quote Leonardo's *Treatise* as translated in English by Farago.

such is based on mental speculation and experience; it is moreover grounded in geometry,<sup>231</sup> but painting is also philosophical, because it is concerned with the motion of bodies in action.<sup>232</sup> On the other hand, sculpture is considered to be solely a mechanical art, as it requires more physical than mental effort.<sup>233</sup> Finally, the fact that sculptures are three-dimensional and more durable than paintings does not contribute to the supremacy of the sculptor, for such qualities are not due to the artist's ingenuity. It is nature itself, in fact, that provides sculpture with a more resistant material and, additionally, with reliefs thanks to the alternation of light and shadows. In the absence of light and shadows, reliefs would appear completely flat.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Leonardo defines what real science is and explains that geometry originates from scientific principles such as the point, the line and the surface. Painting is a science, in its turn, as it originates from the same principles as geometry does. See Leonardo (1992), Chapter 1, pp. 176-180, and Chapters 3-5, pp. 180-183.

<sup>232</sup> Leonardo (1992), Chapter 9, pp. 190-191: 'Si prova la pittura essere filosofia perché essa tratta del moto de' corpi nella prontitudine delle loro attioni, e la filosofia anchora lei s'astende nel moto' (The proof that painting is philosophy is that it treats the motion of bodies in the liveliness [promptitude] of their action, and philosophy also extends to motion').

<sup>233</sup> Leonardo (1992), Chapter 35, pp. 256-257: 'La scultura non è scientia ma arte meccanicissima perché genera sudore e fatica corporale al suo operatore. Et solo basta a tale artista le semplici misure de' membri e la natura delle movimenti e possati, e così in sé finisce dimostrando al occhio quel che quello è ...' (Sculpture is not science but a very mechanical art, because it generates sweat and bodily fatigue in the executant. The simple measurements of members and the nature of movements and poses alone are enough for such an artist, and so, sculpture ends by demonstrating to the eye what is what ...); Chapter 36, pp. 256-257: 'Tra la pittura e la scultura non trovo altra differentia se non che lo scultore conduce le sue opere con maggiore fatica di corpo ch'el pittore, ed il pittore conduce l'opere sue con maggior fatica di mente.' (The only difference I find between painting and sculpture is that the sculptor conducts his work with greater bodily fatigue and the painter conducts his work with greater mental fatigue.)

<sup>234</sup> Leonardo (1992), Chapter 37, pp. 260-262: 'Dice lo scultore, la sua arte essere più degna che'lla pittura con ciò sia che quella è più aeterna per temer meno l'umido, e 'l foco, e 'l fredo che la pittura. A costui si risponde che questa tal cosa non fa più dignità nello scultore perché tal permanenza nasce dalla materia e non dall'artefice. La qual dignità pò ancora essere nella pittura, dipingendo con colori di vetro sopra i metalli et terra cotta ...' (A sculptor says that his art is more worthy than painting because it, fearing humidity, fire, heat, and cold less than painting, is more eternal. The response to him is that such a thing does not make the sculptor more dignified because this permanence is born from the material and not from the artificer. This dignity can also belong to painting by painting with colored glazes on metal or terracotta ...); Chapter 38, pp. 266-268: 'Prima, la scultura è sottoposta a certi lumi, cioè di sopra, e la pittura porta per tutto seco lume et ombra. E lume et ombra è la importantia adunque della scultura. Lo scultore in questo caso è aiutato dalla natura del rilievo, ch'ella genera per sé' (First, sculpture requires certain lights, that is, those from above; but painting carries light and shadow entirely within itself. Light and shadow, therefore, are important for sculpture. The sculptor in this respect is aided by the nature of relief. [Nature] generates relief by itself.); Chapter 42, pp. 274-277: 's'ella [la natura] non soccorresse tale opera [la scultura] con ombre più o meno oscure et con li lumi più o men chiari, tale operatione sarebbe tutta d'un colore chiaro et scuro, a similitudine d'una superficie piana.' (if nature did not rescue the work [of sculpture] with shadows which are more

We can finally turn to some important principles which are inextricably linked, that is, the relationship between the arts and sensorial perception, a theme that engages with the dichotomy between appearance and reality and with the epistemological function of the visual arts. In order to bring out these issues, I will refer to some significant passages from the *Trattato di pittura*. In numerous passages Leonardo states that sight is the noblest and least easy to deceive among the senses.<sup>235</sup> Therefore, the ability of painting to deceive the most reliable sense accounts for the primacy of painting itself. Indeed, other elements contribute to such pre-eminence:

‘The prime marvel to appear in painting is that it appears detached from the wall, or from some other plane, and that it deceives subtle judges about that which is not divided from the surface of the wall. In this [specific case], when the sculptor makes his works, what appears is as much as there is. This is the reason the painter needs to make it his duty to know how the shadows are accompanied by the lights. This science is not needed by the sculptor because nature helps his work just as it does as all other corporeal things.’<sup>236</sup>

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or less dark, and with lights which are more or less bright, these operations would all be one bright or dark color, the similitude of a single flat surface.’)

<sup>235</sup> Leonardo (1992), Chapter 16, pp. 204-205: ‘occhio, come signore de’ sensi’; Chapter 11, pp. 192-193: ‘L’occhio, nelle debite distantie e debiti mezzi meno s’ingana nel suo uffitio.’ (‘At the proper distances and in its proper media, the eye is less deceived in its function than any other sense.’). See also Chapters 15-16, 20, 23 and 28 on the hierarchy of the senses according to medieval *topoi*.

<sup>236</sup> Leonardo (1992), Chapter 45, pp. 280-282: ‘La prima maraviglia che apparisse nella pittura è il parer spicchiato dal muro, od altro piano, et inganare li sottili giudicj con quella cosa che non è divisa dalla superfitie della pariete. Qui in questo caso lo scultore fa l’opere sue, che tanto paiono quanto elle sonno. E qui è la causa ch’ el pittore bisogna che faccia l’officio della nottitia nelle ombre che si incompagne de lumi. Allo scultore non bisogna tale scientia perché la natura aiuta le sue opere com’essa fa anchora tutte l’altre cose corporee.’

In this short but meaningful passage, Leonardo raises at least three important issues. Firstly, painting has the ability to deceive our judgmental faculties. Secondly, the deceptive nature of painting is enhanced by the fact that, while the sculptor is aided by nature with lights and shadows, the painter has to accomplish the difficult task of providing his work with lights and shadows. Last, he maintains that in a work of sculpture there is no difference between appearance and reality, inasmuch as what we see is what is really there. The statement implies that what painting shows us is only appearance. Elsewhere Leonardo, in comparing the two arts once again, is more explicit regarding painting:

‘With little effort sculpture shows what painting appears [to show], the miraculous thing of making impalpable things appear palpable, giving relief to flat things, distance to things nearby. In effect, painting is embellished with infinite speculations which sculpture does not employ.’<sup>237</sup>

Yet Leonardo’s defence of painting is also grounded in its epistemological function. In a long chapter dedicated to the mechanical and non-mechanical arts, he asserts that painting’s exceptional deceptiveness is the result of a complex mental speculation and is consequently a source of knowledge. Like any true science, painting originates in experience (in the mind of the painter-thinker) through the senses; it then turns into a conscious experience thanks to the manual operation of

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<sup>237</sup> Leonardo (1992), Chapter 38 cont., pp. 284-286: ‘La scultura con poca fatica mostra quel che la pittura pare, cosa miracolosa a far parere palpabili le cose impalpabili, rilevate le cose piane, lontane le cose vicine. In effetto, la pittura è ornata d’infinita speculazioni che la scultura non l’adopra’. A further passage confirming Leonardo’s statements, Chapter 42, pp. 274-275: ‘La pittura è di maggiore discorso mentale che la scultura, e di maggiore artificio, con ciò sia che’lla scultura non è altro che quel che’lla pare; cioè nel essere corpo rilevato et circondato d’aria et vestito da superficie oscura et chiara come sonno gli altri corpi naturali’.



the artist, thus becoming a source of knowledge and reflection for the beholder-contemplator.<sup>238</sup>

Some years later, the same contraposition between appearance and reality is to be found in Baldassarre Castiglione's *Il libro del Cortegiano* (*The Book of the Courtier*, 1528), a text organised as a set of conversations and revolving around the figure of the courtier and his education. It includes a short dialogue on the *paragone* debate that was probably inspired by Leonardo's treatise. One of the speakers, the Count, wonders if the courtier should be able to draw and become acquainted with the art of painting as part of his training. The question is a pretext that allows the Count and his speaker, the sculptor Giovan Cristoforo Romano, to express their opinions. They agree that both arts are imitation of nature, but Romano claims that between the eye-deceiving painting and sculpture there is as much difference as between seeming and being, and that the latter is nearer to truth.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Leonardo (1992), Chapter 33, pp. 250-255: 'Dicono quella cognitione essere meccanica la quale è partorita dall'esperientia, e quella essere scientifica che nasce et finisce nella mente, a [sic] quella essere semimeccanica che nasce dalla scientia et finisce nelle operationi manuale. Ma a me pare che quelle scientie siano vane et piene d'errori le quali non sonno nate dall'esperientia, madre d'ogni certezza, et che non terminano in nota esperientia, cioè che'lla loro origine, o mezzo o fine, non passa per nessun' de' cinque sensi ... le vere scientie son quelle che la sperienza ha fatto penetrare per li sensi ... La [pittura] è prima nella mente del suo speculatore e non pò pervenire alla sua perfettione senza la manuale operatione. Della qual pittura li suoi scientifici et veri principij prima ponendo che cosa è corpo ombroso, et che cosa è ombra primitiva ed ombra derivativa, et che cosa è lume, cioè tenebre, luce, colore, corpo, figura, sito, remotione, propinquità, moto et quiete. Le quali solo con la mente si comprendono senza opera manuale, e questa sia la scientia della pittura, che resta nella mente de suoi contemplanti, della quale nasce poi l'operatione assai più degna delle predetta contemplatione o scientia.' ('They say that cognition born from experience is mechanical, and what is born and ends in the mind is scientific, and whatever is born from science and ends in manual operations is semi-mechanical. Yet it appears to me that those sciences are vain and full of errors which are not born from experience, mother of every certainty, and which do not terminate in known experience, that is, their origin, or middle, or end does not pass through any of the five senses ... Now the true sciences are those in which experience has penetrated the senses ... Painting begins in the mind of the speculator, but it cannot come to perfection without manual operation. The first operation of painting is to put down its scientific and true principles, which are: what is the umbrageous body, what are primitive and derived shadow, and what is light, that is, darkness, light, color, body, figure, position, distance, nearness, motion, and rest. These are comprehended only by the mind, without manual operations, and this is the science of painting which stays in the mind of its contemplators. The operation which can be born from the mind is much more worthy than the contemplation, or science.')

<sup>239</sup> Baldassarre Castiglione, *Il Libro del Cortegiano*, ed. Amedeo Quondam and Nicola Longo (Milan: Garzanti, 1998, 7th ed., first published 1981), p. 105: 'GIOVAN CRISTOFORO ROMANO: "Ed a me par

The most significant and articulated contribution after Leonardo came only half a century later, when the Florentine humanist Benedetto Varchi conducted a survey on the ‘maggioranza delle arti’ (1546), later published as part of his *Due Lezzioni* on the nobility of the arts (1549).<sup>240</sup> Acquainted with the entourage of Cosimo I and a member of the *Accademia fiorentina* (1543), Varchi, a *literato* among artists, became familiar with the Florentine cultural circles. Hence, probably, his idea of inviting several painters and sculptors, including Michelangelo, to express their opinions on the subject in writing. Varchi devotes the second part of *Due lezzioni* to the definition of the arts (trying to reconcile diverse philosophical authorities) and then summarizes the contrasting opinions of his respondents, whose letters were published in the appendix.<sup>241</sup> Acting as a philosopher, Varchi does not seem truly interested in solving the quarrel. Rather, he aims to show how it is possible to make arguments both in favour and against a certain subject, according to the principles of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* which were well known to Varchi. It is not necessary to repeat the opinions of all the artists involved in detail, inasmuch as they partly repeat, and expand upon, principles already set out by Leonardo.<sup>242</sup> It is worth noting, however, that four of Varchi’s eight correspondents stress the contraposition of sculpture and painting in terms of appearance versus reality,<sup>243</sup> with Francesco da Sangallo going as

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bene, che l’una e l’altra sia una artificiosa imitazione di natura, ma non so già come possiate dir che più non sia imitato il vero, e quello proprio che fa la natura, in una figura di marmo o di bronzo, nella quale son le membra tutte tonde, formate e misurate come la natura le fa, che in una tavola, nella qual non si vede altro che la superficie e que’ colori che ingannano gli occhi; né mi direte già, che più propinquo al vero non sia l’essere che l’parere ... IL CONTE: E voi ben dite vero che e luna e l’altra è imitazione della natura; ma non è già così, che la pittura appaia e la statuaria sia”.

<sup>240</sup> Benedetto Varchi, *Due Lezzioni ... nella prima delle quali si dichiara un sonetto di M. Michelagnolo Buonarroti. Nella seconda si disputa quale sia più nobile arte la Scultura, o la Pittura* (Florence: Lorenzo Torrentino, 1549).

<sup>241</sup> Varchi (1549), ‘Disputa seconda’, pp. 89-111, summarises the opinions of the artists who responded to his inquiry.

<sup>242</sup> Farago (1992), note 50, on the circulation of Leonardo’s treatise.

<sup>243</sup> Giovan Battista del Tasso in Varchi (1549), p. 137; Benvenuto Cellini in Varchi (1549), p. 154.

far as to argue that sculpture is ‘a second nature’.<sup>244</sup> The sculptor and architect Giovan Battista del Tasso stresses the tactile quality that makes sculpture nearer to truth, in contrast to the optical deceit conveyed by painting. Such is his opinion:

‘I believe that sculpture has pre-eminence, for it represents the thing and the being as they are, and not, like painting does, their appearance. By looking at the sculpture from different angles, you will take part in the truth; and by touching it [the sculpture], you will feel it [the truth]. With painting this is impossible.’<sup>245</sup>

Similarly Niccolò Tribolo, sculptor and architect, says that:

‘It seems to me that the aim of sculpture is, in the intention of the operator, to manually show what is real, and not to deceive. Everyone can acknowledge this in a very simple way: if I were blind ... and came across a sculpture made of marble, wood or clay, I would be able to recognize whether it represents a man, a woman or a child. On the contrary, if I came across a painting, by touching it I would not find anything in it; and even if there were something there, I would consider it a lie because it is a falsehood to show what is not true ... because nature does not deceive human beings: if one is lame or handsome, nature will show them as a lame or as a handsome person, for sculpture is truth and painting is a lie. If I wanted to depict the personification of Deceit, I would portray a painter.’<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Francesco da Sangallo in Varchi (1549), p. 145.

<sup>245</sup> Del Tasso in Varchi (1549), p. 137: ‘giudico che la scultura tenga il primo grado, rappresentando la cosa propria, et essere quello che l’è e non quello che la pare, come fa la pittura. Guardate per tutti i versi la scultura, sempre parteciperete più cose del vero e toccandola le sentirete, dove nella pittura non è così’.

<sup>246</sup> Tribolo in Varchi (1549), pp. 150-151: ‘ma solo questo mi pare a me, che la scultura sia, ne[] concetto del operatore, dimostrare manualmente quello che <è> el vero e non è ingannare la natura. E che l’habbi a conoscere ogni spezie d’huomini, cioè in questo mondo [read: modo]: se fussi uno

If we compare del Tasso's and Tribolo's statements with what Leonardo said on this subject, it is clear that they all agree that sculpture is 'nearer' to truth and that painting is a misleading practice. There are, nevertheless, some important differences. Although all three of them use the same statement in support of their own preferences, Del Tasso and Tribolo also credit touch with an epistemological function that enables the viewer, by touching a sculpture, to participate in the truth. Interestingly, Tasso's letter contains the remarkable passage in which the artist pretends to act as a blind man, using touch to unmask the deceit created by painting. It must be noticed that the anecdote might date back to Leonardo (if not to an older source). According to a seventeenth-century source, in fact, Leonardo summoned a blind man and an idiot to definitely settle the competition to the advantage of painting:

'[Leonardo] debates and settles the famous question of whether to award preeminence between painting and sculpture by having a blind man and an idiot make the decision in favour of painting. As a panel beautifully painted with men and landscapes was placed in front of the blind man, he, upon touching it, found it even and smooth. He [was] so marvelled that he could not believe that there were animals, forests, mountains, valleys and lakes until Duke Ludovico il Moro swore to it.

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ciecho e non avessi mai visto che toccato sé con giudizio suo, e li trovassi una figura di marmo, o di legno, o di terra, che confessassi, l'è una figura d'uomo, di dona <di> dona, di bambino di bambino. E a l'incontro fussi la pittura, e cercando non vi trova nulla, essendovi, pure la confeso bugia, perché è cosa falsa mostrare quello che non fa el vero, perché la natura non inganna l'huomini: se uno zoppo, la lo mostra, se è bello, bello ve lo mostra, tale che a me mi pare la scultura sia la cosa propio, e la pittura sia la bugia. E volendo avere a contrafare la Bugia, contrafarei, in quanto a me, un pittore.' In agreement with Tribolo, Anton Francesco Doni in his *Disegno partito in più ragionamenti* (1549) sets out a dialogue between Nature and Art. Nature says that Art wants to deceive the sight, but touch will discover the deceit of painting. See Doni's excerpt in Paola Barocchi ed., *Scritti d'arte del Cinquecento* (Milan: Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1971-1977), Vol. 1 (1971), pp. 555-56: 'Natura: Io ho pur fatto alquanto meglio alla scultura per avergli concesso il tatto di più che alla pittura; anzi, quando tu [Arte] vuoi ingannare l'occhio dell'uomo, et esso si voglia far certo, gl'ho dato questo mezzo, che possi toccare. Così il tatto, che è stato dotato alla scultura di più, mostra la bugia e scuopre l'inganno della tua pittura.'

Instead, when a statue was placed before him, by touching it, he knew immediately that a man was represented. The idiot was then called, and brushes and stocks of clay having been placed in front of him, he was unable to paint anything, but in the clay he formed perfect natural shapes, feet arms, and a face, which were adequate for obtaining excellent relief.<sup>247</sup>

It is impossible to establish whether Leonardo truly conducted such an experiment, or whether Tribolo drew his anecdote from Leonardo. It is nevertheless interesting that the blind man, a comic *persona* that in theatre and literature has long been the protagonist of amusing, witty or tragicomic anecdotes,<sup>248</sup> is employed in a sophisticated debate to corroborate opposing opinions. What makes Leonardo's blind man decide in favour of painting is the fact that the latter engenders a great sense of wonder, which sculpture allegedly cannot provoke. In addition, Leonardo's criticism against sculpture is reinforced by the fact that even an idiot can act as a sculptor.

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<sup>247</sup> The translation is taken from Carlo Pedretti, *Leonardo da Vinci on Painting. A Lost Book (Libro A), reassembled from the Codex Vaticanus Urbinas 1270 and from the Codex Leicester* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: California UP, 1964), p. 122, footnote 67. The anecdote is known only through Ambrogio Mazenta (1565-1635), Barnabite and architect. He fortuitously came into possession of Leonardo's manuscripts, probably through the heirs of Francesco Melzi, friend and disciple of Leonardo. See Mazenta's *Le memorie su Leonardo da Vinci*, ed. Luigi Gramatica (Milan: Alfieri & Lacroix, 1919), p. [41]: 'Vi disputa, e decide la famosa questione del primato, fra la pittura e la scoltura, facendone dar sentenza da un chieco e da un idiota in favor della pittura, ponendo avanti al cieco bellissima tavola pinta con huomini e paesi, e toccandola ritrovatala solia e liscia, per meraviglia non volse mai credere, che vi fossero animali, selve, monti, valli, e laghi, sin che il Duca Lodovico il Moro non glielo giurò. All'incontro venendoli posto avanti una statoa, palpandola subito conobbe, che vi si figurava un huomo. Chiamato l'Idiota ponendoseli penelli avanti, e masse di creta, non seppe pinger cosa di garbo, e nella creta con proprij piedi, braccia e volto, formò perfettissime cose al naturale, sufficienti per haverne ottimi rilevi.' See *ibidem*, Gramatica's comment on Mazenta, pp. [5-23].

<sup>248</sup> On the figure of the blind man in literature and theatre see Erik von Kraemer, *Le type du faux mendiant dans les littératures romanes depuis le moyen âge jusqu'au XVIIe siècle* (Helsingfors: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1944), pp. 41-83; Edward Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks Before the Blind: Medieval Construction of Disability* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Michigan UP, 2010), pp. 90-128.

It is noteworthy that the debate was reinvigorated<sup>249</sup> at the very time of Ribera's sojourn in Rome, as documented by a letter of 1612 written by Galileo to his close friend and collaborator, the painter Ludovico Cigoli, an artist who was well connected with the Lyncean society.<sup>250</sup> In a well-known essay Panofsky clarified how Galileo, although harking back to the *topoi* established by his predecessors, contributed some important new arguments that testify Galileo's scientific approach to the arts.<sup>251</sup> Due to a lack of documentation, Panofsky could not explain the artistic context that might have been the inspiration for the epistle. Nevertheless, thanks to relatively recent studies that have shed new light on the network of artists acquainted with the Lynceans Academy, we can try to deduce a possible background. In order to illustrate their scientific work, the Lynceans availed themselves of numerous illustrators, thus becoming mediators between scholars and artists; collaborations that heralded profitable achievements. Amongst others, Ludovico Cigoli was one of the most important collaborators and, more importantly, *trait d'union* between the Academy and Galileo. Moreover, Ludovico Cigoli worked in the Pauline Chapel in Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome, from 1610 to 1613, side by side with a heterogeneous group of painters and sculptors, including Pietro Bernini. It is therefore plausible, as is believed, that discussion of the *paragone* and the function of the senses sprang once again from that varied and lively group of scholars and artists sojourning in Rome and who were in part involved with the activity of the Lyncean Academy.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Before Galileo other writers did contribute to the debate with views that are, however, of little interest on this occasion: Paolo Pino, *Dialogo di pittura* [1547], in Paola Barocchi ed., *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento* (Bari: Laterza, 1960-1962), Vol. 1 (1960), pp. 127-129; Ludovico Dolce, *L'Aretino o Dialogo della pittura* [1557], in Barocchi (1960), p. 156.

<sup>250</sup> Letter to Cigoli of 26 June 1612 in Galilei, *Opere*, Vol. 11 (1901), *Carteggio 1611-13*, pp. 340-43, n. 713. The letter is known through a copy of the second half of the sixteenth century, see Federico Tognoni (2009), pp. 27-36. On the artists and the Lynceans see Baldriga (2002), Chapter 5, 'Ritratto di un eclettico: Giovanni Faber linceo, collezionista e mecenate', pp. 171-233.

<sup>251</sup> Erwin Panofsky, *Galileo as a Critic of the Arts* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1954).

<sup>252</sup> See Tongiorgi Tomasi, 'Cigoli e Galileo: cronaca di un'amicizia', in Tognoni (2009), p. 21.

Although we are not in possession of Cigoli's letter to Galileo, we can suppose that the painter, who was involved in the dispute, asked the scientist to give his opinion on such a sophisticated debate. This is, in fact, the end of Galileo's defence of painting: 'You can therefore refute the arguments produced by the supporters of sculpture ... although I suggest that you no longer partake in such a quarrel.'<sup>253</sup>

I shall now summarise some key points made in the letter before quoting some passages from it. Galileo for the first time makes an explicit distinction between visual and tactile relief of works of art.<sup>254</sup> He argues that both painting and sculpture are endowed with a visible relief that deceives the eye. While the visual relief of sculpture is provided by nature through the alternation of light and shadow, the visible relief in painting is achieved by the painter by means of colour as well. Due to the latter, the deceptive ability of painting is superior to that of sculpture.<sup>255</sup> Sculpture is, furthermore, endowed with a tactile relief, too. The tactile relief, as Galileo says, cannot trick our sense of touch for no one, in touching a sculpture, would mistake it for a living being. Finally, the scientist maintains that touch is not able to reveal the deceit set up by painting inasmuch as the latter, and sculpture alike, is made to be seen and not to be touched. With this statement Galileo seems to belittle the tactile values of sculpture and deny touch any epistemological function, thus refuting the positions taken up, among others, by Tribolo and del Tasso in Varchi's survey. As I have already pointed out, we are not able to establish whether the letter circulated or was the object of discussion among the cultural societies of

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<sup>253</sup> Galilei, *Opere*, Vol. 11 (1901), p. 342: 'Tanto per ora mi sovviene poter ella rispondere alle ragioni di cotesti fautori della scultura ... Ma io però la consiglierei a non s'inoltrar più con essi in questa contesa.'

<sup>254</sup> As Panofsky (1954), p. 8, pointed out, the substance of this reasoning was already present in Varchi's respondents and in Leonardo. See Leonardo (1992), Chapters 38 and 42. The novelty resides in the new terminology adopted by the scientist.

<sup>255</sup> Elsewhere it seems that Galileo completely denies the deceptiveness of the visual relief of sculpture: 'La scultura non inganna punto, né vi fa creder mai quello che poi non sia tale', see Galilei, *Opere*, Vol. 8 (1898), *frammenti di incerta data*, p. 642.

the time. We have, nevertheless, some clues that make us surmise that Galileo's contribution was not isolated but part of a wider debate. A passage in his letter has a parallel in Ludovico Cigoli's treatise *Prospettiva pratica*, which remained unfinished due to his premature death in Rome in 1613. In these passages, the scientist and the painter focus on the alternation of light and shadow for the construction of relief. Such is Galileo's reasoning:

It is not width, length and depth that confer relief on statues, but rather the illuminated and shaded parts. And note, as proof of this, that of the three dimensions, only two are visible to the eye, namely length and width ... We therefore know depth, not as the object of sight in itself and absolutely, but by accident and in relation to darker and lighter areas.<sup>256</sup>

Cigoli put it more clearly and explicitly: 'Objects seen from the lighted side, for want of shadow, are without relief, and seen from the too deeply shadowed side appear unpleasant; when viewed midway between light and shadow they show not only their proper colour, but also relief.'<sup>257</sup>

Although unpublished due to Cigoli's premature death in 1613, the evidence that the treatise was known to his contemporaries, especially in Rome and Florence,

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<sup>256</sup> 'Non ha la statua il rilievo per esser larga, lunga e profonda, ma per esser dove chiara e dove scura. Et avvertasi, per prova di ciò, che delle tre dimensioni, due sole sono sottoposte all'occhio, cioè lunghezza e larghezza ... Conosciamo dunque la profondità, non come oggetto della vista per sé et assolutamente, ma per accidente e rispetto al chiaro e lo scuro.' The Italian text and the English translation are in Filippo Camerota ed., *Linear Perspective in the Age of Galileo. Lodovico Cigoli's Prospettiva pratica* (Florence: Olschki, 2010), p. 9, footnote 11.

<sup>257</sup> 'Gli oggetti veduti dalla parte luminosa, per la scarsità dell'ombra non hanno rilievo, et veduti dalla troppo ombrosa appaiono spiacevoli; et posta la veduta nel mezzo in fra il lume et l'ombra si mostrano di più proprio colore, et di più rilievo.' The Italian text and the English translation are in Camerota (2010), p. 9, footnote 11.



is broad and varied and is found in its influence and its fame.<sup>258</sup> Furthermore, Galileo's concern for the visual relief of bodies was rooted in his scientific research, and an example can be traced in a long letter of 1611 to the Jesuit Christoph Grienberger, mathematician and astronomer teaching at the Collegio Romano.<sup>259</sup> It is known that Galileo himself used to make drawings using his astronomical observations and that Cigoli collaborated with him. While observing the moon, Galileo noticed that its craters and mounts appeared flat due to the angle of incidence of sunlight. It being impossible to shift the position of the light source, he theorized that, by virtually shifting the position of the eye, the relief of the craters would finally be visible. Galileo's reasoning certainly had an impact on his contemporaries, including the painter Pietro Accolti, author of the treatise *Lo inganno de gl'occhi. Prospettiva pratica* (1625).<sup>260</sup> In his treatise, Accolti drew two cubes, two devices conceived to cast shadows on a surface [Figs 107, 108]. They are devised in order to allow the eye to shift his position, thus re-proposing Galileo's experiment.

As we have seen so far, the *paragone* debate was particularly lively in Renaissance writings, yet also had a visual counterpart in works of art. Ribera's interpretation of the topic was probably not unprecedented. A lost *San Giorgio* by Giorgione, the *Schiavona* by Tiziano (c. 1510) and the *Gaston de Foix* by Savoldo (c. 1529) are often mentioned, among the numerous available, as possible early examples of the *paragone* in visual art [Figs. 109, 111].<sup>261</sup> Ribera was one of the first, to my knowledge, to treat the subject explicitly and on the ground of sensory perception.

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<sup>258</sup> On the circulation of the treatise, see Miles Chappell, 'The Prospettiva pratica and Cigoli's reputation', in Camerota (2010), pp. XVII-XX.

<sup>259</sup> Letter of 1 September 1611, in Galilei, *Opere*, Vol. 11 (1901), pp. 178-203, n. 576. See also the discussion in Camerota (2010), pp. 5-10.

<sup>260</sup> Pietro Accolti, *Lo inganno de gl'occhi. Prospettiva pratica. Trattato in acconcio della pittura* (Florence: Pietro Ceconcelli, 1625).

<sup>261</sup> Further examples are to be found in Rudolf Preimesberger, *Paragons and Paragone: Van Eyck, Raphael, Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Bernini* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2011).

Later examples might include Luca Giordano's *Carneade's with the Head of Paniscus* (1558-60) [Fig. 33] and Lieven Mehus' *Portrait of the Blind Sculptor Francesco Gonnelli* [Fig. 110].

Let us finally turn to the *Sense of Touch* and analyse how the painter conjured up the main aspects of the rivalry between the arts [Fig. 105]. The *Pasadena Touch* presents a middle-aged, thick-bearded and apparently blind man. It is the only figure of the series to appear in profile. The fact that we can see just half of his face might remind us that touch, unlike the other senses, is not identifiable with a sensory organ specifically located on the face. The blind man has turned toward a bright light – what an irony! – and is touching a sculptured head with classical features with his coarse hands [Fig. 112]. The wrinkles on his face emphasize how deeply absorbed he is in the tactile perception of the object [Fig. 113]. On the table there is a small canvas, which the man might merely be ignoring, which displays the image of a foreshortened head [Fig. 114]. Based on his clothes, the man seems to be better-off than his companions in the other paintings of the series, although his garments are extremely modest. The black skullcap and the dark-brown tunic confer an air of scholarly decorum on him. It has been said that Ribera was too young and not learned enough to deal with such a sophisticated subject. There is no doubt, I believe, that the painter in fact evokes the key points of the *paragone* discussion, setting it in the context of the theme of the function of touch. Moreover, it seems that Ribera was aware of the new approaches to the *paragone* debate which had been brought about by Galileo and Cigoli. Let us see if this is feasible. The man is bathed in an overwhelming light shining from the left, thus exposing the monochrome sculpture to different degrees of shade. This expedient is meant for the viewer, while the blind man is serving the purpose of displaying the sculpted head from a

favourable angle. The display of the head is as ingenious as that of the small canvas. The light is particularly dazzling toward the centre of the head, and thus tends to flatten the relief of the hair. On the other side, the shadows are too thick between the chin and the neck, and therefore their width is almost imperceptible. Where the light shines on the sculptured head creeping into its curls, it casts different gradations of shadow that make the surface of the head vibrant, thus revealing its relief. Is it possible that Ribera, as well as alluding to the key points of the *paragone* discussion, was also hinting at the most recent notions on the subject, as discussed by Cigoli and Galileo? They had pointed out that an object shows its relief only when viewed midway between light and shadow, and that an excess of one of them would make the sculpture unpleasant. If my proposition is right, the *Sense of Touch* testifies that Ribera was, therefore, aware of the most current debates of his time.

At this stage the real problem is understanding which aspects Ribera wanted to bring out. Let us expand upon some facets. The very small canvas on the table, seemingly displaying the image of a male head, shows all the commitment made by Ribera to conceive it. The head has been painted as seen from left and above, but it is put on the table at an angle and is turned upside down with respect to our position [Fig. 114]. Moreover, the point of view of the *Touch* is not frontal but slightly elevated, an expedient that allows us to better appreciate the foreshortening of the canvas in the canvas. In such a small detail, the painter was able to show off not only his ingenuity, but also to highlight the results that painting can achieve. Then he went further and added a sculptured head, almost monochromatic, reproducing the three-dimensionality of a sculpture on a two-dimensional surface [Fig. 113]. At a first glance, it seems that the painter has in practise proved the ability of painting to achieve great results on a flat surface and thus to prevail over sculpture. However, we

do not know the personal opinion of the artist on the subject and it is not clear, as some believe, that his aim was to take a stance in favour of painting.<sup>262</sup> The presence of the blind man makes the image, in fact, an ambiguous one. We have seen that the blind man's example was utilised by Tribolo and Leonardo in favour of their contrasting views. As the painter does not give the viewer any clue in this respect, we remain on the brink of ambiguity and have to conclude that he used the expedient to evoke both positions. Anyone could turn the issue to his own favour. The next image shows a drawing that, although it is not attributed to Guercino, seems to be of his invention [Fig. 115]. It proposes a similar subject, although the aim seems to be different and more explicit. We find here the full-length figure of a blind mendicant who is touching a female bust placed on a support. A small picture, against which the man could stumble, is on the ground and leans against the support. The message seems to be clearly in favour of sculpture. While the man explores the sculpture with his hand and somehow can perceive the concrete obstacle mid-air, he seems to ignore the potential obstacle of the canvas, which enhances the comic tone of the image compared to the painting's. The drawing thus visually re-proposes the dichotomy of painting and sculpture in terms of deceptiveness and truthfulness as set out by some proponents of the *paragone* quarrel. On the other hand, the inscription on the drawing ('sculpture yes / painting no') stands for the victory of sculpture and confirms that its comedic element, that is the blind man, can be used in favour or against the same argument according to the point of view. Finally, the fact that the stance of the drawing is straightforward does not endow it with any ambiguity, which, in contrast, is a quality that characterizes Ribera's painting.

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<sup>262</sup> Such is the current opinion in the records of the Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, California: <[https://www.nortonsimon.org/collections/browse\\_artist.php?name=Ribera%2C+Jusepe+de](https://www.nortonsimon.org/collections/browse_artist.php?name=Ribera%2C+Jusepe+de)>, consulted 25 November 2015.

Ribera probably wanted to express the victory of practice over theory and use the *paragone* subject as a pretext to discuss the function of the senses in art.<sup>263</sup> The reflection of the painter can be understood if we take at least two things into account: on the one hand, he calls upon a blind man to stage the *Touch* within the context of an artistic quarrel; on the other, he involves the viewer in the blind man's experience. They are, indeed, exposed to opposite experiences: the man can avail himself only of touch while, on the contrary, the beholder can only use his sight. The painting, then, is not just about touch, as has previously been thought, but about the function of sight and touch under certain conditions.<sup>264</sup> Let us examine this idea in detail. The blind man is undergoing an experiment in which we are accomplices. By fingering the uneven surface of the sculpture, the man might be able to recognise that what he is holding is a head. Yet we cannot take for granted that he will be able to discern whether it is a woman's or man's, and therefore we do not know the extent to which touch will help him. Let us suppose that touch, as stated by Tribolo and del Tasso, has an epistemological function. The painter is showing that this alleged function is nevertheless strictly bound to the materiality and three-dimensionality of the object and that it is of no use with the small canvas on the table. Moreover, the painter has put a painted head on the table. Whether the blind man ignores the existence of the canvas or not, the latter will remain meaningless for him. With such an expedient, Ribera consequently shows that painting has lost its deceptive power. Deceptiveness, in fact, is not an inherent feature of painting, but a characteristic that occurs under certain conditions of the senses. What is deceptive in normal conditions would fail to deceive us if we were blind. We may laugh spitefully at, or sympathise with, the man for the trick he is subject to, but it is likely that the

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<sup>263</sup> As in Hecht (1984), p. 128.

<sup>264</sup> Aragón Strasser (1996).

painter is equally laughing at us while rendering us counterparts of the blind man. Ribera depicted a blind man at least in other two paintings. The first is the aforementioned *Sense of Touch* (1632) at El Prado [Fig. 106]. The second is in the *Lazarillo and the Blind Man* (c. 1632), a painting which I will discuss in Chapter 4 [Fig. 127]. As to the latter work, I will show that this blind beggar, a stock character that we can find in literature, is a rascal able to disguise his true nature, thus tricking the viewer with his air of apparent religious contrition. The painter, with his mastery and ingenuity, conjured up the elusive emotions of his character by portraying him in a very convincing way, thus sharing the power of cheating the beholder with him. With the character staging the *Touch* (Pasadena) Ribera achieved much the same result. The man is deeply engaged in the tactile perception of the object, as emphasized by his frown. We are therefore lured into sharing the man's intense tactile activity, but we stop midway, for we realise that our touch is of no help in such a situation. The painter has made a great effort to conjure up the tactile values of sculpture, but we cannot experience these. Painting, then, will not enhance our knowledge inasmuch as it can only evoke, but not reproduce, the tactility of the depicted sculpture and the emotion of the man.

Finally yet importantly, let us see in detail how the blind man, a stock figure of theatre and literature, could appeal to public awareness of the debate about the arts. In the most common jokes the blind man has his money or food stolen, or is put before a stumbling block to be ridiculed. In other cases, he is able to plan a subtle revenge on his tormentors.<sup>265</sup> The blind man was therefore a laughable character of novels and plays and as such part of the collective imagination. However, his caricature was employed in academic quarrels, as we have already seen.

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<sup>265</sup> All these examples are to be found in the novel *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554), but see all the anecdotes in Kraemer (1944) and Wheatley (2010).

A further example is in Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*, in the section dedicated to the depiction of Sculpture:

‘A young and charming woman, with a simple and unsophisticated hairstyle. On the head, there will be a twig of green laurel ... and she will lay the hand on a sculptured head ... The twig of laurel, which during the severe winter keeps its leaves green, shows that sculptures keep well-preserved despite the harshness of time. The hand ... shows that, although sculptures are mainly the object of sight, they can similarly be the object of touch, too. The solidity of sculpture, which is provided by nature, can be equally sensed by sight and touch. We know that Michelangelo, light and splendour of sculpture, became almost blind in his old age due to incessant study. Nevertheless, by touching both modern and ancient sculptures, he was able to judge their price and value.’<sup>266</sup>

Ripa here highlights the sculpture's durability and tactile value, two characteristics already pointed out by other artists. More importantly, he calls upon Michelangelo, who according to a legend became blind, to demonstrate that sculpture can be experienced by touch other than by sight. The legend of his blindness probably originated when the sculptor Leone Leoni created a medal with the profile of Michelangelo on the obverse and with a blind men led by a dog on the

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<sup>266</sup> Ripa (2012), p. 526, n. 342 ('Scoltura'): 'Giovane bella, con l'acconciatura della testa semplice e negligente, sopra la quale sarà un ramo di lauro verde ... con la destra mano sopra al capo di una statua di sasso ... Il ramo del lauro, che nella severità del verno conserva la verdezza nelle sue frondi, dimostra che la scoltura nell'opere sue si conserva bella e viva contro alla malignità del tempo ... La mano ancora sopra alla statua dimostra che se bene la scoltura è principalmente oggetto dell'occhi, può esser medesimamente ancora del tatto, perché la quantità soda circa la quale artificiosamente composta con imitatione dalla natura si essercita quest'arte, può esser egualmente oggetto dell'occhio e del tatto. Onde sappiamo che Michel Angelo Buonaruota, lume e splendore di essa, essendogli in vecchiezza per lo continuo studio mancata quasi affatto la luce, solleva con tatto, palpeggiando le statue, o antiche o moderne che si fossero, dar giudizio e del prezzo e del valore.'

reverse [Fig. 116]. We know about the medal both from a letter of Leoni to Michelangelo (1561)<sup>267</sup> and from Vasari (1568),<sup>268</sup> while the additional information about the blindness is reported by Lomazzo (1584)<sup>269</sup> and Sandrart (1675)<sup>270</sup> as well as by Ripa. According to Sonia Maffei, who has edited one of the most important Italian editions of the *Iconologia*, the anecdote of Michelangelo's blindness was widely used by seventeenth-century commentators to highlight the tactile value of sculpture

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<sup>267</sup> Letter of Leone Leoni from Milano to Michelangelo in Rome, dated 14 March 1561: 'Molto magnifico signor mio sempre osservandissimo, mando a Vostra Signoria per lo signor Carlo Visconte, grande huomo in questa cita di Milano et amato da Sua Santità, quatro medaglie de la vostra effigie le due saranno d'argento et l'altre due di bronzzo. Sarei stato più breve a mandarle a Vostra Signoria, se non fussi così occupato ne l'opera che per cagione di Vostra Signoria hebbi da Sua Santità, et se anchora non havessi fede che Vostra Signoria mi perdonasse l'errore de la tardanza, ma non già il peccato de l'ingratitude. Quella che è nel bossolo è tutta rinettata et la guarderà e conserverà per amor mio. L'altre tre, ne farà ciò che gli parerà; perciò che, secondo ch'io per ambizione ne ho mandate in Spagna et in Fiandra, così per amore ne terò mandate a Roma et in altre parte. Dissi ambizione, perciò che mi par haver troppo aquistato ad haver guadagnata la gratia di Vostra Signoria, ch'io astimo molto; et chi non si terebbe da molto, poi che in meno di tre mesi ho due lettere scritemi da voi huomo divino, non come a servitor di cuore et di volontà, ma da figliuolo? Horsù, io non darò più fastidio per hora a Vostra Signoria, ecetto che la prego che mi voglia perseverare d'amarmi, et, dove occorre, favorirmi, et al signor Thomao del Cavalliere dir ch'io non sarò [s]memorato. Il Signor vi dia ogni contento, acciò io habbia contento. Da Milano, il XIII de marzo del 61. D[i] Vostra Signoria ser[vitore] obligato il cavallier Leone. Al molto magnifico signor mio osservandissimo il signor Michelagnolo Buonarroti. A Santo Apostolo. Roma'. The text, as part of the entire correspondence of the artist, is available online at <<http://www.memofonte.it/autori/carteggio-michelangelo-buonarroti-1475-1564-10.html>>, consulted 23 November 2015. There is of course a certain resemblance with the profile of the artist on the recto and the blind man on the reverse of the medal. Nevertheless the medal made by Leone has engendered some confusion among some modern scholars, who believe that the blind man represents Michelangelo. See, in this regard, Maffei's note on 'Sculpture' in Ripa (2012), pp. 811-812, n. 343; Romeo De Maio, 'Carlo Borromeo e Michelangelo', in *San Carlo e il suo tempo* (proceedings of the International Congress, Milan, 21-26 May 1984) (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1986), Vol. 2, p. 1000.

<sup>268</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, eds Rosanna Bettarini and Paola Barocchi (Firenze: SPES, 1966-1987), Vol. 6, *Testo* (1987), p. 101: 'Lione Lioni aretino, scultore eccellentissimo, molto amico di Michelangelo ... ritrasse in una medaglia Michelangelo molto vivacemente, et a compiacenza di lui gli fece nel rovescio un cieco guidato da un cane, con questa lettera attorno: Docebo iniquos vias tuas et impii ad te convertentur' (the Latin quotation is from Psalms 51.15).

<sup>269</sup> Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, *Trattato dell'arte della pittura, scoltura ed architettura* (Milan: Paolo Gottardo Pontio, 1584), Book 2, p. 185: 'una madaglia d'un buono statovario, il quale dove nel rovescio di quella haveva ritratto Michel Angelo haveva fatto un povero guidato da un cane legato, con una corda al collo, la quale si vedeva tutta stesa, e dritta a guisa d'un bastone senza calata alcuna. Il che diede occasione sino ad un fanciullo motteggiarla e dire che se quel cane havesse tirato quella corda così fortemente, o si sarebbe affocato, o non haverebbe potuto gir più oltre, con tanto riso d'alcuni pittori che erano meco che ne furono per scoppiare.'

<sup>270</sup> Joachim von Sandrart, *Teutsche Academie der Bau-, Bild- und Malberey-Künste ...* (Nurberg: Johann-Philipp Miltenberger, 1675), pp. 33-34: 'Der fürtreffliche Michaël Angelo, als er schon wegen hohen Alters ganz blind ware und nicht mehr laboriren konte, hat dennoch zur ergötzung seines Tugendgewidmeten geistes sich vielmals zu diessen Figuren führen lassen; da er dann diessselben wegen der auserlesnen Vollkommenheit mit seines Händen von oben bis unten, wie auch rund umher, betastet, in seine Arme genommen und geküset.'



denied by Galileo.<sup>271</sup> If this were true, we would have further evidence that Galileo's letter was known and discussed. A further potential example might be the aforementioned drawings by the school of Guercino with the blind man, which may refer to the iconology of Michelangelo as represented in the aforementioned medal by Leone Leoni [Figs 115, 116]. Unfortunately, there is not sufficient evidence to support this suggestive theory.<sup>272</sup> As a matter of fact, even if Ripa's anecdote was not re-employed in anti-Galilean terms, his description of Sculpture evokes arguments – on the durability of sculpture and its tactile value – which had already been discussed by del Tasso and Tribolo, among others.

The possibility that Ribera's *Touch* has Michelangelo's anecdote as a subtext – even without implying any anti-Galilean reference – is feasible. The story of the master's blindness and his recourse to touch to enjoy sculpture might have appealed to viewers inasmuch as the episode is reported in two major sources of the time, Lomazzo's *Trattato dell'arte della pittura* and Ripa's widely known *Iconologia*. There might, nevertheless, be an alternative interpretation. Contemporaries of Ribera might have easily identified in the figure of the blind man the traits of Aristotle, including the tunic and skullcap [Figs 117, 118], the philosopher of antiquity that analysed the functioning of the senses more thoroughly than others. The effigies of Aristotle spread, in a variety of guises, at least from the middle of the twelfth century through the mediums of medals, cameos, enlightened books and sculptures.<sup>273</sup> The controversial iconography of the Stagirate philosopher, like that of other eminent

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<sup>271</sup> See Maffei's note on 'Sculpture' in Ripa (2012), pp. 811-812, n. 343.

<sup>272</sup> Professor Sonia Maffei has confirmed to me in a private email that the issue remains unanswered but is worthy of further investigation.

<sup>273</sup> Franz Studniczka, *Das Bildnis des Aristoteles* (Leipzig: [A. Edelmann], 1908); Leo Planiscig, 'Manuele Crisolora trasformato in Aristotele', *La Rinascita* 4 (1941), pp. 818-826; Jan Hendrik Jongkees, *Fulvio Orsini's Images and the Portrait of Aristotle* (Groningen: J. B. Wolters, 1960); Oreste Ferrari, 'L'iconografia dei filosofi antichi nella pittura del sec. XVII in Italia', *Storia dell'Arte*, n. 57 (1986), pp. 103-181.

personages, puzzled antiquarians and collectors for centuries. The finding of sculpted busts and inscriptions, together with details provided by Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, inspired Aristotle's devotees to attempt to restore his 'real' physiognomy. The result was a concoction of features which, combined together, have inspired several portraits of the philosopher: an elderly or mature man, with beard or beardless, with long hair or partly bald. The skullcap, instead, nearly always accompanies the typology of the elderly Aristotle with tunic, thick beard and long locks, the oldest representations of which date back, to my knowledge, to the first half of the fifteenth century [Fig. 119].<sup>274</sup> Such diverse iconographies, which also spread in the North of Europe during the sixteenth century,<sup>275</sup> persisted during the Renaissance with the addition of a new type, a young and beardless Aristotle,<sup>276</sup> until Ribera combined the attributes and came up with a further novelty: a young Aristotle, with a sparse beard and a peculiar black skullcap [Fig. 126]. The effigy of the philosopher bearded and with that curious hat must have been well-known and appreciated during the Renaissance since many a scholar, such as the Greek humanist Manuele Crisolora, wished to be portrayed in such a guise [Fig. 125].<sup>277</sup> During the late sixteenth century, this typology became known through the versions of Pirro Ligorio and Enea Vico [Fig. 121] and was present in the richest collection of the Roman humanist Fulvio Orsini (1529-1600) [Figs 117, 120].<sup>278</sup> At the service of various members of the Farnese family in his capacity as librarian and diplomatic, Orsini was a renowned collector and specialist in the iconography of illustrious

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<sup>274</sup> According to Jongkees (1960), p. 17, they date back to the middle of the twelfth century but he does not provide any examples.

<sup>275</sup> Planiscig (1941), p. 819.

<sup>276</sup> Jongkees (1960), p. 17.

<sup>277</sup> Jongkees (1960), pp. 17-18.

<sup>278</sup> Planiscig (1941), pp. 821-822.

personages, which he displayed in his huge collection of sculptures and prints.<sup>279</sup> Within the circle of Fulvio Orsini were known four different typologies of Aristotle,<sup>280</sup> and the one with the beard and the hat is present in Orsini's *Imagines et elogia virorum illustrium* (1570),<sup>281</sup> which is illustrated with numerous effigies drawn from the busts of his personal library. Orsini had planned an extended edition that included his entire collection and a new commentary but he died (in 1600) before its publication, which came to light in 1606 thanks to two future members of the Lyncean Academy, Johann Faber and Mark Welser.<sup>282</sup> The first was an art collector himself and knew Fulvio Orsini and his collection intimately.<sup>283</sup> The bearded and hooded Aristotle continued to appear in seventeenth-century publications such as in Della Porta's *Della fisionomia dell'uomo* (1610)<sup>284</sup> [Fig. 122] and in Giovanni Bellori's *Imagines* (1670) as a reproduction from Orsini's collection.<sup>285</sup> The effigy remained fixed – prominent nose, long locks, thick beard and tunic – except for the hat which was slightly modified. We find it in fact as a flat skullcap [Fig. 119] or conical with either a rounded or a flat point [Fig. 122], in rare cases with a decorated band [Figs 120-121] and sometimes with that peculiar protuberance tossed backwards [Figs 117, 120, 123-124]. This peculiar figure was, indeed, as frequent as the other philosopher's guises in early modern representations and became a distinctive and alternative trait of Aristotle's iconography. The resemblance between the blind man portrayed by

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<sup>279</sup> Jongkees (1960), pp. 3-16.

<sup>280</sup> Ferrari (1986), pp. 105-106.

<sup>281</sup> Fulvio Orsini, *Imagines et elogia virorum illustrium et eruditor ex antiquis lapidibus et nomismatibus cum annotationibus ex bibliotheca Fulvi Orsini* (Rome: Antony Lafrery, 1570), p. 57.

<sup>282</sup> Johann Faber, *In Imagines illustrium ex Fulvii Ursini Bibliotheca, Antverpiae a Theodoro Gallaeo expressas ... Commentarius* (Antwerp: Officina Plantiniana, 1606).

<sup>283</sup> Jongkees (1960), p. 11.

<sup>284</sup> Giovan Battista Della Porta, *Della fisionomia dell'uomo libri sei* (Naples: Giacomo Carlino, 1610), p. 195.

<sup>285</sup> Giovanni Bellori, *Veterum illustrium philosophorum, poetarum, rhetorum et oratorum imagines ex vetustis nummis, gemmis, hermis, marmoribus, alijsque antiquis monumentis desumptae* (Rome: Io. Iacobum de Rubeis, 1670), plate 8.

Ribera and the Greek philosopher is highly ingenious and appropriate to the representation of the *paragone* in the context of the senses. We are indebted to the Starigite philosopher for the oldest and most detailed treatment of sensorial perception in ancient Western culture. Aristotle treated the topic in numerous writings dedicating a thorough analysis to the functioning and to the objects of the senses, thus establishing principles which were destined to be very influential and debated by his commentators in the centuries to come. The Greek philosopher set out an unstable hierarchy of the senses, in which sight and touch enjoyed primacy alternately based on their epistemological functions.<sup>286</sup> Moreover, in discussing the role of mimesis in his *Poetics*, the philosopher pointed out, although briefly, how certain images can improve our knowledge.<sup>287</sup> Now the fact that Ribera called upon a blind person to sort out a quarrel strictly grounded in sensory perception certainly belongs to the register of mockery. The ironic tone is even enhanced if the figure is really that of Aristotle: the paradigm of natural philosophy is paradoxically devoid of sight and forced to recognise the limits of sensory perception. The reference to Aristotle allows me to finally bring out the comedic aspect of the painting. As we have seen, the blind man and the spectator undergo similar – although incomplete – experiences, which make the latter sympathise with the former. The blind man’s contact with the sculpture and the presence of the small painting bring about, at least potentially, a change of action – or ‘metabasis’, according to Aristotle’s *Poetics* (10.2, 18.2) – due to his possible reactions. This leads him to the so-called moment of recognition (‘anagnoresis’, *Poetics*, 10.2), which is a condition that allows the character

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<sup>286</sup> For a general overview on the hierarchy of the senses in Aristotle see Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy* (Ithaca; London: Cornell UP, 1999), especially Chapter 1, ‘The Hierarchy of the Senses’, pp. 11-37. For the epistemological function of touch and sight in Aristotle see Pascal Massie, ‘Touching, Thinking, Being: The Sense of Touch in Aristotle’s *De Anima* and its implications’, *Minerva. An Internet Journal of Philosophy* 17 (2013), pp. 74-101.

<sup>287</sup> *Poetics*, 1448b3-27.

to make a discovery, and which can take place even through an inanimate object (*Poetics*, 11.6). Nevertheless, this recognition (of both sculpture and painting) here remains undeveloped due to the man's impairment. This deficiency of information could be read as an example of an information gap or error, which Quintilian defines as 'ignorantia' (*Institutiones oratoriae*, 7.4.14). The viewer is then involved in the tension of the situation – the blind's man groping in the darkness – and will try to figure out the potential progress of the character he sympathises with. We participate in the information gap but our degree of awareness is, although partial, superior to the character's, thus accomplishing one of the key principles of comedy (and tragedy) according to which the spectator can be better informed than the character himself.<sup>288</sup> The painting thus conveys, through its comedic structure, a serious reflection on the function of the senses. The reader might recall an excerpt from the *Guzmán de Alfarache* (see Chapter 2) in which the protagonist is involved in an embarrassing situation – an unexpected liaison. Being in the dark, then being virtually blind, sight cannot help him, and the man does not want to rely solely on touch ('My eyes could not be of much help in the dark ... touch was misleading me').<sup>289</sup> The man tries to rely on each sense in turn, but in the end he gives up the adventure. Beyond the erotic aspect that underlies the episode, what matters is that the man has to resign himself to seeing how the situation will evolve (an information gap). In order to reliably judge what to do, he would have needed the complicity or collaboration of sight. The potentially blind Guzmán and Ribera's character share similar experiences. Both are unable to finalise their actions, which would require the comparison (*paragone*) between perceptions coming from different senses. The

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<sup>288</sup> See Heinrich Lausberg, *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric. A Foundation for Literary Study*, ed. George A. Kennedy (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 536-537, § 1213.

<sup>289</sup> *Segunda parte de la vida del pícaro Guzmán de Alfarache* (2007), pp. 417-418.

difference is that while Guzmán's experience comes finally to an end for the reader, the action of the blind man remains unsolved, inviting the beholder to endlessly conjecture various solutions. In the end, the *paragone* of the arts remains unsolved too. However, the painting cannot be analysed separately from the other senses and solely within the context of the *paragone* of the arts, as has previously been done. It must necessarily be analysed within the context of the series of the five senses. The artistic *paragone* becomes then a sort of frame that prepares the ground for, and alludes to, another type of comparison, that of the senses and of sensory perceptions. In making a distinction between tactile and visual values of sculpture, Galileo (and to a certain extent Leonardo and Del Tasso too) maintain that a three-dimensional object can be experienced by touch and sight together, or alternately by only one of them. The statement implies, on the one hand, that perceiving an object by using only one sense engenders an imperfect experience; on the other, that the use of two senses that complement one another produces a more complete and comparative experience.

The absence of a comparative analysis, which the painting alludes to, brings us back to the experimentalism of the Roman academic societies. If we want to read the painting in a wider context, *Touch* tells us that an information gap is taking place due to the absence of sight. All the characters staging Ribera's *Senses* touch an object (as perhaps the missing *Hearing* does too). The man staging the *Touch* stands out, among the others, to remind us that in the absence of one of the senses (in this case sight) even the sensory experience of his companions would irreparably be compromised. If my supposition is right, Ribera not only referred to the main aspects of the artistic quarrel, but also ingeniously used them to evoke the noticeable absence of sensorial *paragone*. The *paragone*, or, more accurately, comparative analysis,

becomes then an anti-*paragone* and brings us back to the core of the Lyncean methodology and to the importance of an all-embracing sensory experience in order to better understand reality. If Ribera alludes to Aristotle, then he represents him as staging blindness in order to establish the epistemological possibilities of touch. By closing his eyes, he is acting in a deliberate way, and therefore he might epitomize a new generation of natural philosophers who investigated the specificity of the senses. Once again, the sensation that the man extracts from touching cannot be conveyed by the painting, and his closed eyes invite us to imagine his feelings, but not to grasp his conclusions.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE BEGGAR-PHILOSOPHER

As we have already seen, Ribera developed a taste for the poetics of the humble from his Roman period onwards. I have also tried to show that his depiction of street characters conceals, and entails, a subtle reflection on the scientific and academic issues that were being debated in Rome at the time. During his long Neapolitan sojourn the painter kept developing the same subject, without affecting its originality. In this regard, I will show how Ribera repeatedly employed this process of concealment of identity throughout his work though with different, yet still original, outcomes. Figures which are usually categorized as beggars, philosophers dressed like beggars, and ordinary-looking apostles account for a conspicuous twenty-five percent of the entire known corpus of the artist, which currently numbers three hundred and fifty works (though about a hundred more are being discussed as possible copies, works done by followers, and as workshop works) [Figs 134-138]. Now, scholars have always approached these figures as belonging to distinct categories which allegedly reflected the needs and expectations of Ribera's patrons. As such, the mendicants would comply with the tenets of Counter-Reformation, such as charity and assistance to the underprivileged. As for the philosopher-beggars, the question that has arisen is how, and for whom, Ribera pursued the revolutionary course of representing them as ordinary-looking or very shabby men. Both art and literary historians have analysed them, whether in connection with classical sources, with the mystic doctrines that took root in Rome and Naples with the diffusion of Neo-Stoicism and Quietism, or even with the ideas of Erasmus of Rotterdam as they were popularised through the interpretation of



Francisco de Quevedo.<sup>1</sup> I will instead look at the problem from a different angle, trying to go beyond the traditional schemes and show how the painting simultaneously combines and transcends different categorisations.

When, in previous chapters, I have referenced the literary sources that underlie Ribera's works, I have also specified that the artist employed strategies and procedures characteristic of the picaresque genre. I will now focus on a work that depicts a blind beggar with a young assistant [Fig. 127]. This painting is one of the rare cases, if not the only one, in which Ribera not only re-proposes in visual terms the dichotomies and comedic aspects of a specific novel, the *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554), but also episodes that can be traced in it. This does not mean that we can consider the painter a mere illustrator of the tale. On the contrary, the painter created the figures of the old man and the young boy by establishing a dialectical process between his paintings and the literary source. Understanding such a complex conception would have required a learned viewer able to grasp the interactions at play and to interpret the possible outcomes offered by the painting. Ultimately, I will set out to demonstrate that the blind man is something more than a beggar. He is a multifaceted character, in turn mendicant, a scoundrel with an air of sanctity, and a master with a philosophical temper, in other words, an impostor concealing his identity.

The painting was completed during Ribera's Neapolitan sojourn for an unknown patron. Given the lack of archival documentation on the work, and it being

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<sup>1</sup> These are, in chronological order, the main contributions which have been made on the subject: Delphine Fitz Darby, 'Ribera and the Wise Men', *The Art Bulletin* 44, n. 4 (December 1962), pp. 279-307; Ferrari (1986); Francisco Rico, 'Los filósofos de Velázquez, o El Gran Teatro del Mundo', in Javier Portús ed., *El siglo de oro de la pintura española* (Madrid: Mondadori España, 1991), pp. 345-358; Santucci (1992).

therefore hazardous to connect it with one of Ribera's numerous distinguished patrons (Spanish Viceroy, ecclesiastics, and other prominent personages), I will have necessarily to leave the question open. Hopefully my analysis of the painting will bring with it, indirectly, a sketch of the cultural profile of the anonymous buyer. The work is signed and dated on the lower left 'Jusepe de Ribera 163-?'. The last digit is illegible and it would be preposterous to read it as '1632' because of the physiognomic similarity with another blind man,<sup>2</sup> this one certainly dated 1632, and either representing the *Sense of Touch* or a philosopher [Fig. 105]. Ribera, in fact, frequently used the same models over long periods of time. After this short introduction we can now begin a comparative analysis of both Ribera's and the anonymous *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554), and avail ourselves of other sources to underpin the discussion. A short summary of the novel is required for the benefit of readers not acquainted with the story. An orphan, as his father has been sentenced to death for his dodgy dealings, Lazarillo remains at the mercy of his ambiguous mother and of a shady stepfather. He abandons his mother's house or, to put it frankly, he is pushed to leave it while still an innocent child. Later on, he places himself at the service of more or less spiteful masters – a blind beggar, a stingy priest, a penniless squire and so forth: an amazing 'miscellany' of human characters representing the various strata of a society in continual flux. In their care and at their mercy, he learns the cleverest forms of deceit, namely that dirty business of life which, according to the rules of the society in which he grows up, means swindling and deceiving people in order to get the advantage of them. Finally, having awoken from the slumber of childhood, he realizes that ascending the social ladder requires a great deal of dishonesty. The child, by now having become an experienced adult, namely a *pícaro*,

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<sup>2</sup> See Oberlin's online records, <[http://www.oberlin.edu/amam/Ribera\\_Beggar.htm](http://www.oberlin.edu/amam/Ribera_Beggar.htm)>, consulted 29/03/2016.

will achieve economic wellbeing to the detriment of his honour. Accepting to get married to the ‘protégée’ of a powerful archbishop, he consciously accepts the benefits and drawbacks of this *ménage à trois*: economic advantages alongside rumours resulting from this new relationship. Before continuing it is important to remember (as I have previously indicated) that the *Lazarillo* is a first-person narrative. The adult Lazaro, in fact, sets out to relate his story by a process of concealing and revealing in order to involve the reader more deeply into his vicissitudes, as we shall see again later.

Scholars have already made some comparisons between Ribera’s painting and the novel or, for the sake of accuracy, an anecdote from the first chapter, where Lazarillo meets the blind beggar, his first master. It is worth summarizing their opinions, as they will prove useful later. Angulo Iníguez has acknowledged that the painting was inspired by the novel *Lazarillo*, but he has inferred that Ribera treated the subject ‘with no picaresque elements and no deformities’, contrary to what the painter did in the *Clubfooted Boy*. According to Angulo, Ribera disregarded the conventions of the genre because, in representing the mendicant, he opted for a sort of Greek sage or Archimedes, a ‘very noble old man ... [an] aristocratic type of beggar, with an air of grandeur about him, as painted by Berruguete in his picture at the Prado’ [Fig. 130], ‘rather than the picaresque blind man out of the *Lazarillo* de Tormes, full of tricks’.<sup>3</sup> As Angulo Iníguez seemed to identify the picaresque with exclusively low-genre elements, that is to say deformities and ugliness, his remarks would be valid only if we were to analyse the issue on purely formal grounds, thus disregarding the narrative procedures and the visual metaphors which are an essential part of literature and the visual arts. The scholar was right when he stated that the

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<sup>3</sup> Diego Angulo Iníguez, ‘The Blind Old Beggar by Ribera’, *Memorial Art Museum Bulletin* 14, n. 2 (1957), p. 59.

beggar looks rather like a noble character but, as I will try to prove, it is just this noble gait that makes him a picaresque, and therefore, elusive *persona* ‘full of tricks’. Other scholars have concurred with Angulo Iníguez. Nicola Spinosa and Craig Felton, for example, have downplayed the impact of literary sources on Ribera. Felton has accepted Spinosa’s interpretation according to which ‘Ribera does not really illustrate the picaresque tale; he concentrates on the profound humanity and the moral import of the subject.’<sup>4</sup> The Italian scholar, furthermore, maintained that the painter was interested in the humble condition of the characters and that he even ‘rejected the picaresque elements of the novel.’<sup>5</sup> Spinosa’s words evoke once again the usual and trite image of the Neapolitan alleys swarming with beggars and street urchins as Ribera’s source of inspiration: a commonplace which is also often repeated by scholars with regard to Caravaggio. For other art historians the painting, together with the *Clubfooted Boy* (1642) at the Louvre and the *Old Beggar* (1640) at Knowsley Hall [Fig. 135], represents an invitation to reflect on the transience of life and the importance of charity according to Counter-Reformation tenets.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, even when the importance of the picaresque background is recognized incidentally, this does not seem to go beyond the superficial. By upholding the idea that the real protagonist of the painting is the boy, the ‘lively Lazarillo’, who is ‘astute and a crook’<sup>7</sup>, they seem to overlook the visual interactions at play and the contribution made by each individual element of the composition. My contention is, in contrast,

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<sup>4</sup> Spinosa (1978), p. 102, n. 64 as quoted in *Jusepe de Ribera lo Spagnoletto* (1982), pp. 132-133, and plate n. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Spinosa (1978), p. 102. The opinion of the scholar remains nearly unchanged in Spinosa (2006), p. 312, n. A140.

<sup>6</sup> Edward J. Sullivan, ‘Ribera’s Clubfooted Boy: Image and Symbol’, *Maryas*, n. 19 (1977-78), pp. 17-22.

<sup>7</sup> Antonio Gaya Nuño, ‘Peinture picaresque’, *L’œil* 7, n. 84 (1962), p. 54: ‘le personnage principal n’est pas l’aveugle ... dramatique et noble ... mais le *lazarillo* vif, astucieux et filou.’

that the painter breaks up, recomposes and expands upon the structures of the genre, thus presenting them in a new framing.

Let us now return to the novel. The tale of Lazarillo's apprenticeship at the service of various masters begins with a blind beggar. The latter thinks up every kind of licit and illicit device to scrape a living, including acts of sorcery or saying prayers from memory in churches or at crossroads, while being assisted by his young collaborator in the collection of alms. The theme of the blind man accompanied by a child, known in literature from the Middle Ages onwards, became a *topos* in the literary movement known as 'rogue literature', and perhaps reached its climax in *Lazarillo de Tormes*.<sup>8</sup> The examples of blind men reciting prayers or selling love poems are so numerous<sup>9</sup> that being someone's Lazarillo de Tormes (that is, a blind man's assistant) became a proverbial expression, as confirmed by the *pícaro* Estebanillo Gonzales, the idle protagonist of a novel of the same name: '[The blind man] sold so many [poems] ... [that] I resolved to be his Lazarillo de Tormes.'<sup>10</sup>

This motif was diffused in the visual arts as well. In a thirteenth-century decretal we find four illuminations of a blind man, one of which depicts a young boy stealing a man's bag, an anecdote which is also present in *Lazarillo*.<sup>11</sup> The aforementioned Pedro Berruguete's *Grave of Saint Peter Martyr* [Fig. 130] and Ribera's

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<sup>8</sup> On the figure of the blind man in literature and theatre see Kraemer (1944), pp. 41-83; Wheatley (2010), pp. 90-128.

<sup>9</sup> See Quevedo (2011), p. 44, footnote 28; *La vida y hechos de Estebanillo González* (2012), Vol. 1, pp. 229-230; Alcalá Yáñez y Ribera (2005), pp. 274-75.

<sup>10</sup> *La vida y hechos de Estebanillo González* (2012), Vol. 1, p. 232: 'Eran tantas las [coplas] que vendía ... [que] tuve propuesto de ser su Lazarillo de Tormes.'

<sup>11</sup> Manuscript Royal MS 10 E IV (c.1340-60) held by the British Library, available at the address: <[http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Royal\\_MS\\_10\\_e\\_iv](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Royal_MS_10_e_iv)>, consulted 01 August 2013. The pages show a *Blind man led by another* (f. 218), a *Blind Beggar* (f. 110), a *Blind man and a woman* (f. 218 v), and a *Blind man and a boy* (f. 219).

painting are among the numerous examples of how the motif developed.<sup>12</sup> As I shall demonstrate, Ribera's painting presupposes a thorough knowledge of picaresque literature not only on the painter's side, but on the viewer's, too.

In the canvas [Figs 127-128], the beggar is dressed with an affected decorum and has a noble demeanour worthy of the most cunning *pícaro*. There is nothing here in common with the real dignity and the sincerity and noble gait of the wealthy blind man and his assistant in Berruguete's painting [Fig. 130]. Ribera's beggar is wearing a black coat over a shirt that might have been white once. The collar and the cuff – the latter leaving his bony forearm uncovered – are clearly worn out. The buttons – an unmatched set of uncertain provenance – are of different shapes and sizes. Those on the top have their surface slightly embossed, a desirable affectation for such an 'aristocrat of poverty.' From a rope at the boy's level hangs a key, an object that has been paid little attention to and which deserves closer analysis. The man holds in his right hand both a walking stick and an iron alms cup with a strip of paper bearing the inscription 'Dies Illa, Dies Illa', a quotation from the Medieval hymn *Dies irae* (*Day of Wrath*), which was later used in the Requiem mass: an invitation to do good deeds in the form of alms before the Last Judgment. The right arm is half outstretched towards a hypothetical charitable passer-by. The left hand is resting confidently and firmly on the right shoulder of the young guide. The man's forehead is high [Fig. 128], illuminated from the left by a light that pitilessly lingers over the reticulate of wrinkles which stretch down to his eyebrows. Bouncing off his cheekbones, the light heightens the silvery glint of his beard and the eyelids of his deep-set eyes, whose hollow orbits resemble empty bezels. With parted lips, the man seems to be

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<sup>12</sup> Other examples are: Rutilio di Lorenzo Manetti's *The Blind Beggar*, an oil painting belonging to the Collezione Chigi-Saracini, Monte dei paschi di Siena; and Leonaert Bramer's illustrations (1645) to *The Life of Lazarillo* at the Graphische Sammlung, Munich.

mystically absorbed – as the unwitting passer-by would be tempted to believe – in litanies, or rather preaching. To the right stands the boy with his innocent face [Fig. 129]. Lazarillo is wearing a whitish shirt with a huge hole on the right shoulder, underneath a tattered jacket which is a patchwork of different dark-brown fabrics. The jacket is so worn out and full of holes that it half-reveals the poor condition of the undershirt. With a hat in his left hand, his face partly enlightened by a bright light, the boy stares at the beholder.

Before going further, it is necessary to briefly discuss the setting. A restoration in 1955, as well as revealing a reshaping of the whole canvas, has recovered the space which was previously illegible around the figures because of the deterioration of the varnish.<sup>13</sup> The scene, then, seems to occur in a church rather than at a crossroad, as the blind man seems to be standing behind a *prie-dieu*.

We can now go back to the story to appreciate the dynamic tension between the painting and the literary source. We can surmise that the boy in the painting is between eight and nine years old, as in the novel. In the first chapter, in fact, Lazarillo claims to be eight years old when he places himself at the service of the old beggar, by which time his father had been sentenced to death and his mother had met another man, giving him a stepbrother. Shortly after, the blind man, in agreement with Lazarillo's mother, takes the child with him as a guide. In short succession there follows the well-known incident of the stone bull, an episode that represents the first stage of Lazarillo's growth and that therefore is full of implications which play out throughout the rest of the novel. In leaving the city of Salamanca, the blind man asks the boy to put his ear to a bull-shaped sculpture and to listen to 'a great noise inside it'. Giving credence to the man's words, the naïve boy

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<sup>13</sup> Richard D. Buck, 'Oberlin's Ribera: a Case History', *Allen Memorial Art Museum Bulletin* 14, n. 2 (1957), pp. 63-68.

agrees to the experiment. As his head approaches the bull, the man spitefully knocks it so violently against the stone that the poor child is in pain for days. There follows an interesting dialogue (*italics mine*):

"Poor simpleton, just learn that a blind man's lad ought to be one point sharper than the devil himself." And he laughed heartily at his joke.

It seemed to me as if *at that very instant* I awakened from the simplicity in which, as a child, I was asleep. I said to myself: 'He is telling the truth, it is time *I opened my eyes and became shrewd*, as I am alone and I have to think how to look after myself.'<sup>14</sup>

The blind man, who 'was an *eagle* at his job', carries on offering his precious advice:

"I can give you neither gold nor silver; but I will give you plenty of advice on how to stay alive."

And it was so that, after God, it was him who gave me life, and although he was *blind*, he *enlightened* me and trained me for the race for life.'<sup>15</sup>

The author has repeatedly made use of contrasts and parallels throughout the text – 'blind/enlightened', 'blind/eagle', 'awakened/simplicity', 'child/asleep' are only

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<sup>14</sup> *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1997), p. 23: "Necio, aprende que el mozo del ciego un punto ha de saber mas que el diablo", y rió mucho la burla. Parecióme que en aquel instante desperté de la simpleza en que, como niño, dormido estaba. Dije entre mí: "Verdad dice éste, que me cumple avivar el ojo y avisar, pues solo soy, y pensar como me sepa valer."

<sup>15</sup> *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1997), pp. 23-24 "Yo oro ni plata no te lo puedo dar; mas avisos para vivir muchos te mostraré". Y fue así, que, después de Dios, éste me dio la vida y, siendo ciego, me alumbró y adestró en la carrera de vivir".



some of the symptomatic hallmarks which characterise the language of the novel – in order to nuance Lazarillo’s awakening and initiation into a new life.<sup>16</sup> Let us consider how these linguistic contrapositions operate in the painting. In Ribera’s painting the faces of the youth and of the elderly man are placed along a diagonal of light which contrasts with the dark background of the canvas. The *chiaroscuro* of the figures’ faces seems to re-propose the dichotomies of the novel’s characterisation, but with a great difference: if the dichotomy is still operative for the old man, it is reversed here in the case of the boy. We need to go through this passage in stages. The warm and amber-coloured light illuminates the face of the man in its entirety, emphasizing the isolation and the rapture he feels [Figs 127-128]. His bust is seen frontally, while his head is slightly turned to the right as if willing to be flooded by the warmth of the light that he can only dimly perceive. In spite of the movement suggested by the rotation of the head, his body appears motionless apart from his parted lips. Yet his temporal abstraction and religious contrition are nevertheless betrayed by ‘earthly’ details that bring him down to an existential and trivial level: the alms cup reminds us that his main purpose is materialistic rather than spiritual. The metaphysical rapture of the man and the transience of ordinary objects generate a tension whereby the viewer recognizes the contraposition of both high and low registers. We need to turn to another passage from the novel which describes the blind man’s cunning and capabilities in order to understand the nuances of the divergences between the two sources:

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<sup>16</sup> In this regard, it is worthy referencing the analysis carried out by Henry Sieber, who has attentively examined the structures and the functions of the multi-layered language employed by the author. Sieber, in fact, has inferred that the awakening of the child is no less than a ‘semiotic initiation into the language’ and has distinguished between different levels – language of blindness’, ‘sacramental language’, ‘language of honour’ and so forth – the common denominator of which is the use of communication as a fraud. See Henry Sieber, *Language and Society in ‘La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes’* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins UP, 1978), pp. xi-xii.

‘At his job he was an eagle: he knew hundreds of prayers by heart; [and he would recite them in] a low, calm and sonorous tone which made the church where he was praying echo; [he put on] a humble and devout expression and prayed with such an air of composure, without making either gestures or grimaces with his eyes or mouth like others do. Besides this, he had thousands of other means of obtaining money. He said he knew prayers for many and different things ... In the matter of medicine, correspondingly, he said that Galen did not know half as much as he did about toothaches, fainting fits, female illnesses ... As a result, everyone would follow him, especially women, who believed everything he told them. From them he drew great profits with the tricks I have talked about, and he earned more in a month than a hundred blind men do in a year.’<sup>17</sup>

Such comparisons between beggars and eminent personages are frequent even in other contemporary sources and confirm the protean aptitude of the *pícaro*. In order to achieve their business successfully, those leading the life of a rogue had to do their best to deceive – both through their clothing and through their behaviour – according to the principle of dissimulation, which is a cornerstone of the picaresque life.<sup>18</sup> Cogent examples run throughout the genre, such as that mentioned in the sequel to *Lazarillo de Tormes* by Juan de Luna (1620). Here an already adult Lazarillo

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<sup>17</sup> *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1997), pp. 25-26: ‘En su oficio era un águila. Ciento y tantas oraciones sabía de coro. Un tono bajo, reposado y muy sonable, que hacía resonar la iglesia donde rezaba; un rostro humilde y devoto, que con muy buen continente ponía cuando rezaba, sin hacer gestos ni visajes con boca ni ojos, como otros suelen hacer. Allende desto, tenía otras mil formas y maneras para sacar el dinero. Decía saber oraciones para muchos y diversos efectos: para mujeres que no parían; para las que estaban de parto, para las que eran malcasadas, que sus maridos las quisiesen bien. Echaba pronósticos a las preñada: si traía hijo o hija. Pues en caso de medicina decía que Galeno no supo la mitad que él para muela, desmayos, males de madre ... Con esto andábase todo el mundo tras él, especialmente mujeres, que cuanto les decían creían. Destas sacaba él grandes provechos con las artes que digo, y ganaba más en un mes que cien ciegos en un año.’

<sup>18</sup> See in this regard the interesting observations of Enrique Miralles García in his edition of Mateo Alemán, *Guzmán de Alfarache* (Barcelona: Bruguera, 1982), Vol. 1, p. 53, footnote 33.

says that ‘the good blind man ... knew, as he used to say, much more than Seneca.’<sup>19</sup>

A further passage, taken from another picaresque novel, clarifies that mendicants were trained on how to behave and modulate their voices to improve their credibility for every occasion:

‘The most important part of the rhetoric [of mendicity] is to convince the listener and not to be discovered ... If I meet a vicar, I tell him that I am a graduate and I recite some prayers in Latin from memory ... in this way I manage to get some money; if I talk to a man, I do it softly and modestly; if to a woman, I ask for alms in the name of the Saints. No one, seeing my appearance, composure and humbleness, will deny me alms...’<sup>20</sup>

In some cases, the beggars joined ‘clubs’ where new affiliates received lessons in dressing in ‘style’, learning how to modify their behaviour or modulate their voice to improve their credibility for every occasion.<sup>21</sup> The beggar of the novel, then, comically compared with Galen, a physician, surgeon, philosopher, and one of the most accomplished scholars of antiquity, is presented as a sort of thaumaturge involved in the sacred and most of all in the profane, one who is able to solve any

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<sup>19</sup> De Luna (1990), p. 217: ‘[el] buen ciego sabía, según él decía, más que Bártolo, y que Séneca en doctrina.’

<sup>20</sup> *Segunda parte de la vida del pícaro Guzmán de Alfarache* (2007), pp. 297-298: ‘en la retorica se ha de encubrir el arte, porque el descubrirle enfada mucho el auditorio ... se ha de procurar que no se eche de ver arte ni afectación, sino pocas palabras con sencillez, y que parezca ignorante el que pide, y no que entre manos se quiera graduar de catedrático y predicator. Estos advertimientos me han valido en muchas ocasiones; y, en particular, he usado, quando voy camino, de paso, en llegando al lugar, preguntar qué gente de letras hay en él; a éstos, y al cura y vicario, me voy a sus casas y pregunto por ellos, y hago que les digan que està allí un licenciado que le quiere hablar; propóngoles una oracioncilla que tengo estudiada en latín, pidiendo mi limosna como pobre estudiante que va de paso a la universidad, y que profeso la facultad de leyes y cánones, y que voy con grande necesidas. No hay ninguno que, en viendo mi presencia y el sosiego y humildad con que le propongo mi petición, calificada con el lenguaje, que no me dé de un real arriba.’

<sup>21</sup> In this regard, examples are to be found in Quevedo (2011), pp. 97-108 and the *Segunda parte de la vida del pícaro Guzmán de Alfarache* (2007), pp. 291-297.

kind of problem and especially to take advantage of people's naivety, putting on an air of reliability as shown by his 'composure'.

The painter, in turn, recreates the deceptive rhetoric skills of the astute "beggar", depicting him with the gait of a sage or a saint. If by reading the novel it is clear that the old man is a fraud, in viewing Ribera's beggar this becomes deliberately unclear. In other words, the painter uses painting to re-create deception: beholders are unable to establish whether the man is sincere in his prophetic rapture or whether, according to their knowledge of the novel, he is shamming. Depending on the viewer's approach, the narrative will take two different turns. If we focus on the face of the old man and perceive solely his absorption, without being distracted by the interference of other elements that might claim our attention later, the story then takes an intriguing turn. The dignified demeanour and prophetic rapture of the blind man, in fact, might induce an experienced viewer to recall other noble *personae*. For example, one of Ribera's numerous *Saint Jerome* paintings [Fig. 132], or the figure staging *The Sense of Touch* [Fig. 105] – who is suggestively interpreted as a philosopher as well<sup>22</sup> – not only call the blind man to mind owing to their physiognomic resemblance (Ribera clearly used the same model for the *Touch*), but also because of their gait. The juxtaposition of these characters makes itself known in the mind of the beholder, inviting him to perceive, even if only for a short moment, the 'sanctity or wisdom' of the man. Conversely, if after this 'sacred' digression we switch our gaze from the face of the beggar to the alms cup, we are then urged to shift from his atemporal and dissimulated state of mind to the prosaic reality of baseness and triviality. Where acknowledged, the contraposition between two different tones, heroic (or devotional) and trivial, generates a comedic effect.

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<sup>22</sup> See Delphine Fitz Darby, 'Ribera and the Blind Men', *The Art Bulletin* 39, n. 3 (September 1957), pp. 195-217.

By contrast, a pale light illuminates the face of Lazarillo, whose posture does not counterbalance his companion's and confers an air of discomfort on the boy [Figs 127, 129]. His bust is in fact placed at an angle to the man's, while his face is oriented towards us. Although the left half of his face is in shadow, this does not prevent us from catching a glimpse of it. As a result, we are rather attracted by his elusive, half-concealed and half-revealed gaze, and prompted to decipher the boy's thoughts. Even the clothes of the poor lad reveal and conceal at the same time. Ribera's depiction of the tears in the shirt and in the jacket are significant; in fact, while the beggar is dressed with affected decorum suitable for his tricks, the child is contrastingly ragged. It might be worthy noticing that his tattered clothing may allude to an inner tear and thus to the boy's transition into a condition of self-awareness. It can be argued that the description of shabby garments is so incidental and brief in *Lazarillo de Tormes* that it is impossible to discern an exact correspondence between text and image. This is entirely acceptable if we recall the initial assumptions: the painter goes beyond precise parallels, he has a take on the story and thus through his inventiveness he elaborates, expands upon and manipulates structures and patterns, to wit, a gamut of visual and textual sources on which he plays. Through the painter's eyes, then, the beholder may plausibly process those rags not merely as a visual detail, but as a pattern which operates on a deeper level and thus evokes the victim's abrupt growth. The viewer, kept under scrutiny by the child, might comprehend the boy's state of mind: he might be slumbering no longer, for he has gone through the hardship of life and has been enlightened by his master.

It is now time to discuss the 'dies illa' on the alms cup in connection with the ways in which the author of *Lazarillo de Tormes* employs religious 'ideas possessing

elevated connotations [while stripping them] of their dignity and solemnity.<sup>23</sup> In a world in which ‘moral values are inverted’,<sup>24</sup> God is invoked and thanked by the *pícaro* for the fulfilment of his material aims, even if this affects other people. In the first chapter of *Lazarillo*, the blind man warns his assistant: ‘I can give you neither gold nor silver; but I will give you plenty of advice on how to stay alive’, thus evoking the *Act of Apostles* where Peter says ‘I have neither silver nor gold, but what I do have I give you.’<sup>25</sup> Lazarillo, in his turn, asks Saint John the Baptist to blind his second master (‘Saint John, blind him’<sup>26</sup>) to conceal his food theft. The smith supplying him with a key to access the sideboard is called an ‘angelic tinker’ and the alimentary treasure hidden there becomes a ‘breadly paradise’, as Lazarillo sees ‘in the bread the face of God.’<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, funeral orations represent for the boy and the priest the opportunity to enjoy refreshments, as it was a common habit to give out food after burials. These occasions were so advantageous that the boy ascribes the frequent deaths to divine charity (‘the Lord seeing my rabid and endless death, I think He would not mind killing them to keep me alive.’<sup>28</sup>) In the light of these considerations, the ‘*dies illa*’ inscription may take on a different significance. The ‘trastorno de la moral’, as it has been dubbed the debasement and subversion of moral and religious values,<sup>29</sup> occurs visually through the juxtaposition of the sacred and the profane. Invitations to muse over the final judgment and the transience of life (*dies illa*) of the

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<sup>23</sup> Ron W. Truman, ‘Parody and Irony in the Self-Portrayal of Lázaro de Tormes’, *The Modern Language Review* 63, n. 3 (July 1968), p. 602.

<sup>24</sup> Truman (1968), p. 601.

<sup>25</sup> Acts 3.6.

<sup>26</sup> *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1997), p. 57: “‘Sant Juan, y ciégale!’”.

<sup>27</sup> *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1997), pp. 55-56: ‘Comenzó a probar el angélico calderero una y otra de un gran sartal que dellas traía, y yo ayudalle con mis flacas oraciones. Cuando no me cato, veo en figura de panes, como dicen, la cara de Dios dentro del arcaz ... Y otro día, en saliendo de casa, abro mi paraíso panal.’

<sup>28</sup> *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1997), p. 53: ‘porque, viendo el Señor mi rabiosa y continua muerte, pienso que holgaba de matarlos por darme a mí.’

<sup>29</sup> Bruce W. Wardropper, ‘El trastorno de la moral en el *Lazarillo*’, *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica*, n. 15 (1961), pp. 441-447.

fictitiously devout man are used in reality for the fulfilment of his material and contingent needs (alms cup).

We can now turn to a problematic detail that has almost gone unnoticed to art historians and has been only rarely touched upon by scholars of Spanish literature. I am referring to the key which is hanging from the old man's coat at the level of the boy's shoulder [Fig. 128], and which is mentioned in *Lazarillo de Tormes* numerous times in relation to the boy's attempts to find food.<sup>30</sup> The key, in my opinion, does not play an accessory role. On the contrary, it further confirms that the painting is ingeniously connected to the novel. On the one hand, the key might in fact play a proleptic role, a clue that brings to mind a sequence of anecdotes as they unfold in the novel. On the other, it connotes the figure of the old man and his relationship with the boy. If we abide by the first explanation, then the key accounts for Lazarillo's physical survival. In the first chapter of the novel, where it is first mentioned, the key represents such an obstacle to the boy that the old man, until then defined as 'humble and devout', on account of it becomes 'mean and stingy':

‘[The blind man] carried the bread and the other things in a cloth bag whose neck he closed with an iron chain, a lock and a key ... After he had locked the padlock and had forgotten about it, thinking that I was engaged in other things, through a little stitching that so many times I had unstitched and sewed up to open a side of the bag, I bled that mean bag, taking not morsels but big chunks of bread, bacon and sausages.’<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> For a reflection on the functional role of the key within the novel see Marcel Bataillon, *Novedad y fecundidad del 'Lazarillo de Tormes'* (Salamanca: Anaya, 1973, 2nd ed., first published 1968), p. 54; and Sieber (1978), pp. 18 and 36.

<sup>31</sup> *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1997), pp. 27-29: ‘Él traía el pan y todas las otras cosas en un fardel de lienzo, que por la boca se cerraba con una argolla de hierro y su candado y su llave ... Después que cerraba el

In the second chapter the key plays a more important role and is directly connected to one of the most hilarious episodes in the novel. A duplicate of the key allows Lazarillo to treacherously access the 'breadly paradise', namely the chest where his second master, a priest, stores provisions. Once he is discovered, Lazarillo is punished and thrown out of the house. In contrast with the previous episode, this time the boy does not get away with his tricks. The painter may then be alluding, by placing the key within the boy's reach, to episodes that occur in different times and places, while foreshadowing future events for those who have a thorough knowledge of the whole story. Once again, evoking the role of the key in the novel may generate a dialectical tension between the written source and the painted one. I would also like to propose a complementary explanation to the key, whose function becomes that of creating an interaction between the novel and the image, thereby magnifying the artist's inventiveness and independence. The boy is not only a guide but also a character that plays a role in the comedy performed by the old beggar to move people to pity. However he seems, despite his connivance, to alert the beholder to the old man's scam through his direct gaze and momentary detachment from the beggar, thereby suggesting his awareness and, presumably, his subsequent independence. In this case the key could connote the figures in the terms I have described, that is as two figures in a master and servant relationship, the former exerting his authority (through the key) over the latter. This aspect allows me to introduce the next point for discussion.

At the very beginning of this analysis, I have touched upon an issue I now mean to develop further: the use of the first-person narrative, a feature common to

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candado y se descuidaba, pensando que yo estaba entendiendo en otras cosas, por un poco de costura, que muchas veces del un lado del fardel descosía y tornaba a coser, sangraba el avariento fardel, sacando no por tasa pan, mas buenos pedazos, torreznos y longaniza.'



many picaresque stories and a literary technique that does not allow the reader to ‘assume a detached position.’<sup>32</sup> In fact, in telling his adventures to an imaginary reader or listener (‘Vuesa Merced’), Lazarillo bridges the gap between him and the reader and ‘imposes upon us the requirement not of sympathy but of empathy.’<sup>33</sup> The reader thus also engages in the vicissitudes of the protagonist through seeing: ‘I think it would be good if such remarkable things accidentally never heard or *seen* before, should be made public (*italics mine*).’<sup>34</sup> If we now turn to the painting, we notice that ‘Lazarillo’ is not only superimposed to the blind man, but he even turns his back on him, putting himself in a physical and psychological isolation which is emphasized by his de-centered position. In Berruguete’s painting [Fig. 130], the mutual confidence between the blind man and his guide is clear. The blind man leans on the boy, who tightly holds the walking stick so as to guide the man’s steps. Furthermore, he looks at the man’s face with the thoughtfulness of one who is carefully carrying out his duty. In Ribera’s picture, instead, the communication loop is apparently interrupted, as Lazarillo seems to momentarily distance himself from his tyrant. He imposes his gaze upon the onlooker who is required, in turn, to gaze upon the boy: thus their respective spatial fields dovetail with one another. At this stage, we can recapitulate some of the possible implications of this apparent lack of communication. The beholder’s biases, in fact, may engender a range of different approaches to the painting’s subject.

The blind man has to trust his own mouth and ears to survive and by now also his assistant; he ‘sees’ through the boy’s eyes only what he is allowed to see by

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<sup>32</sup> Janis A. Tomlison and Marcia L. Welles, ‘Picturing the Picaresque: Lazarillo and Murillo’s Four Figures on a Step’ (1996), in *The Picaresque: Tradition and Displacement*, ed. Giancarlo Maiorino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1996), p. 71.

<sup>33</sup> Tomlison and Welles (1996), p. 72.

<sup>34</sup> *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1997), p. 3: ‘Yo por bien tengo que cosas tan señaladas, y por ventura nunca oídas ni vistas, vengan a noticia de muchos y no se entierren en la sepultura del olvido.’

his godchild, and this implies the risk of incurring possible pitfalls. Similarly, the beholder needs to rely on the painter's clues to interpret the painting, thereby incurring the possibility of being misled. The man's blindness, to a certain extent, corresponds to the viewer's "blindness." Indeed, how is the beholder to "read" the attitude of the old beggar towards Lazarillo? Is he a tyrant who is spitefully exploiting the child's innocence to move people to pity, or a wise and far-seeing master who is teaching the boy how to obtain money and survive? And, on the other hand, what are the feelings of the boy towards the man and what he is about to do? He may be alerting the viewer, through his detachment and eye contact, to his being a victim. Or is Lazarillo, with his gaze directed at us, telling us that he is learning the business of living before taking off? Has he trained enough to make himself independent? Or, finally, is he – yet another consummate actor – playing the role he has been appointed to, namely that of a pitiful and vulnerable child whose job it is to beguile the passerby and the beholder? Evaluating Ribera's intentions implies identifying a set of possible interpretive alternatives that hinge on the beholder's subjectivity. Ribera re-proposes, in a coeval work, another adult-child group, Saint Joseph and Jesus, whose positions are inverted compared to the pair in the Oberlin painting [Fig. 131]. Joseph has been shifted towards the right and holds his traditional attribute, the flowering rod, in his right hand with a gesture that recalls that of his counterpart, the beggar. The left hand, contrastingly, does not lean on the child, but is dramatically spread out over the chest, thus emphasizing the absorption of the man flooded in light. The child does not look at the observer as Lazarillo does, but, similarly to the latter, he has a face which is half sunk in shadow. The child Jesus looks toward the light, like the father, while helpfully holding a wicker basket which contains Joseph's work tools. The two works not only share a similar conception, but also the way that

divine light shrouds the characters. Ribera, then, not only echoes the dichotomies of the novel in the Oberlin painting, but evokes, in a very subtle way, the figures of the New Testament. There is, nevertheless, an important difference between the two works. Whereas the Jesus-Saint Joseph pair is collectively absorbed in quiet, genuine contemplation, the Lazarillo-master couple conceals, behind the apparent composure, that psychological tension that I have discussed. The beggar, a sort of reversed or negative Saint Peter [Fig. 133] holding the key to the material paradise coveted by Lazarillo, thus exerts his ambiguous authority over the child.

It has been argued that the author of *Lazarillo* 'is addressing himself to two types of readers, those who are interested in reading purely for enjoyment, and those who wish to penetrate more deeply in order to catch the satirical message the text holds specifically for them',<sup>35</sup> and that 'the production of meaning ultimately depends on the reader'<sup>36</sup> (in our case on the beholder). As I have already stated, picaresque fiction involves a constant and skilful alternation of light and shadow, of concealment and revelation. It is no coincidence that Mateo Alemán wrote two prologues in Part One of his *Guzmán de Alfarache* (1599), the first addressed to the common public ('vulgo') and the second to the learned reader ('discreto lector'). By the same token, Ribera's painting could delight the eye of a learned and sophisticated patron who was able to respond to the allusions in the work. It is likely that the emergence of such subjects was even influenced by the Counter-Reformation, inasmuch as since the sixteenth century both ecclesiastical and secular institutions

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<sup>35</sup> Fred Abrams, 'To whom was the Anonymous Lazarillo de Tormes dedicated?', *Romance Notes* 8 (1967), p. 274.

<sup>36</sup> Helen H. Reed, *The Reader in the Picaresque Novel* (London: Tamesis, 1984), p. 33.

had dealt with the alarming problem of mendicity.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, in the light of the interpretation I have proposed here, I believe that the Oberlin painting goes well beyond the pietistic aim. The painting has a textual picaresque background for which *Lazarillo* is the main source and requires a ‘discreto’ beholder able to grasp the comedic and parodic interactions which are at play between the two different media. Be that as it may, such an articulated interpretation showcases the painter’s mastery and ingenuity, and his ability to conjure up the elusive emotions of his figures. By depicting the old man in such a convincing way, for example, Ribera acts as the equivalent of the beggar, sharing the power of deceiving the beholder with him: he is able to dissimulate a state of mind to the point that the viewer is unsure about the real tenor of the image. The theme of the artist’s powers to give life and death to his characters, his ability to appeal to our feelings and involve us in the visual trick he concocts for us is present in poetic ekphrasis of the period and has been discussed by various scholars in relation to numerous writings celebrating artworks.<sup>38</sup> According to such poetic ekphrases, the artist is able to infuse life into his creatures and to make the picture’s support a principle of life to the point that it is difficult for the beholder to distinguish the fiction of the narrative from reality, as I will demonstrate by the following representative examples chosen from the many available.<sup>39</sup> In his aforementioned poem dedicated to Ribera, Giuseppe Campanile says that the Spanish Zeuxis, with his brush-arrow, conjures up Death to the point that Venus

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<sup>37</sup> David Davies, ‘Velázquez’s Bodegones’, in *Velázquez in Seville* (exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh, 8 August – 20 October 1996), ed. Michael Clarke (Edinburgh: National Gallery of Scotland, 1996), pp. 63-64.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example: Luigi Salerno, Duncan T. Kinkead and William H. Wilson, ‘Poesia e simboli nel Caravaggio’, *Il Palatino* 10 (1966), pp. 106-117; Elizabeth Cropper, ‘The Petrifying Art: Marino’s Poetry and Caravaggio’, *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 26 (1991), pp. 193-212; Pericolo (2011), in particular Chapters 4-5, pp. 135-175, and Chapter 14, pp. 447-479.

<sup>39</sup> Such as those by Giovan Battista Marino, *La Galeria* (c.1619); to a lesser extent, those by Gaspare Murtola (1604) and *Canzonette ... con altre rime* ([Venice]: [s.l.], 1608); and Marzio Milesi, a jurist devoted to antiquarian and historical research.

cries because her grief for the death of Adonis has been recreated with unbearable intensity.<sup>40</sup> In a poem (1640) by Girolamo Fontanella extolling a *Saint Jerome* by Ribera, the saint seems so alive that he could even talk. The chiasmic pattern of the poem, ‘feigned/living’ and ‘inanimate/breaths’ are again meant to emphasize the artist’s great ingenuity and his ability to infuse life into the painting while draining life from the viewer (‘a l’huom il senso fura’).<sup>41</sup>

Regarding the painters’ visual duplicity, it would be helpful to have at least some testimony as to their temperament and feelings, so as to be able to outline, where possible, a psychological sketch and understand their attitude towards the beholder. In the case of Ribera, we have an enjoyable anecdote reported by one of his (contested) biographers (1742), the Neapolitan Bernardo De Dominici, who defines Ribera in the exact terms I have described him, that is, as a picaresque figure. De Dominici relates that the Spaniard painter ‘was cheerful by nature and loved joking and telling stories, and sometimes he played tricks on people ... and in this regard I would like to tell the story of a trick he played on two Spanish officials’<sup>42</sup>. In this anecdote Ribera convinces the two officials that he has come into possession of the philosopher’s stone, and therefore invites them to his rooms in order to demonstrate how he can turn everything into gold. While the two soldiers wait for the miracle impatiently, the artist sets to work in order to complete an unfinished portrait. He keeps his guests in suspense in order to better enjoy his well-conceived

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<sup>40</sup> Campanile (1674), ‘Si celebra il pennello di Giuseppe di Rivera, e si discorre sopra alcune pitture di quello’, pp. 154-155: ‘Ispano Zeusi in animar figure ... / Dai col vivo color morte a la Morte ... / Se di Adon miro il tragico successo ... / Par che Venere esclami: O ciel crudele, / chi così vivo ha il mio dolore espresso?’

<sup>41</sup> Girolamo Fontanella, *Nove cieli. Poesie* (Naples: Roberto Mollo, 1640), p. 257: ‘Finta no, ma verace, ecco si mira / Meraviglia de l’Arte alma fattura ... / Priva di senso a l’uom il senso fura ... / In sì bell’opra attenta i lumi gira / e se stessa trovar non sa Natura. Sta dubbia l’arte e ’n sì gentile figura / La tua bell’Arte invidiosa ammira.’

<sup>42</sup> De Dominici, Vol. 3 (1743), p. 18: ‘Fu però di natura allegro, amò gli scherzi, e le novelle, e talvolta fece delle burle ... i suoi motti erano mordaci ... e a tal proposito non mi sarà grave qui riferire uno scherzo, ch’egli fece a due Officiali Spagnuoli.’

prank. When the painting is ready, Ribera asks his assistant to take the work to the buyer. Shortly after, the boy comes back with a handful of golden coins, which Ribera, as a plot twist, throws on a table to show the officials that for him the only way to turn everything into gold is to sell his artwork.<sup>43</sup> What really matters in this story is the psychological tension which is conveyed by Ribera's silence and gestures in order to increase the expectations of his victims and leave them in a momentary state of bewilderment. Although we do not know De Dominici's sources for the episode, we can find parallels of such an irreverent, light-hearted and, all in all, 'picaresque' demeanour in many novels of the genre.<sup>44</sup> From this point of view, Ribera as a painter goes well beyond the picaresque by becoming a picaresque figure himself: the creator of a visual "fraud".

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<sup>43</sup> De Dominici (1743), pp. 18-19.

<sup>44</sup> An episode of the same tenor that first comes to my mind is to be found in the novel by Espinel (1642), Vol. 2, pp. 122-131, where the protagonist plays the philosopher's stone trick on his jailor.

## CHAPTER 5

### HUMAN PHYSIOGNOMIES

#### Introduction

On the sixteenth of December 1631 Mount Vesuvius shook Naples with a devastating eruption. Torrents of lava buried entire villages and thousands of people, leaving those who survived with indelible memories. In 1632, two of the many eyewitnesses published extensive accounts of the catastrophic event. The first of these was Giulio Cesare Braccini,<sup>1</sup> a Tuscan ecclesiastical who was living in Naples, the second Gianbernardino Giuliani, an obscure ‘segretario del popolo napolitano’, who probably had some administrative role in the government of the city.<sup>2</sup> The two observers are in no doubt: catastrophes are the means through which God shows his mightiness and anger. Giuliani attributes the calamity to the sins of internal enemies of the Spanish Vice-Kingdom, who were envious of the prosperity and abundance brought about in Naples by its capable Viceroy, the Count of Monterrey (ruled 1631-1637). Those able to understand prophecies had stated, Giuliani notes, that some sort of disaster was inevitable. The eruption had in fact been preceded by the birth of a monstrous child, who at the age of fourteen months had teethed completely and had oversized limbs. The poor creature was called ‘the Giant’, and people would flock to where he was kept and pay to look at him.<sup>3</sup> We do not know whether Giuliani actually

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<sup>1</sup> Giulio Cesare Braccini, *Dell'incendio fattosi nel Vesuvio a XVI di dicembre 1631. E delle sue cause, ed effetti* (Naples: Secondino Roncagliolo, 1632).

<sup>2</sup> Gianbernardino Giuliani, *Trattato del Monte Vesuvio e de' suoi incendi* (Naples: Egidio Longo, 1632). The reference to his role is on the title page.

<sup>3</sup> Giuliani (1632), pp. 176-177: ‘Del quale Incendio dicevano alcuni, che stato ne fosse presagio infausto l'essersi alquanti mesi prima veduto in Napoli il mostruoso Elefante, che à cagion di guadagno vi havevan da lontani paesi portato certi Oltramontani, i quali un tanto à testa darsi facevano per mostrarlo altrui; e l'esser nato ne' tenimenti della nostra Villa Antignana di poveri rusticani parenti un figliuolo, à

saw the child himself, or whether he based his account on typical exaggerated hearsay. Chronicles, novels, and proto-scientific treatises of the period are full of such stories and illustrations that mix reality and imagination. Yet it is possible that there is some truth behind the gossip. From Monterrey's inventories, in fact, we gather that the Viceroy owned a painting (whose whereabouts are unknown) with a 'naked, monstrous child' by Ribera.<sup>4</sup> If the two facts are related, we can imagine the painter engaged in a field trip to view the child on behalf of the Viceroy. In the same year, 1631, Ribera painted *The Bearded Woman Maddalena Ventura with Her Husband Felice De Amici and a Child* for Monterrey's predecessor, the Duke of Alcalá, Viceroy of Naples in 1629-1631 [Fig. 139]. Eleven years later, he painted the *Clubfooted Boy*, which was possibly for another Spanish patron [Fig. 155].<sup>5</sup> At least one another painting, showing a dwarf with a dog (of which we have only a small reproduction), and some drawings with so-called grotesque heads, testify to the painter's concern with the representation of aberrations and deformities [Figs 6-7, 159].

The study of anatomical anomalies (both in human beings, animals and plants), when based on a scientific approach that focuses on the investigation of the origins of deformities, is nowadays called teratology, a compound word derived from ancient Greek and meaning 'study of monsters', or 'study of marvels' (*teras*, 'monster', and *logos*, 'study of'). To my knowledge, the first to use this neologism was the French zoologist Isidore Geoffroy St-Hilaire, author of the *Traité de tératologie* (1832-1835). Before the

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cui perché nell'età di 14. mesi non pur tutti i denti, ma sì grossi haveva egli 'l polso, e 'l braccio, che non gli hà tali il più smisurato huomo, c'hoggi di ci viva, corrispondenti a' quali si vedevano in lui etiandio, con la faccia, tutti gli altri membri della persona, sostenendo egli con la destra un bastone di non picciol peso, à cui, dico veniva, e tuttavia dato perciò ne viene di Gigante 'l nome, e pagasi parimente da chi vuol vederlo.'

<sup>4</sup> Alfonso E. Peréz Sanchez, 'Las colecciones de pintura del conte de Monterrey (1653)', *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia* 184 (1977), p. 451, footnote 186: 'Otra pintura de un niño monstruo en carnes de mano Joseph de Rivera con marco negro.'

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 5.2.



introduction of this new term, the most common word in use was the Latin 'monstrum'. This word can be translated into English as monster, prodigy, or portent, terms that convey the idea of an extraordinary event which engenders amazement and wonder. Nevertheless, the word was more often used in its pejorative sense to highlight that nature had perverted her usual order and produced extraordinary things as punishments or warnings sent by God to humankind. Behind this simplification, there is a much more complex reality. Attitudes towards abnormal beings – from fear to curiosity, scientific interest or mockery – not only changed over the centuries, but also according to cultural environments. Scholars have identified some of the main attitudes towards wonders of nature and have analysed the way they developed and changed over the centuries. This division corresponds to a rough periodisation – the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, post-Galilean scientific experimentalism – but in reality this does not mean that each approach necessarily corresponds to a precise timespan. According to this division, anomalies were first seen as warnings against corruption and sin, and therefore as signs of God's anger. Later, the birth of private collections and cabinets of curiosities in Renaissance Europe led to the accumulation of rare specimens, fossils, stones, shells, and embalmed animals. The specimens which were displayed did not necessarily present morphologic anomalies, but their rarity nevertheless engendered surprise. Permanent exhibitions, moreover, helped visitors to become better acquainted with certain images, and, to a certain extent, contributed to the cultural shift from superstition to a more dispassionate observation of the anomalies of nature. One of the greatest and best-known *Wunderkammern* in Europe was that assembled in Naples by the naturalist Ferrante Imperato [Fig. 19], which became renowned to the point that foreign scholars often visited it to study and make drawings of the specimens exhibited. Access to such collections and the possibility of

reproducing their specimens promoted the publication of illustrated treatises. Both Ulisse Aldrovandi in Bologna and Giovan Battista della Porta in Naples obtained reproductions for their publications from engravers and illustrators, according to a practice that the Academy of the Lynx later consistently supported. The third stage derived from the second and saw the birth of learned academies, which demanded a more detailed and analytical observation of nature in terms of their description and visual reproduction. Modern scholars would define this approach 'pre-scientific' inasmuch as its representatives, including the Lynceans, were on the edge of a cultural turning-point still characterized by theological tenets. Finally, a more genuine scientific approach is said to have taken place in the late nineteenth century and ushered in modern teratology, the branch of medicine that investigates the causes of physical deformities.<sup>6</sup> Although the words 'monstrum' and 'teras' have more or less the same meaning, the latter took over in the nineteenth century as a reflection of changing attitudes towards deformities. This schematic account might seem arbitrary, for cultural contexts are not necessarily rigid structures and can overlap. The emergence of scientific investigative methodologies did not sweep away ancient superstitions. Each period might have been dominated by the rise of a specific methodological approach, but each age brought with it the beliefs and tenets of the past. The new does not preclude the existence of the old. On the contrary, different attitudes coexisted and influenced the media, written sources and images, which were in use for representations of the wonders of nature.

The period between the first half of the sixteenth century and the second half of the following century seems to have been one of the most productive in this regard.

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<sup>6</sup> See Dudley Wilson, *Signs and Portents. Monstrous birth from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment* (London: Routledge, 1993).

It includes a variety of written and visual sources which were produced across Europe, ranging from the proto-scientific approach to fictional works. One of the characteristics of these non-fictional sources is that the majority of them, contrary to what we would expect, are not based on direct experience because their authors relied upon the testimony of other ancient and modern writers. As a result, the promised ‘marvellous and monstrous things’ are more often than not a pastiche of exaggerated or overblown facts copied indiscriminately, with a few notable exceptions. One of the most well-known works is the *Histoires prodigieuses* by the French humanist Pierre Boaistuau. This collection of curiosities and oddities was first published in 1560, but it was republished several times and translated into various languages until the following century. The peculiarity of this treatise is that Boaistuau uses the word *prodige* in the widest sense possible, including in it various facets not necessarily connected with physical anomalies. Let us consider some examples. The first image drawn from Boaistuau shows a deformed child born in 1381, allegedly on the very day on which the two maritime powers Genoa and Venice signed a peace treaty [Fig. 150]. According to some commentators mentioned by the author, the fusion of two bodies in one – four arms, four legs and one head – represented the reconciliation between the rival cities.<sup>7</sup> Another famous case was the birth of a monstrous child who was born in Ravenna in 1512 [Fig. 151]. If the first image shows a plausible anomaly, the second looks like a work of fantasy. This chimera has the bust and the head of a human being, but instead of arms, it has two bat-like wings, a horn on its head, and the lower part of its body is like an enormous falcon’s leg. Its pectorals are very pronounced, and in the centre of its torso there is the sign of a cross and the letter ‘Y’. Boaistuau and later

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<sup>7</sup> Pierre Boaistuau, *Histoires prodigieuses (édition de 1561)*, eds Stephen Bamforth and Jean Céard (Geneva: Dros, 2010), pp. 665-668.

commentators added that the creature was a hermaphrodite. Its birth was seen as a warning against the wars between Pope Julius II and King Louis XII, which were devastating Italy and resulted in the bloody battle of Ravenna in 1512.<sup>8</sup> In both cases, the monsters were considered as manifestations of divine will. The third image shows two separate cases which are presented together [Fig. 152]. The small child on the left was considered extraordinary because he was born black due to sexual incontinence of his white mother. The case of the hairy woman in the middle, in contrast, is classified as a case of psychological influence. She was apparently born hairy because her mother, during her pregnancy, was in the habit of staring intensely at an image of Saint John the Baptist wearing a camel's skin.<sup>9</sup> Among a variety of wonders, Boaistuau describes other extraordinary cases, such as that of a group of people that survived an ordeal by fire totally unharmed. The equally famous treatise *Des monstres et prodiges* published by the French Ambroise Paré (1573) shares a similar premise, with the difference that Paré was a 'man of science', a surgeon, and during his career saw with his eyes what others claimed to know by hearsay. Indeed, he did not reject all superstitions out of hand, but rather identified alternative causes which were believed to be responsible for the birth of deformed beings. For the French surgeon misshapeness is not necessarily provoked by the anger of God or by the depravity of mothers, for biological or even mechanical causes might affect the foetus [Fig. 153].<sup>10</sup> If the mother has received a blow or if she has fallen from a certain height the child may become crippled, hunchbacked or suffer from other malformations.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Boaistuau (2010), pp. 737-739.

<sup>9</sup> Boaistuau (2010), pp. 384-390.

<sup>10</sup> Ambroise Paré, *Des monstres et prodiges*, ed. Jean Céard (Geneva: Droz, 1971), Chapter 1, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Paré (1971), Chapter 12, p. 44.

Even the Lynceans, as it is well known, had a certain interest in anomalous and deformed beings, especially animals. The last few pages of a miscellaneous manuscript of the Academy which mainly contains images of fungi and flowers, show a child affected by hydrocephaly, a rare genetic anomaly [Fig. 154]. It seems to be the only image of a misshapen human being in the entire corpus of the Lynceans' works. Unfortunately, the absence of any commentary does not allow us to make any conjecture regarding their approach to the topic.<sup>12</sup>

If we broaden our range of sources, we can include in the field of our discussion treatises on physiognomy and on skin diseases. From Giovan Battista della Porta's first edition of *De humana phisiognomoniam* (1586) to Ildephonsus Nuñez's *De gutturis et faucium ulceribus* (*On the ulcers affecting the throat and the fauces*, 1615), several authors dealt with the appearance, proportions, and peculiarities of the human body [Figs. 8-10]. The simple presence of moles or other imperfections on the skin, physiognomic resemblance to animals or any disharmonious relationship between the limbs was a sign that nature had diverted from her normal course.

Sources of this period referencing deformity – among which I have not yet mentioned the fictional ones – are varied and numerous, and I will refer to others as we go. Taken as a whole, they contributed to the shaping of the imagery of people and consequently to the production of further written and visual evidence. Every image and every episode is therefore the result of direct experience, hearsay, and the most oddly assorted readings. No wonder the accounts of Braccini and Giuliani, the two chroniclers who escaped death during the eruption of 1631, were imbued with religious superstitions. It could be argued that they mechanically repeated a trite *topos*. Yet, until proven otherwise, the repetition of *clichés* keeps the commonplace alive. During the

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<sup>12</sup> On the composition of this manuscript, see Freedberg (2002), pp. 238-243.

same years, Ribera painted some of his masterpieces, the aforementioned *Bearded Woman* and the *Clubfooted Boy*. At the time Ribera depicted them, the two figures were certainly perceived with a mixture of fear and fascination. Yet I believe that his interpretation ushers in something deeper. His characters imply a thorough and ‘interdisciplinary’ reflection upon the subject, a reflection that results not only in the representation of the human vicissitudes of the figures, but also in an extraordinary optical accuracy. This does not mean that we can consider Ribera’s paintings as modern scientific illustrations, despite the fact that scholars have been able to firmly and certainly identify the pathologies that affected the characters who are portrayed. Scientific illustration requires an impersonal objectivity that does not permit digressions. Ribera’s paintings are certainly extraordinary documents for historians of science, but there are further layers underlying his works.

As I will venture to demonstrate in the following pages, I believe that Ribera encapsulated and elaborated upon perceptions of monstrosity, but at the same time went well beyond them and made his representations multifaceted. Ribera was Spanish and so were the majority of his patrons. The taste or curiosity of the Spaniard sovereigns for anomalous beings – dwarves, idiots and so on – is known and documented by the works of Diego Velázquez too [Fig. 160]. When we come to fictional literature, the Spanish taste is for grotesque sketches that, sometimes teasingly, flow into the comic register. I am not implying any disrespectful intention on the part of Ribera, but his *Maddalena Ventura* and the *Beggar Boy* with a deformed foot analysed here are not simply real characters painted from life. Before Ribera portrayed Maddalena Ventura, there was already specific and consolidated literary tradition on bearded women. In these sources, we pass from the popular lore of proverbs to the pseudo-scientific approach of treatises on physiognomy and physiology, to the

mocking register of fictional works. Treatises on physiology or the various collections of encyclopaedic knowledge, harking back especially to Aristotle's *On the Generation of Animals*, attribute the growth of a beard in women to alterations in body temperature. It is interesting to note that these pseudo-scientific explanations of the phenomenon end more often than not with a moral condemnation connected with the alleged lascivious behaviour of bearded women.<sup>13</sup> Besides placing the hairy woman between the adulteress and the pimp, early modern scholars believed that hairy women could turn themselves into hermaphrodites through the growth of male genitals.<sup>14</sup> Some sixteenth-century physicians had already acknowledged that the feminine beard alone did not imply that a woman would become a hermaphrodite; nevertheless, the growth of a beard was enough to arouse suspicion against the promiscuous nature of bearded women. Between the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries the bearded woman became, moreover, a literary stock character, due to her frequent occurrence in novels and plays, and as such was an easy target for parody and mockery. Needless to say, the figure acquired a negative connotation through the addition of insults which reflected the attitudes and the stereotypes of the pseudo-scientific sources.<sup>15</sup> The bearded woman was unanimously considered to be a deviation from nature. In summary, we can say that she is usually described with insulting epithets, which highlight her monstrous and depraved nature (such as 'lustful', 'sorceress', 'prostitute', 'bewitching').

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<sup>13</sup> Mondino de Liuzzi, *Traducción del Tratado de la Phisonomía en breve summa contenida* (fourteenth century), as quoted in Catalina Buezo, 'La mujer barbuda en la literatura española', in Francis Desvois ed., *Le Monstre, Espagne et Amérique Latine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009), p. 163: 'Et la muger se llama 'barbuda', la cual haués de saber que es muy luxuriosa por su caliente complexión, et por consiguiente, es de fuerte natura et de varonil condición.'

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Barbardino de Sagahún, *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España* [1540-1585] (Mexico City: Alejandro Valdés, 1830), Vol. 3, Chapter 15, *De muchas maneras de malas mugeres. De las mugeres públicas. Del Hermafrodito*, p. 38: and Jerónimo Gómez de Huerta, *Historia natural de Cayo Plinio Segundo traducida por el licenciado Gerónimo de Huerta ... ampliada* (Madrid: Luis Sánchez, 1624), p. 262.

<sup>15</sup> Numerous fictional and non-fictional sources are to be found in Buezo (2009), pp. 161-176, and Fernando R. de la Flor, *La península metafísica. Arte, literatura y pensamiento en la España de la Contorreforma* (Madrid: Editorial Biblioteca Nueva, 1999), Chapter 8, 'La puella pilosa', pp. 267-306.

Among the sources that I have consulted, none of them seems to allude to the anger of God as a cause of the anomaly. They instead attribute the phenomenon to bodily dysfunction. Whatever the cause, bearded women become disquieting and threatening figures. On a par with other abnormal beings, they are the object of unrelenting interest.

Regarding the young beggar in the *Clubfooted Boy*, the painting is remarkable for two important aspects. On the one hand, it stages a mendicant, a controversial figure subject to heated social and religious debate, and also the protagonist of fictional works (which I have discussed in Chapter 1). On the other hand, it depicts a ‘teras’, a boy with a congenital malformation, which in modern medical terminology is called a ‘club foot’.

Alongside the written sources, there is also a figurative tradition for both figures. Ribera certainly recorded two specific characters with optical accuracy, but we have to take the variegated substratum of iconographic and literary tradition at play into account. Sinister fascination, disdain, fear, and irony might have operated in the mind of the painter during the creative process, giving birth to some of the most fascinating of Ribera’s works, which we are going to analyse in detail in the following pages.



### 5.1 Portents of Nature: Jusepe de Ribera and the Bearded Woman

In 1631 Marcantonio Padavino, a diplomatic representative of the Venetian Senate, was the guest of Fernando Afán de Ribera y Enríquez, third Duke of Alcalà and Viceroy of Naples (1629-31). His diary entry for the eleventh of February tells us [Fig. 144]: 'In the apartments of the Viceroy there was that very famous painter making a portrait of an Abruzzese woman, who is married and the mother of many children. She has a totally virile face and a *palmo* [i.e. handbreadth] of beard, which is black and beautiful. Her chest is covered with hair. His Excellency took pleasure in showing her to me as a wonderful thing, and she really is such.'<sup>16</sup> Padavino's description is of extraordinary importance, not only because it describes Ribera's work in progress, but also because of the expressiveness of his language, which conveys a vivid and fresh impression of the fortunate ambassador meeting the woman. The painting, now displayed in the Prado Museum, still amazes contemporary viewers [Fig. 139]. They pause by it either smiling or feeling sorry for the poor woman. All the more reason for Padavino's astonishment to be easy to comprehend. Apart from Padavino's account, the long Latin inscription which appears engraved in capital letters on the plinth in the painting is the only source that refers to this woman. Although the inscription is essential to our understanding of the painting, in my opinion it has never been analysed carefully, which has somehow affected the interpretation of the image. Moreover, it

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<sup>16</sup> The document was first published by Giuseppe De Vito, 'Ribera e la "svolta" degli anni trenta', *Ricerche sul '600 Napoletano* (1983), p. 43. It is held by the Archivio Storico in Venice, Senato III (secreta), fascio 51: 'Nelle stanze del viceré stava un pittore famosissimo facendo un ritratto di una donna Abbrucese maritata e madre di molti figli, la quale ha la faccia totalmente virile, con più di un palmo di barba nera bellissima, ed il petto tutto peloso. Si prese gusto sua Eccellenza di farmela vedere, come cosa meravigliosa, et veramente è tale.' The transcription is mine. I have written out abbreviations in full and slightly changed the punctuation for the sake of clarity.

seems to contain some errors, which I will highlight and hopefully amend. Because of these issues, I will propose my translation after transcribing the Latin text [Fig. 141]:

‘En magnum natura miraculum: Magdalena Ventura, ex oppido Acumuli apud Samnites, vulgo El Abruzzo, Regni Neapolitani, annorum 52, et, quod insolens est, cum annum 37 ageret, coepit pubescere, eoque barba demissa ac prolixa est, ut potius alicuius magistri barbati esse videatur quam mulieris, quae tres filios ante amiserit, quos ex viro suo Felici De Amici, quem adesse vides, habuerat.

Josephus de Ribera Hispanus, Christi cruce insignitus, sui temporis alter Apelles, iussu Ferdinandi II, ducis III de Alcala, Neapoli proregis, ad vivum mire depinxit. XIII kalendas martias anno MDCXXXI.<sup>17</sup>

Translated into English, the epigraph is as follows:

‘Here is a great portent of Nature: Maddalena Ventura from the village of Accumoli, in the Samnite region commonly called Abruzzo, of the Kingdom of Naples, aged fifty-two, and, what is uncommon, when she was thirty-seven years old she began to become hairy, and because of that she grew a long beard, which seems to be more suitable to a bearded *magister* than to a woman who had previously given birth to three children fathered by her husband Felice De Amici, whom you see present.

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<sup>17</sup> In order to make the inscription easier to read, I have written out abbreviations in full. I have also modified the punctuation. I have not reproduced the original layout determined by the dimension of the plinth, but have instead chosen to leave it as continuous text. I here transcribe the inscription according to the layout and abbreviations found in the painting: ‘En magnu(m) natura | miraculum: Magdalena Ventura, ex | oppido Acumuli apud | Samnites, vulgo El A | bruzzo, Regni Neapoli | tani, annorum 52, et, | quod insolens est, cu(m) annum 37 ageret, coe | pit pubescere, eoque | barba demissa ac pro | lixa est, ut potius | alicuius magistri barbati | esse videatur quam mu | lieris, quae tres filios | ante amiserit, quos ex viro suo Felici De Amici, | quem adesse vides, ha | buerat. | | Josephus de Ribera His | panus, Christi cruce insignitus, | sui tem | poris alter Apelles, | iussu Ferdinandi II, | ducis III de Alcala, | Neapoli proregis, ad | vivum mire depinxit. | XIII kalend. mart. | anno MDCXXXI.’

Jusepe de Ribera, Spanish, honoured with the Cross of Christ, new Apelles of his time, at the order of Ferdinand II, Third Duke of Alcalà, Viceroy of Naples, marvellously painted this from life. Sixteenth of February 1631.’

Before proceeding further it is worthy clarifying some technical details. Although the inscription seems to be written in elegant Latin, apparently there are two mistakes. Instead of the word ‘naturae’ (genitive case), as we would expect to see, we find ‘natura’ (ablative case).<sup>18</sup> As to the ‘amiserit tres filios’, which literally means ‘she had lost three children’, I here propose to read it as ‘emiserit tres filios’, and therefore I translate it as ‘she had given birth to three children’.<sup>19</sup> Another oddity is the form ‘El Abruzzo’, in which we find the Spanish article ‘el’ (the), and the Italian ‘Abruzzo’ instead of the Latin ‘Apruzio/Abruptio’. Finally, there is the word ‘filios’, which can be translated both as ‘sons’ and as ‘children’. If the author of the inscription was writing in formal Latin it is possible that he meant ‘sons’. I have preferred to keep the second alternative in order to avoid adding information not necessarily implied by the text. I will discuss these issues, along with other aspects, throughout the chapter. Let us now have a closer look at the way the content of the epigraph is organized. After an initial

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<sup>18</sup> From close analysis of the canvas, it seems that there are no traces of a letter ‘e’ that have faded away. Moreover, the letter ‘r’ is rather slanted and fits badly between the preceding ‘u’ and the following ‘a’, as if the painter had forgotten to write it and had amended the word later.

<sup>19</sup> Both forms are possible. Yet, since there is no reason for the inscription to reveal that she had lost her children, the latter is more likely. The choice will not affect my proposition for, as we will see later, what matter is not the fact that Maddalena’s children had died, but that she gave birth before she started to develop a beard. Regarding the tense ‘amiserit/emiserit’, we would expect the form ‘amiserat/emiserat’, which is the third-person singular of the plusperfect indicative. As to ‘amiserit/emiserit’, we have two possibilities. It can be the third-person singular of the future perfect indicative, and in such case it would be clearly a mistake inasmuch as the future does not fit with the sequence of the tenses of the epigraph. In the second case, it can be the third-person singular of the perfect subjunctive. In such a case, the verb is in the form termed ‘subjunctive by attraction’ and would therefore be correct and reflect a stylistic choice. Broadly speaking, in the subjunctive by attraction a secondary clause, which could normally take the indicative, instead takes the subjunctive by attraction to a previous clause that is in the subjunctive or infinitive form. It is impossible to ascertain whether the form is owing to another mistake by the painter, or to a choice made by the composer of the text.

warning that advises us to consider the miracle of nature, the inscription continues with a biographical sketch of Maddalena Ventura, which we can divide into three parts. The first part of this account tells us the origin of the woman and the age at which the painter made her portrait. The second section describes the effect of the singular phenomenon that had been affecting her for the last seventeen years, giving her a masculine physiognomy. The last part recounts the past motherhood and the marital status of Maddalena with the elderly Felice De Amici. According to the biographical facts, then, Maddalena was already a mother, and perhaps her children were already grown up, when the transformation took place. Contrary to what we see in the painting, from the inscription it seems that she never gave birth after growing her beard. This ‘inaccuracy’ will be discussed later as well.

As if it had been done on purpose, a cleft divides the plinth and the inscription into two blocks, thus marking the transition from the growing beard (upper part) and the new masculine condition of Maddalena (‘magistri barbati’ in the lower part). Let us now come to the final lines. With a masterstroke, the composer of the inscription indicates Ribera’s knighthood as well as his condition of ‘the new Apelles’. The juxtaposition with the Greek painter implies additional praise of Alcalá as the new Alexander the Great, who was the protector of Apelles. This inscription, as we have seen, was devised with a great subtlety worthy of the painting it accompanies, which we are now going to analyse in detail.

Maddalena Ventura stands in the centre of the composition with her disquieting presence, while embracing a new-born baby in her robust hands. The clothes she wears are typical of her region and were still in use until a few decades ago. They are not the refined clothes typical of the city, but robust and coarse garments, which despite their simplicity confer an air of further solemnity on the already grave

woman. As can be seen in other paintings by Ribera, her clothing is reproduced meticulously. The woman wears a dark-green and sleeveless tunic, which is embellished with orange embroidery all over its surface. A white embroidered collar frames the fierce face of Maddalena. Her full outfit includes, beneath her tunic, a dress made of an amber-yellow fabric, while a white apron is tied around her waist. Her head, instead of being covered with a kerchief, which is still in use among the women of certain areas of Abruzzo, is instead covered with an oriental-looking hat, which was more frequently worn by men than by women. Its shape is compatible with the influence of oriental fashion on the Adriatic coast of Italy.<sup>20</sup> The aspect of the woman is masculine not only because of the presence of her thick beard, which is indeed the first thing that strikes us. Modern scholars of medicine have been able to identify the pathology affecting the woman thanks to other masculine features, such as her facial traits, receding hairline, and very large hands, all of which are due to a hormonal imbalance [Fig. 143].<sup>21</sup> There is, however, another aspect that demands our attention. As has been pointed out, it is extremely unlikely, although not impossible, that Maddalena Ventura delivered a baby at her age and with such a hormonal imbalance affecting her body.<sup>22</sup> This point is not negligible and will require further clarification in the light of the Latin inscription, which we will resume later. Furthermore, it is also extremely unlikely, in my opinion, that an elderly woman would pose with an exposed breast. In this regard, it is clear that the only breast visible is painted in a rather unusual position. It is placed almost in the middle of the chest and too high on the body. We will return to this issue shortly. The ring that Maddalena wears on her index finger, as well as the spindle and the

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<sup>20</sup> I would like to thank Bruna Condoleo for helping me with this description of Maddalena's garments.

<sup>21</sup> Which in medical terms is known as androblastoma. See Michael G. Turnbridge, 'La mujer Barbuda by Ribera, 1631: a gender bender', *The Quarterly Journal of Medicine*, n. 104 (January 2011), pp. 733-736.

<sup>22</sup> Turnbridge (2011), p. 734.

bobbin on the top of the plinth, attest to her femininity, alluding to her marital status and to domestic activity and role. The feral-looking figure of Maddalena is extraordinary in itself, but the juxtaposition with that of the husband brings out her exceptional nature even more. The uncomfortable and almost frightened Felice De Amici clasps a hat between his hands. The half-light, his black clothes, and his straggly beard enhance his mournful gaze and emaciated face [Fig. 139].

As I have said in the introductory pages to this chapter, attitudes towards wonders of nature changed over time and according to cultural contexts, and resulted in a varied production of sources that dealt with monstrosity in different ways. To begin with, let us consider some images of unnaturally bearded people which preceded Ribera's painting. One of the most striking examples is that of Pedro González (1537-1618), a man from Tenerife (Spain) who was affected by hypertrichosis, like some of his daughters.<sup>23</sup> Pedro and his family's portraits were included in the animal miniatures made by the Flemish artist Joris Hoefnagel (1575-1582) [Figs. 147-148] and in Ulisse Aldrovandi's pamphlet *Monstrorum historia* (1642) [Fig. 149].<sup>24</sup> Although they are not explicitly labelled as execrable beings, they are nevertheless included among animal and

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<sup>23</sup> When he was ten years old, Petrus was taken to France, to the court of the King Henry II. Here he received a good education, which made him a gentleman, and married a Frenchwoman. In 1589, the family moved to Italy, where he spent some time at the court of the Duke Ranuccio I Farnese in Parma, and travelled through Italy, probably visiting Rome and Naples. Needless to say, they became the object of curiosity and medical investigation by scholars, including Ulisse Aldrovandi, who probably saw them either in Parma or in Bologna. From a medical point of view, the case differs from that of Maddalena Ventura, as hypertrichosis does not imply an alteration in physiognomy as happened to Maddalena. González's daughters, on the contrary, seem to have kept their feminine traits under their thick hair. In spite of these differences, the case is interesting for our analysis in terms of contemporary reactions to the anomaly. For the reconstruction of the story see Roberto Zapperi and María M. Álvarez Vázquez, *El salvaje gentilhombre de Tenerife. La singular historia de Pedro González y sus hijos* (Tenerife: Zech, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Ulisse Aldrovandi and Bartolomeo Ambrosini, *Monstrorum historia* (Bologna: Niccolò Tebaldini, 1642). The treatise was published and edited posthumously by the naturalist Bartolomeo Ambrosini. The girl holds in her hands, as in Ribera's painting, two tools alluding to female activity, one of which seems to be a spindle, and the other a sort of niddy-noddy (a tool used to make skein) or a toy.

insects (Hoefnagel) and among ‘woodland fauna’ (Aldrovandi), that is among inferior beings.<sup>25</sup>

Let us now consider other two important cases of bearded persons. The first, which is connected again with the interests of Aldrovandi, is a watercolour portraying another famous bearded woman, who was known as Helena and had become the ‘property’ of various eminent personages [Fig. 145]. The portrait was made by the physician Gisbert Voss von Vossenburg and was sent to Aldrovandi in 1598 together with a letter describing her case: ‘Our bearded Helena is now twenty years old. She has a completely virile face and a very long beard, the colour of which is like chestnut tending towards black. It is thick and bushy ... Her beard is thick, bushy, and dense, and so are the moustaches over the lip and the hair on the cheeks and on the chin ... I am attaching the portrait of our lady Helena for your museum’.<sup>26</sup> In his short letter, the physician reiterates the same adjectives so as to convey his astonishment before the unfortunate girl, but he does not linger over details for the attached image is very eloquent and ‘very similar to the model’.<sup>27</sup> The language used to nuance the shades of the colours of her beard is the same as that used by botanists and zoologists to describe vegetable and animal specimens. The tempera shows, as in Ribera’s painting, a receding

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<sup>25</sup> The inscriptions that accompany Hoefnagel’s watercolours invite the reader to mull over the brevity and the miseries of life, and to consider the ways God manifests his mightiness. The watercolour of Consalvus and his wife is surmounted by mottoes drawn from Saint Augustin, *De civitate Dei*: ‘Nam et omni miraculo, quod fit per hominem, maius miraculum est homo’ (10.12); ‘Visibilium omnium maximus mundus est, invisibilium omnium maximus Deus est. Sed mundum esse conspicimus, Deum esse credimus’ (11.4.1). The one at the bottom is taken from Job, 14.1: ‘Homo natus de muliere brevi vivens tempore repletus multis miseriis.’

<sup>26</sup> The letter was sent on the 17 November 1598, probably from Cologne, and is held by the Biblioteca Universitaria of Bologna, ms Aldrovandi, 136, XXVII, cc. 221v-222v. I have drawn it from *Arcimboldo. Artista milanese tra Leonardo e Caravaggio* (exhibition catalogue, Palazzo Reale, Milan, 10 February - 22 May 2011), ed. Sylvia Ferino-Pagden (Milan: Skira, 2011), p. 141: ‘La nostra Helena barbata è adesso di 20 anni di faccia tuta virile, barba prolissa fere alla cinta, di color fere di castagna subnigrante, spessa, et piena ... La barba sua è spessa, piena, et folta, così anco li mostacci sopra la bocca et dalla banda gli pili delle guancie et disotto il mento ... Mando il ritratto della nostra Sig.ra Helena quale V. S. E. in memoria mia servirà nel suo Museo.’

<sup>27</sup> *Arcimboldo. Artista milanese* (2011), p. 142: ‘La pittura quale mando a V.S. gli assomiglia benissimo, però adesso è un poco più rossetta, che è il suo naturale, sì come gli pittori fanno per l’ordinario.’

hairline, Helena's masculine facial traits and her luxuriant beard. The shape of the very stylish outfit with the large round collar and the hat recall Maddalena's much more modest dress. Finally, we have one of the most famous portraits of bearded women, that of Brígida del Río of Peñaranda, who was portrayed in 1590 by the Spanish painter Juan Sánchez Cotán [Fig. 146].<sup>28</sup> While Brígida's beard is executed with the same meticulousness that Sánchez Cotán employed in his still life, the remaining visible anatomy of the woman (her face, ears and hands) is, in contrast, less detailed and even tends towards stylization (especially her ears). Brígida del Río is depicted with a certain air of pious resignation in her eyes, although the painter seems more interested in graphic values than in the psychology of the character. The woman's very austere outfit includes a white cap, a white shirt with a large collar and a brown dress.

As we can conclude from these examples, there did exist striking visual models that might have appealed to beholders with different cultural backgrounds. Ribera does echo such iconographical precedents, but also goes far beyond them. The depiction of a bearded woman was, as we have seen, neither a visual novelty nor scientifically exhaustive. If Maddalena were not represented with her bare breast and nursing, she would not be as stunning as she is, especially in comparison with the precedents. Maddalena was a 'monstrum', for Ribera's contemporaries, not only because she developed her condition but because, previously, she was also a mother. In this regard I want now to return to a detail that I have only briefly touched upon, the phrase 'tres

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<sup>28</sup> The Spanish lexicographer Sebastián de Covarrubias y Orozco mentions the bearded woman of Peñaranda in his work *Emblemas morales* (Madrid: Luis Sánchez, 1610), Centuria 2, Emblema 64, c. 164r. The work contains several illustrations each of which is prefaced by a Latin motto, followed by a riddle in the form of a strophe of eight verses and by a comment by the author. The purpose of this collection is to provide the reader with some cautionary tales. One of the illustrations shows a stylized bearded woman from Peñaranda together with the motto that reads 'ne utrum et utrum' ('neither the one nor the other'). The strophe announces the ambiguous nature of the figure, 'I am a man, I am a woman, I am a hybrid', who is 'target of the critics of those who look at me as a sinister omen and evil eye'. The moralistic aim of the verses is to 'all should beware: if you are effeminate, you are another me.'



filios ante [e]miserit'. The sentence could be misleading and induce the reader to think that the couple had young children when the portrait was made. As a matter of fact, some scholars have surmised that the baby in the painting was Maddalena's.<sup>29</sup> This detail allows me to introduce two aspects that hinges on the medical assumption that Maddalena Ventura could not have borne any more children due to her age and health. Let us now come to the first point. Firstly, the verb 'emiserit' is qualified by the adverb of time 'ante', that is 'previously', which clearly emphasizes that the event had happened before Maddalena grew the beard, that is seventeen years before. This detail might seem redundant to us, but probably would not have been for Ribera's contemporaries. They doubted that a woman could develop masculine features after puberty and most of all after giving birth, because both were considered to be indubitable signs that a woman had become 'perfect' and could no longer change her nature.<sup>30</sup> From this point of view, the inscription might act as a sort of document that both testifies to, and contradicts, the beliefs and concerns of the time with respect to such a prodigy. As for the latter aspect, the inscription does not, surprisingly, mention the baby in the arms of the woman. This seems to confirm the assumption that he does not represent any of the grown children borne by Maddalena in the years preceding the emergence of her physical anomalies. This apparent incongruence between text and image engenders a contrast between what is depicted in the picture and what is stated by the painted epigraph. The inscription relates Maddalena's story with objectivity, providing chronological and biographical details. Without it, the

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<sup>29</sup> Spinosa 1978), pp. 99-100, n. 49; Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez, *Ribera* (Madrid: Unidad Editorial, 2005), p. 110.

<sup>30</sup> Antonio de Fuentelapeña, *El Ente dilucidado. Discurso único novísimo en que muestra hay en la naturaleza animales irracionales invisibles y cuáles sean* (Madrid: Emprenta Real, 1676), Section 2, Doubt 16, pp. 111-112, n. 469: 'no se puede creer, que después de aver parido alguna muger, se aya convertido en hombre, y lo mismo dizen de aquella a quien ia huviesse venido el menstuo, porque esta es tambien señal de perfecta muger.'

painting would probably be still an enigma. Through the painting, Ribera presents, like the inscription, Maddalena's physical abnormality, marital status and past motherhood, but then he elaborates upon all these elements and turns them into a stunning image. Once viewers have acknowledged that the child is an interpolation, its presence takes on a twofold significance by introducing a temporal short-circuit. In the first place, the representation of Maddalena nursing is 'analeptical': it refers to the past and confirms the ability of the woman to procreate. Yet it is also a possible misrepresentation: Maddalena might not have been able to give birth after growing the beard, and from that point of view the image is inaccurate both scientifically and from the pictorial point of view. This ambivalence intimates a continuity between the scientific *monstrum* and the representation. But we know that the portrait is not entirely a portrait, for the woman had no new-borns at that moment nor was nursing any.<sup>31</sup> In the second place, the child is also a device that enhances Maddalena Ventura's femininity in contrast with her virile features. And yet, even this female trait is rendered even more 'monstruous' by placing a rather abnormal naked breast in the middle of Maddalena's chest [Fig. 143]. Its almost centralized position deviates from the standard of human anatomy by turning Maddalena into a sort of hairy Amazon. The breast, then, brings out the feminine side of the woman in contrast with the beard she exhibits, but at the same time renders the woman more disquieting and unpleasant. An old and fragmentary Latin inscription that runs on the upper left of the canvas witnesses the bewilderment of the beholder before the image [Fig. 142]. It reads more or less like this: 'Hominis barbamque gerens ... [mir]anda figura/ et puerum lactans oculis mirabili monstrum' ('and having a beard of a man ... [wonder]ful figure breastfeeding a child,

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<sup>31</sup> It is interesting to notice that the same ambivalence emerges from Padavino's account. In reading his letter, in fact, it is unclear whether he was shown the painting or the woman and the painting.

marvellous wonder [or ‘monster’] to the sight’).<sup>32</sup> We do not know when the inscription was added, but it is extremely interesting inasmuch as it represents the way in which the work was perceived, probably by one of its owners. It is as if someone felt the urge of expressing in words the impression which was conveyed by the painting. Moreover, the ‘oculis mirabili monstrum’, unless it is a standardized formula, seem to evoke some verses of the *Aeneid*: ‘Ecce autem subitum atque oculis mirabile monstrum’<sup>33</sup> (‘behold a sudden and marvellous prodigy to the sight’) and reinforce the ‘magnum naturae miraculum’ of the original inscription. The verse of the *Aeneid* alludes to the finding of a zoological rarity, a white sow taken as a good omen. Yet whereas the ‘monstrum’ here means ‘prodigy’, the ‘mostrum’ of the painting keeps its ambiguous meaning between ‘wonder’ and ‘monster’.

The presence of the child takes a further significance, for it turns the couple into an exceptional family group. In this regard, it has been correctly concluded that the painting evokes two themes rarely depicted together, the nursing Madonna and the Holy Family, which both appeal to, and undermine, the expectations of the viewer [Fig. 140].<sup>34</sup> This family group, although evoking the Holy Family, at the same time lends itself to tantalising irony. In a comedy attributed to Calderón de la Barca, *La Barbuda* (c.1664), we find a couple consisting of a bearded woman and her husband. People in Madrid have heard of the arrival of a monster, who is promoted by a young advertiser as the most beautiful thing in the world. They rush to see her and gather before a travelling theatre where the performance is about to take place. When the curtains open, they see a bearded woman with a guitar seated on a chair, while her

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<sup>32</sup> The adjective ‘mirabili’ (dative and ablative, feminine and masculine, singular) should instead be ‘mirabile’ (nominative or accusative case, neuter, singular), in order to agree with the neuter ‘monstrum’.

<sup>33</sup> Virgil, *Aeneis*, 8.81.

<sup>34</sup> James Clifton, “Ad vivum mire depinxit”. Toward a Reconstruction of Ribera’s Art Theory’, *Storia dell’Arte* 83 (1995), p. 125

helpful husband combs her hair. The woman starts to play and sing a love song, but at a certain point another woman of the audience snatches the guitar out of her hand and accuses her of ‘going from place to place to enchant husbands’.<sup>35</sup> The bearded lady and her assistant speak a language that is a mix of Spanish and Italian, and I wonder whether Calderón’s trio – the singing woman, the speechless husband, and the boy – was somehow inspired by Ribera’s *personae* (the painting was already in Spain by the end of the seventeenth century<sup>36</sup>). Apart from that, the reaction of the jealous woman in the comedy reflects age-old concerns about the bearded woman’s seductive power. From this point of view, Ribera shares Maddalena’s bewitching power, and turns her into a sort of Medusa and the viewer into a spectator petrified by the painter’s mastery. The myth of the petrifying Medusa has enjoyed great popularity since antiquity and was exploited in the modern age in the ekphrastic poems of Giambattista Marino’s *Galeria* (one of which was written in praise of Caravaggio’s *Head of Medusa* at the Uffizi). In one of these poems, the poet plays with, and juxtaposes, the real image of a captivating woman with her sculptured portrait, while the real purpose is to praise the astounding effect of the work of art on the beholder and the artist’s mastery:

‘The figure portrayed / seems like Medusa to me. / The sculpture is made in such a way / that it changes the limbs of others ... / And marvel so deprives me of sense / that I am almost the statue, / and she seems alive. / The beautiful image breathes, / almost an animated form; / it breathes, but does not speak ... / While I contemplate equally / now this and now that face, / I know not how to discern which

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<sup>35</sup> *La barbuda*, in Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *Teatro comico breve*, ed. María-Luisa Lobato (Kassel: Reichenberger, 1999), p. 534: ‘andan de tierra en tierra / enamorando maridos.’

<sup>36</sup> Vicente Lleó Cañal, ‘The Art Collection of the Ninth Duke of Medinaceli’, *The Burlington Magazine* 131, n. 1031 (February 1989), pp. 108-116.

/ is the true, which the sculptured, / and I say with thought that is doubtful and badly defined: / "Both are true, or both are feigned".<sup>37</sup>

In a similar way, the Latin inscription acts like an ekphrastic poem, which extols the painter's ability and brings out the sense of wonder the viewer feels in the presence of the painting [Fig. 141]. The opening 'here is a great portent of Nature', distinctly written in larger letters, is artfully aligned with 'Maddalena Ventura' and 'Josephus de Ribera'. The incipit indeed invites us to admire the prodigious life of the marvellously painted Maddalena (whose resemblance to the model is assured by the fact that it was made from life by the new Apelles), but then progressively shifts our attention from the painted subject to the painter. In doing so, it gradually invites us to acknowledge another portent of Nature, Jusepe de Ribera, miracle of his time.

The painting claims to be a portrait, but it is not, or at least not entirely. In a sense, it is the prolongation of a *Wunderkammer*, with two blocks of stone with what looks like an ancient inscription, and, of top of it, two objects. Then, posing as testimony of nature's monstrosity, there is not just an ordinary bearded woman, but a bearded woman who had sexual intercourse with a man and was also a mother. This depiction of the animate posing alongside the inanimate in a fictive *Wunderkammer* is a marvel of successful painting. Another miracle consists in representing what a mere reproduction cannot: by telescoping time and space, Maddalena has become mother again. We can wonder whether this is comic or serious. And here we find Ribera again, who accentuates the 'monstrous' and prodigious nature of the couple in conformity with the comic tradition, but then represents them frontally, solemnly, as an inverted

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<sup>37</sup> I have taken the English translation from Cropper (1991), p. 202, but I have replaced 'stupor' with 'marvel'. For the Italian text see Marino (2005), pp. 405-408.

*sacra famiglia*. And yet, we stand by the painting just as we would before a stage, waiting for the family group to perform the roles that Ribera gave them.

## 5.2 The Clubfooted Boy: *Pícaro* or Soldier?

One of the most pleasant streets in Naples is via Medina. It runs parallel to the more famed via Toledo and the block of buildings known as Quartieri Spagnoli (Spanish Quarters). The arterial road is less than half a mile long and strategically connects the offshoot of the city centre with the seafront. The street overlooks Castel Nuovo and Largo Castello, which were both the settings for popular revolts that led to the uprising led by Masaniello in 1647. The street was named after its major renovator, Ramiro Felípez Núñez de Guzmán, Duke of Medina de las Torres and Viceroy of Naples from 1637 to 1644. His reign was short but intense. Over seven years he had to face a naval assault by France, the enormous damage caused by the eruption of the Mount Vesuvius (both happened in 1638), and use tact and diplomacy to persuade Philip IV to reduce the participation of Spain and its colonies in the Thirty Years' War. He left Italy in 1643 a wealthy man, just before growing dissatisfaction boiled over into the 1647 revolt. In spite of this, the scholarly interpretation of his actions is generally positive, for it seems that the Viceroy genuinely undertook to limit the crisis and to alleviate poverty.<sup>38</sup> We will return to this aspect later. In 1642, two years before the departure of Guzmán, Jusepe de Ribera signed and dated the so-called *Clubfooted Boy*, a painting displaying a young beggar suffering from a malformation [Fig. 155]. A nineteenth-century label on the back of the canvas states that Ribera made the work for the Princess of Stigliano.<sup>39</sup> The Princess alluded to was probably the

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<sup>38</sup> Robert A. Strandling, 'A Spanish Statesman of Appeasement: Medina De Las Torres and Spanish Policy, 1639-1670', *The Historical Journal* 19, n. 1 (March 1976), pp. 1-31.

<sup>39</sup> Véronique Gerard Powell and Claude Ressort, *Musée du Louvre. Département des peintures. Catalogue. Écoles espagnole et portugaise* (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 2002), p. 228: 'Ce tableau sort de la galerie del Princes de Stigliano pour lesquels il avait été peint par Ribera'. Louis La Caze, who donated the painting to the Louvre in 1869, acquired it before 1849. Ibid., pp. 228 and 230.

Neapolitan noblewoman Anna Carafa, the second wife of Medina de las Torres in 1636. It is, therefore, plausible that the painting could have been made for the Spanish Viceroy, although doubts have been cast on this.<sup>40</sup> We will return on this aspect later and will try to see if it is possible to connect the *Clubfooted Boy* with the historical situation of Naples under the Spanish ruler.

The young beggar stands out against thick clouds, which part to reveal patches of light-blue sky. The use of the low horizon line makes the lone boy tower over the deserted landscape. His attire is in very good condition and seems to be a simplified version of a military uniform rather than the garments of a beggar [Figs 163-164]. The oblong black hat, which the boy has politely doffed to us, is to be found in other pictures portraying beggars [Fig. 162]. He smiles openly revealing his decaying teeth behind the smile [Fig. 156]. Instead of using the crutch to support himself, he carries it on his shoulder with a martial air [Figs. 155, 163-164]. The scrap of paper bears the Latin inscription 'Da mihi elemosinam propter amor[em] Dei', that is 'Give me alms for the love of God' [Fig. 158]. Strangely, the boy's thumb covers the first three letters of the keyword 'amore[m]'. It is easy to guess what the shaded letters are, but this device seems intended to alert us. The most accredited interpretation considers this work, like the majority of Ribera's beggars, to be a response to the pietistic aims of the Counter-Reformation. According to this view, the boy is alluding, with the scrap of paper, to the Catholic principle of the salvation of the soul achieved through good deeds; while

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<sup>40</sup> Véronique Gerard Powell (in Gerard Powell – Ressort, 2002) postulates that the Princess of Stigliano mentioned on the label was actually Giovanna Vandeneynnden, wife of Giuliano Colonna of Stigliano and respectively daughter and granddaughter to the Flemish art collectors Ferdinand and Jan Vandeneynnden. Either Ferdinand or Jan, Gerard Powell says, must have commissioned the *Clubfooted Boy* and bequeathed it to Giovanna. Although paintings by Ribera are listed in the 1688 inventory of Vandeneynnden-Colonna, it is not yet clear whether the Vandeneyndens numbered among Ribera's patrons or whether they acquired his works from previous owners. See in this regards Ferdinando Colonna di Stigliano, 'Inventario dei quadri di casa Colonna fatto da Luca Giordano', *Napoli Nobilissima* 4, n. 2 (1895), pp. 29-32; and Renato Ruotolo, 'Mercanti-collezionisti fiamminghi a Napoli: Gaspare Roomer e i Vandeneynnden', *Ricerche sul '600 napoletano* (1982), pp. 5-44.



his smile and military pose represents the Christian disregard for suffering and earthly vicissitudes. The painting, according to this interpretation, therefore depicts a sort of militant of poverty fiercely facing the hardships of life, allegedly following the taste of Medina de Las Torres.<sup>41</sup> As for the scrap of paper, it has also been seen as one of those licences of mendicity which authorized beggars were obliged to carry with them.<sup>42</sup>

In 1650 the first edition of *On the Happy Poverty Described and Dedicated to the Never Happy Rich* was published, a work by the Jesuit Daniello Bartoli. Its title page contains an illustration showing a Roman-like soldier who is holding a broad and tattered flag [Fig. 161]. Even though the image is very eloquent, Bartoli explains that the poor man is consoling himself because he is a soldier of Christ, whose standard is torn due to many battles.<sup>43</sup> In an age in which widespread poverty threatened social stability, the function of such an image could have been that of reassuring the wealthy. The unpleasant reality was that the poor swarmed in their hundreds in the streets. They were foul-smelling, threadbare, irksome, and most of all the emblem of social instability. In Ribera's painting, the young beggar is alone and far from urban tumults. He looks decent, serene, and well-mannered. Very politely, he asks the well-off to give him alms for the love of God. In short, he is a sort of wild animal in a cage. The beholder can observe poverty from a distance; he is allowed to enter the world of the shadows for a moment and feel that he emerges with a clear conscience. If we follow this train of thought, the painting, other than reflecting the pietistic aims of the

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<sup>41</sup> The interpretation proposed by Sullivan (1977-1978), pp. 17-21, has been accepted, to my knowledge, by the majority of scholars. See in this regard the bibliography in Gerard Powell - Ressort (2002), p. 231, footnote 5. It is not clear why Sullivan asserted that the painting corresponded to Medina's tastes for pietistic subjects (p. 19). The scholar neither gave a biographical account of the Viceroy's life, nor knew his artistic preferences. In fact, the Viceroy's inventories were published only in 1989, that is twelve years after Sullivan's essay.

<sup>42</sup> Santucci (1992), p. 48.

<sup>43</sup> Daniello Bartoli, *La povertà contenta descritta e dedicata a' ricchi non mai contenti* (Rome: Domenico Manelfi, 1650), p. 383.

Counter-Reformation, can be seen to reflect the aims of the Catholic rhetoric as pursued by Daniello Bartoli.

As with other paintings I have discussed, I will try to put forward a complementary explanation by reconstructing the context in which the painting was made. There is, first of all, an important difference from other paintings portraying beggars, inasmuch as the boy is affected by a malformation. His medical condition is described with such an accuracy as to suggest to scholars that Ribera had a medical adviser. Modern medical scholars have in fact been able to identify the different types of malformation affecting the boy's upper and lower limbs.<sup>44</sup> His right foot is clearly twisted and cannot be placed flat on the ground, thus necessitating the boy's use of a crutch [Fig. 157]. His nails are hooked like the talons of a bird of prey. Although less obviously, the boy's left foot also has some sort of deformity, as its instep is clearly swollen. Moreover, the way the right wrist is bent suggests that the boy cannot use his fingers properly and is instead pushing his hat against his hip [Fig. 158]. In addition, other almost imperceptible anomalies and asymmetries have been pointed out.<sup>45</sup> Yet what is clear and rationally understandable to modern scholars, probably was not so for Ribera's contemporaries. We have already seen, in the introductory pages of this chapter, how the birth of deformed children was believed to foreshadow or follow catastrophes. Although the pathology of this boy is not comparable with some terrible abnormalities that we have seen, the painting does display a disagreeable and possibly disquieting anomaly. At this point, we have to take a step back and consider that the condition of the boy was further enhanced by his status of beggar and vagrant.

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<sup>44</sup> Leo Arthur Green, 'The Boy with the Clubfoot: Who advised the Artist?', in George W. Simons ed., *The Clubfoot: The Present and a View of the Future* (New York: Springer, 1994), p. xii; Manoj Ramachandran and Jeffrey K. Aronson, 'The diagnosis of art: arthrogryposis and Ribera's *The Clubfoot*', *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 99 (June 2006), pp. 321-322.

<sup>45</sup> See previous footnote.

Whether the painting was or was not in line with the principles of Catholic reform, the boy encapsulates two aspects that simultaneously repelled and obsessed Ribera's contemporaries, physical deformity and vagrancy, both of which contradicted the normal order of nature and destabilized the social and natural order.<sup>46</sup> As regards the second aspect, we have to bear in mind that beggars were often regarded as impostors and tricksters, individuals who were able to conceal their identity and who pretended to be ill-bodied. The boy, as we have seen, has a congenital malformation, but we cannot be sure that seventeenth-century beholders perceived the deformity from a medical point of view unless they were specialists. The ability of beggars to feign injuries or physical impairment had reached such a level of sophistication that it could deceive the authorities. In this regard, the Parisian authorities availed themselves of the aforementioned surgeon Ambroise Paré, who examined allegedly ill-bodied vagrants in order to confirm or deny their disability in writing.<sup>47</sup> Unfortunately, when it came to children, their deformities (both congenital and manufactured) were often real. In fact, both historical and fictional sources dealing with poverty and vagrancy reported cases of children who had been maimed in order to gain employment as alms-seekers. It seems that this horrific practice was so widespread that it pressured religious and political authorities to seek to combat it.<sup>48</sup> The literature of roguery offers us several interesting cases in this regard. The most singular example is in Mateo Alemán's *Guzmán de Alfarache* (Part 1, 1599). It is worth bearing in mind that Alemán knew the poorer districts of Spanish towns and cities well and was the close friend of Cristóbal Pérez de Herrera, author of one of the most influential treatises on poverty of his time.

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<sup>46</sup> See the introduction to this chapter, and Chapter 1.

<sup>47</sup> See Paré (1971), chapters 21-24, pp. 70-82.

<sup>48</sup> See, among the others, Juan de Robles, *De la orden que an algunos pueblos de España se han puesto en la limosna: para remedio de los verdaderos pobres* (Salamanca: Juan de Junta, 1545), c. [6]; and Pérez de Herrera (1598), cc. 6r-v.

Before summarising the anecdote, I want to highlight the fact that the following story is placed soon after the chapter dedicated to the freedom of the senses enjoyed by the poor (quoted in Chapter 1), which we will return to shortly. The story is about an impoverished man who decides to maim his only male child in order to secure him a future as a mendicant. The purpose of this expedient, from the father's point of view, is to prevent the child from learning a trade and most of all from serving a master. The description is chilling. The father twists the child's neck and legs to the point that the boy is thereafter forced to use a sort of wheelchair or ride a donkey. The boy lives for seventy-two years and when it comes to the reading of his will, it is revealed that the Duke of Tuscany is the heir to the beggar's only possession, that is a saddle, which, surprisingly, contains a conspicuous amount of money. Anecdotes regarding beggars who accumulated fortunes during their lifetimes can be traced in various works, but the peculiarity of this account is that it takes on a specific significance.<sup>49</sup> As I have already pointed out, the freedom of the senses which the poor allegedly enjoyed was in reality a farce that revealed their social seclusion. The list of the senses in Alemán's novel ends with the mention of touch and is followed by the story of the maimed child. When the narrator finishes telling the anecdote of the will, he says that the inheritance accounts for the 'tact' of the poor, playing with the polysemic word 'tacto', which means both sense of touch and judgment, or kindness.<sup>50</sup> The cruel story tells us that the freedom of the poor does not exist. The perfidious father, instead of freeing his son, has subjugated and isolated him. The irony of fate rules that the wealthy beggar should donate the saddle to a powerful personage, the Duke of Tuscany, whom he considers to be the legitimate owner of it. Had he not been maimed by his father, what

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<sup>49</sup> See Alemán (2012), note 282.27, and pp. 1280-1281 for further sources.

<sup>50</sup> Alemán (2012), pp. 278-282; further examples in García (1998), p. 118; and *Segunda parte de la vida del pícaro Guzman de Alfarache* (2007), pp. 304-308.

could have been the destiny of the unfortunate child? In 1545 the Benedictine friar Juan de Robles published a treatise on poverty, one of the most well-known in Spain and the Spanish colonies. In the same year, the Council of Trent began, which reaffirmed, overtly in contrast with Luther, that the salvation of the soul could be achieved through good deeds and charitable works. De Roble's work was published four years after the disastrous battle of Alger (1541), during which the Emperor Charles V tried to conquest the stronghold of the Ottoman Empire. The treatise, which was dedicated to Philip II, the future heir of Charles V, seeks to reconcile Christian charity with the inevitability of the war. Upon reading the text, we infer that Robles was indeed the embodiment of pragmatism: poverty can be eradicated, he writes, by sending the poor to war; they could in this way earn a living, distinguish themselves, and contribute to the glory of the Spanish Empire.<sup>51</sup> Half a century later Pérez de Herrera, physician of the galleys of the Spanish Crown, expanded upon this theme and reiterated the idea that the poor should be employed to reinforce Spanish military power. It is necessary, he says, that the children of the idlers should be employed in the terrestrial and naval defence of the Spanish Kingdom in order to prevent them from following in the footsteps of their parents.<sup>52</sup> Former soldiers can teach boys and girls aged seven and upwards to make artillery and to shoot, to climb walls and dig trenches.<sup>53</sup> All this will allow them to live virtuously, in a Christian way, and to bring glory to the kingdom.<sup>54</sup> Pérez de Herrera dedicated his treatise to the new sovereign Philip III (1598-1621), who succeeded his father Philip II (1556-1598).

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<sup>51</sup> Robles (1545), c. 37r.

<sup>52</sup> Pérez de Herrera (1598), cc. 122v-123v, 130r, 154r.

<sup>53</sup> Pérez de Herrera (1598), cc. 171r-172v.

<sup>54</sup> Pérez de Herrera (1598), c. 142v.

It has been pointed out that, following the death of Philip II, there was an increase in the publication of both historical texts and plays praising Charles V. The purpose of these works was, it seems, to urge Philip III and Philip IV (1621-1665) to emulate their ancestor Charles and restore Spain's military prestige.<sup>55</sup> The end of the reign of Philip II dramatically changed the role played by Naples, which was gradually turned from a strategic stronghold in the Mediterranean into a reserve of money and soldiers.<sup>56</sup> One of the supporters of this military restoration was Gaspar de Guzmán y Pimentel (better known as the Count-Duke of Olivares), an influential prime minister under Philip IV and first father-in-law of Medina de las Torres, Viceroy of Naples. The Count-Duke was responsible for the education of the king and instilled admiration in him for his illustrious ancestor Charles V. Philip IV put Olivares's lesson into practice and ordered the Duke of Monterrey, Viceroy of Naples in 1631-1637, to strip the city of its resources and recruit as many people as possible for the Spanish army.<sup>57</sup> Medina de las Torres, Monterrey's successor, was elected when the situation had become critical and, through force of circumstance, had to take a position against the exploitation of the colonies. The new Viceroy and the local authorities denounced the depopulation of the countryside due to conscription, the consequent lack of labourers and farmers, and the general impoverishment of the population.<sup>58</sup>

Its participation in the war led Spain, from the time of Charles V onwards, to the unprecedented recruitment of every sort of non-professional soldier – mercenaries, idlers, criminals – who took advantage of their position to commit crimes and became

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<sup>55</sup> Harry Sieber, 'Introduction' to Luis Vélez de Guevara's *La mayor desgracia de Carlos V*, eds William R. Manson and George Peale (Newark: Juan de la Cuesta, 2002) pp. 13-37.

<sup>56</sup> Rosario Villari, *La rivolta antispagnola a Napoli. Le origini (1585-1647)* (Bari: Laterza, 1967), p. 123.

<sup>57</sup> Villari (1967), pp. 124-127.

<sup>58</sup> Villari (1967), pp. 127-130.

looters.<sup>59</sup> The presence of unruly troops gave rise to the formation of a new social 'class', the threadbare soldier of fortune, who, at the end of a war, had to get by however he could, whether by licit or illicit activities. As such, he became part of the collective imagination and a stock character in Spanish literature. Hardly a picaresque novel lacked a reference to these figures (see Chapter 3.2 for some examples). Yet if the political propaganda urged or pushed people to enrol in the army, attracting them with the promise of honour and wealth, fictional works lampooned the concept of military honour. Luis Vélez de Guevara's play *La mayor desgracia de Carlo V* (*The Worst Misfortune of Charles V*, 1623), which tells the story of his army's aforementioned defeat in Alger (1541), can be taken as an example of such irony. When a poorly dressed soldier wants to see Charles V to deliver him an important embassy, the emperor's bodyguard tries to stop the messenger while addressing him as '*pícaro*, ragamuffin and soldier'. But the dismayed sovereign answers that being a soldier is the greatest honour possible, and that it is impossible to be soldier and *pícaro* at the same time.<sup>60</sup> Later, non-professional soldiers in the rear guard are addressed once again as '*pícaros*'.<sup>61</sup>

Let us now try to draw some conclusions in the light of the observations I have made so far. Instead of pointing out the potential pietistic attitude towards the destitute, I have, instead, shown the other side of the story. Attitudes, including charity, towards beggars were in reality also the result of a complex strategy that was intended

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<sup>59</sup> See Geoffrey Parker, *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road, 1567-1659: the logistics of Spanish victory and defeat in the Low Countries' wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1972), p. 180.

<sup>60</sup> Luis Vélez de Guevara, *La mayor desgracia de Carlos V*, eds William R. Manson and George Peale (Newark: Juan de la Cuesta, 2002), I, pp. 186-190: 'MARTÍN: "¡Dejadme pasar, que traigo / un aviso que le importa, / y es fuerza comunicarlo! // SOLDADO: ¡Quita, pícaro! ... // CARLOS: ¡Hola! ¿qué es eso? // SOLDADO: ¡Un mal trapillo, un soldado, / un pícaro! // CARLOS: Es imposible. / ¿Soldado y pícaro? Paso, / que implican contradicción / los nombres que le habéis dado. / No hay soldado que no sea / noble, que el galán ornato / no añada valor al pecho / ni mayor fuerza a los brazos. / Si es pícaro no será / soldado ... // CARLOS: El ser soldado es, en mí, la mayor honra que alcanzo".'

<sup>61</sup> Vélez de Guevara (2002), III, p. 351: MARÍA: "De estos pícaros criados / de ejércitos yo he de seros / hoy general".'

to meet the needs of religious and political authorities. On the one hand, society fought poverty in order to reduce it if it became threatening; on the other, it kept it within certain limits in order to protect a consolidated social order.<sup>62</sup> The economy in fact needed unskilled workers and day labourers; war employed people who had nothing to lose in order to swell its ranks; some representatives of the Church praised the 'contented poor' to increase the sense of guilt of the wealthy. But the 'contented poor' is a figment of propaganda. The real poor citizen is instead a marginalized individual who is caught between other social groups. Though it might seem absurd, the fictional *pícaro* tells us much more than the official publications of the time do.

Now, scholars who uphold the religious aim of Ribera's *Clubfooted Boy* have explained it as responding to the taste of the Viceroy Medina de las Torres. However, what do we know of his artistic taste? Unfortunately, there is not enough documentary evidence to surmise that he preferred works of art showing edifying subjects. His inventories number both religious and erotic paintings. Two of Ribera's works appear in it, but neither the *Clubfooted Boy* nor similar works are mentioned.<sup>63</sup> If it is not possible to connect the painting to Medina's personal taste, we can try to connect it with his regency in a pivotal moment in the history of Naples. The skilled and pragmatic Viceroy, although he was obliged to obey Philip IV's orders and contribute to the bolstering of Spanish power at the expenses of Naples, was aware of the vicious circle in which the city was caught. Contrary to his predecessor Monterrey, he demonstrated strength of character. He took over the Spanish Vice-Kingdom of Naples during one of its major fiscal and political emergencies. The situation was deteriorating rapidly as Madrid was demanding more money from the colonies in order

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<sup>62</sup> Geremek (1988).

<sup>63</sup> Marcus B. Burke, 'Paintings by Ribera in the Collection of the Duque de Medina de las Torres', *The Burlington Magazine* 131, n. 1031 (February 1989), pp. 132-136.



to subsidize the war. The Viceroy, having fallen out with several eminent personages of the Spanish court, addressed several letters to King Philip IV and his advisers urging them to halt economic draining of the city and to promote peace. He explicitly stated that the war was draining away resources, impoverishing Naples and fostering discontent among the population. There are two interconnected foci of his arguments, war and poverty, the latter being discussed as a direct consequence of propagandized benefits of war.<sup>64</sup>

Military propaganda was widespread through images as well. The engravings that I am reproducing here portray two elegantly dressed soldiers equipped with all the necessary paraphernalia [Figs 163-164]. They stand out against the low horizon posing with unperturbed air, as if they were parading instead of going to war. The Latin inscriptions below their images emphasises the sense of duty and the honour that distinguishes the career of these men.<sup>65</sup> The atmosphere is serene, and the horror of war seems very distant. However, the reality was much more complex, and rather than gaining honour and glory, those returning from war had to face real life. I have also included an image by the Sienese engraver Francesco Villamena, which is part of a series of portraits of workers [Fig. 165]. The picture portrays an ink seller with his work tools (c1600), which was made for a silk trader residing in Naples. It is accompanied by an inscription that reads 'Look at the real image of the soldier', and the man is in fact striking a soldierly pose. We do not know if there was any intention to seriously parody military virtue (or its absence), but I would suggest that – since the character is portrayed as an amusing one – such a print was intended to provoke good humour

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<sup>64</sup> See again Strandling (1976) and Villari (1967).

<sup>65</sup> The inscriptions read 'Pro patria pugnans, armis hostemque lacesens. / Officio fungor sedulus vsque meo' [Fig. 163], and 'Et genus, et mea virtus me terraque marique / non imo patitur nomen habere loco' [Fig. 164]

and laughter.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, it is interesting to notice, in the first place, that the street seller could well have been one of the countless former soldier who swarmed in the larger cities at the end of military campaign. In the second place, the man's pose, the setting, and the dimensional relationship between the figure and the landscape suggest that Villamena exploits a framework analogous to that employed for the representation of real soldiers, although Villamena replaces the military tools with innocuous work tools, such as a hanger stick, an inkpot, and some funnels. Ribera, in his turn, avails himself of a similar framework, exploiting the structure of previous tradition, although his clubfooted boy seems to entail a message that goes beyond the light humour of Villamena's seller. Ribera's young beggar is neither a former soldier nor a street seller. His only 'weapons' are his deformity, a crutch and a written plea. He has nothing to offer; on the contrary, he asks us for something. This figure, like the *pícaro*, is on the fringes of society. Beggars were thick on the ground in the city centre, where they would knock at the door of churches and charities, or play their tricks at the expense of passers-by. However, the desolate landscape suggests that the boy is far from the bustling city centre. He poses like a soldier who is fighting a solitary battle, armed with a crutch that, instead of being used as an indispensable impairment aid, is shouldered as it were an arquebus. The valiant youth seems ready to march, but his monumental figure is built on unsteady and deformed feet, which will not take him a long way. Ribera, with his usual sense of humour, is showing us what a beggar turned soldier looks like. While he might give the impression of lionising the boy, he is especially ridiculing those who foster the idea that the problem of beggary could be solved by

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<sup>66</sup> Villamena made four plates with portraits of workers, of which two were dedicated to the print dealer Giovanni Orlandi (*The Gardener* and *The Roast-Chestnut Seller*) and two to Tobia Rosolino (*The Blind Man* and *The Ink Seller*). Since the inscriptions that accompany the images are humorous and use a familiar tone, my impression is that both these men were Villamena's friends.

turning beggars into soldiers. The boy's military gait therefore entails not only a subtle irony of the Spanish sense of honour, but also criticism of Spanish policies in Naples. He seems to deny, while aping a soldier, the conceited Spanish rhetoric. Glory, military honour, and the promise of enrichment are reversed in Ribera's painting, for they make room for the solitude of a relegated figure, who would in fact be useless to the war effort and to any related activity due to his impairment. The paper that the boy is bearing might look like, but is not, a licence of mendicity.<sup>67</sup> This was an official document issued by local authorities after due inspection, which the boy has probably never been subject to. The note is, instead, simply a scrap of paper in which the half-concealed word 'amorem' – a key concept in Christian charity – seems to challenge the concept of charity itself; the boy, meanwhile, remains one of those unauthorized and unrecorded picaresque characters for whom the prospect is bleak. We are at a crossroads, as often happens with Ribera's works. Was the painting conceived to respond to the tenets of the Counter-Reformation, or to subtly satirise them? If it was made for Medina de las Torres, I would venture to say that this military-like and crippled beggar epitomises, and denounces, the condition of the destitute under the Spanish crown, with particular reference to the condition of the Neapolitan populace during the last years of Medina's regency. Yet, beyond the needs and taste of the buyer, it seems clear that Ribera plays subtly with ambiguity. The deceitfully smiling boy might have appealed to, and reassured, a pious and charitable patron who was unaware of the polemical tone lying behind the painting. On the other hand, Ribera might also have appealed to a public able to perceive the sarcastic military gait underlying the image.

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<sup>67</sup> Such is the opinion of Santucci (1992), p. 48.

If in Vélez de Guevara's play Charles V says that it is a contradiction to simultaneously be a soldier and a *pícaro* at once (for honour and dishonour are in conflict with each other), Ribera's poetics of the humble confirms, instead, that the discrediting combination is possible, for the *pícaro* can be everything at will. Moreover, we should not forget that the painting displays a human being with a malformation, which for Ribera's contemporaries might still foreshadow forthcoming turmoil. Three years after the departure of the Viceroy Medina, the Neapolitan populace headed by Masaniello finally rose up in the famous revolt of 1647. In spite of its brevity – it lasted a week – this violent revolt undermined the power Spain had had over the city for centuries and affected its reputation in the eyes of other European countries. A spectator of the Neapolitan uprising could probably have said in retrospect, just like the chroniclers who survived the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 1631, that the storm had been heralded by a monstrous birth.

## EPILOGUE

### TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF RIBERA'S PICARESQUE

To my knowledge, the first to use the term *pícaro* in relation to painting was the Florentine-born painter Vincenzo Carducci (1576-1638), naturalized Spanish as Vicente Carducho. Carducho was active both in the courts of Philip II and Philip III of Spain and was the author of *Diálogos de la pintura* (*Dialogues on Painting*, 1633). In Chapter 7 of his treatise, 'Different Ways of Painting the Sacred Stories in a Decent Manner', a master teaches his pupil what are the most suitable manners of painting historical or Biblical stories. When the disciple asks why the representation of lowly characters engaged in ordinary actions or dressed like dignitaries alongside noble personages was permitted, the master replies:

'Artists are quite responsible for this, either due to ignorance or because they have a low opinion of themselves. They have brought down generous art to trivial concepts, as we see nowadays, with paintings representing *bodegones* [i. e. taverns] with low and vile contents, and others with drunkards, cardsharps, gamblers and similar subjects without inventiveness. The only reason is that painters have taken a fancy to the depiction of sloven *pícaros* or unkempt little women, which has caused the decline of art and affected the reputation of the artist.'<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Vicente Carducho, *Diálogos de la pintura, su defensa, origen, esencia, definicion, modos y diferencias* (Madrid: Turner, 1979), pp. 338-339: 'no tienen poca culpa los artífices que poco han sabido, o poco se han estimado, abatiendo el generoso Arte a conceptos humildes, como se vee oi, de tantos cuadros de bodegones con baxos y vilisimos pensamientos, y otros de borrachos, otros de fulleros, ta[h]ures, i cosas semejantes, sin mas ingenio, ni mas assunto, de aversele antojado al Pintor retratar quatro picaros descompuestos, y dos mugercillas desaliñadas, en mengua del mismo Arte, y poca reputacion del Artifice.'

Scholars have at times quoted this passage to infer that Carducho's contemporaries already perceived the picaresque painting as a specific genre.<sup>2</sup> In reality, Carducho is here dismissing genre painting according to an opinion shared by other authors,<sup>3</sup> and defines the *pícaro* as an indecorous ordinary character that contravenes the principles of decorum. The *pícaro* is, then, part of genre painting and is described with a series of adjectives that reflect all his negative and exterior connotations.

Apart from a cursory remark made by Karl Justi (1888),<sup>4</sup> we have to wait until 1937 to find the first important contribution on the subject. In that year the Spanish scholar Miguel Herrero published a long article that, although primarily focused on picaresque literature, opened a window onto a preliminary definition of a picaresque painting and its relation with its literary counterpart.<sup>5</sup> In Herrero's opinion, both stage the underworld but with different purposes. Herrero distinguishes between picaresque literature, which is the prerogative of Spain and which has mainly an ascetic and moralizing purpose, and picaresque art, which he argues developed especially outside Spain and which is characterized by the representation of ridiculous and comic themes and characters. With respect to the first point, Herrero states that the wickedness of *Lazarillo de Tormes* and of *Guzmán de Alfarache* represents a moral warning to the Christian reader about the consequences of a sinful life.<sup>6</sup> When it comes to visual art, in contrast, Herrero argues that Jacques Callot's stock characters, for example, represent only the humorous and entertaining aspect of the picaresque. Finally, when

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Rosa López Torrijos, 'El tema de la picaresca en la pintura española del siglo de oro', in Manuel Criado de Val ed. (1979), p. 173.

<sup>3</sup> A similar passage is to be found, for example, in Lomazzo (1584), p. 432.

<sup>4</sup> Karl Justi, *Diego Velázquez and His Times* [1888], translated by A. H. Keane and revised by the author (London: H. Grevel and Co., 1889). Justi touches upon Cervantes's *Novelas ejemplares* (1613) in relation to Velázquez.

<sup>5</sup> Miguel Herrero, *Nueva interpretación de la novela picaresca*, *Revista de filología española*, n. 24 (1937), pp. 343-362.

<sup>6</sup> Herrero (1937), p. 354. In this regard, the scholar points out the influence of Erasmus of Rotterdam's thought on the picaresque novel.

Herrero touches upon Ribera and Velázquez, he maintains that the parodic (and picaresque) aspect did not characterize the work of Spanish artists, inasmuch as they preferred to represent the other side of the coin, such as physical deformities and ugliness.<sup>7</sup> Although Herrero proposes an excessively clear-cut dichotomy between the outcomes and purposes of literature and visual art, he is the first, to my knowledge, to allude to the connection between these two different media in relation to the picaresque.

In 1942, Enrique Lafuente Ferrari made interesting observations on the topic in his long introduction to Werner Weisbach's *Der Barock als Kunst der Gegenreformation* (*The Baroque as the Art of the Counter-Reformation*, 1921). Ferrari argues that the way in which Ribera lingers over unpleasant details (such as deep wrinkles and skin imperfections) in his humble characters has a parallel in the meticulous descriptions typical of picaresque literature, where pustules, wounds and other sordid details are analysed with disquieting accuracy. Ferrari labels this modality as *feísmo* – an art that privileges and magnifies the ugly – which he believes to be a structural component of the picaresque genre. For the first time, the peculiarity of the picaresque genre and its specific descriptive techniques (not necessarily narrative ones) across different media, figurative arts and literature are clearly laid out and analysed.<sup>8</sup>

In a later contribution, Ferrari identifies a picaresque background also in Murillo's paintings as well and highlights its specificity compared to Ribera's interpretation. Ferrari argues that Murillo preferred to mitigate the flashy crudeness typical of the picaresque genre by banishing harsh realities from his paintings and by

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<sup>7</sup> See Herrero (1937), p. 359.

<sup>8</sup> Enrique Lafuente Ferrari, 'La interpretación del Barroco y sus valores españoles', in Werner Weisbach, *El Barroco arte de la Contrarreforma*, translation and introductory essay by E. Lafuente Ferrari (Madrid: Escasa-Calpe, 1948, 2nd ed., first published 1942), pp. 9-53 and in particular pp. 36, 38, 41.

idealizing the features of the young beggars he portrayed [Figs. 3, 4].<sup>9</sup> Ferrari might be right when he states that Ribera and Murillo pursued two distinct picaresque approaches, although Murillo's picaresque mode seems to be less straightforward than Ferrari concludes it to be.<sup>10</sup>

In 1986 José Maravall published an important essay which was dedicated to the study of the economic and historical turmoil that contributed to the birth of picaresque literature. In drafting the sociological and psychological profile of the *pícaro*, Maravall points out that the character's disapproval of social norms seems to be rooted in the cynical and stoical doctrines; in addition, he notes that the *pícaro*'s quest for truth behind the appearance makes him a sort of Galileo *ante litteram*.<sup>11</sup>

In 1992 the Italian scholar Paola Santucci, expanding upon some of Maravall's propositions, suggested that Ribera's ordinary figures might conceal, under their miserable appearance, a reflection on the academic issues that were being debated in Rome in the wake of Galileo's new science of nature.<sup>12</sup>

In this concise overview we have seen how, in the course of almost a century, modern scholars have perceived and explained certain peculiarities of the picaresque within the figurative arts (and especially in Ribera) and its relationship with its literary counterpart. If we want to summarise such different opinions, we can conclude that the distinctive traits of the visual picaresque – its comedic facet, its taste for the description of unpleasant details achieved through a crude realism, and its concealment

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<sup>9</sup> Enrique Lafuente Ferrari, *Breve historia de la pintura española* (Madrid: Editorial Tecnos, 1953) (4th ed., first published 1934), pp. 260-261.

<sup>10</sup> See in this regard Tomlison – Wells (1996).

<sup>11</sup> Maravall (1986), pp. 289-290.

<sup>12</sup> Santucci (1992).



of unexpected philosophical reflection – have been treated as if they were unrelated features and therefore not interconnected with one another.

In the course of this thesis I have instead sought to show that these and other characteristics are inextricably linked in Ribera's painting and give birth to a peculiar visual picaresque. In presenting his modest or miserable figures, Ribera lingers over, and magnifies, picaresque elements – threadbare garments, physical deformities, unpleasant sensory perceptions – thus distracting the reader and leading him or her through countless details. But the identity of these characters is, like that of their literary counterpart, highly deceptive. Ribera ingeniously devises and disseminates more or less evident clues, which are meant to alert the beholder and to lead him towards a higher degree of awareness. We have then acknowledged that each of the ordinary figures staging the senses conjures up and parodies, in a very distinctive and original manner, the investigative procedures which were established by scholars affiliated with the scientific Accademia dei Lincei. This ambivalence is given a graphicness that, while rendering the comic serious, induces the beholder to go beyond the inherent limits of painting and partake in the intense sensory activity of the figures depicted. But Ribera teases the viewer by raising false expectations and then brings him or her back to reality. Like the pioneers of the new science of nature, or like dismayed *pícaros*, we acknowledge the opposition between appearance and reality, the limits of our sensory abilities and of visual art in disseminating knowledge.

By the same token, Ribera's maimed and blind beggars are not simply street characters whom the painter could have met at every crossroads in Naples and Rome. They are protean performers (and as such the result of a well-conceived visual strategy) that, while playing their roles, lay bare the contradictions of a society founded on the art of deception and on the triumph of appearance.

And deception is, I believe, the key picaresque concept that lays at the core of Ribera's poetics of the humble. His naturalism mimics reality by incorporating and amplifying its picaresque elements. The picaresque, in turn, subverts the function of naturalism and turns it into a medium which is highly conducive to visual fraud.

Ribera's picaresque is to a certain extent rooted in its literary counterpart, of which the painter exploits themes and motifs, but it is also clear that he created his own pictorial equivalent to this literary genre. The attempt was successful inasmuch as, with Ribera, the *pícaro* as a pictorial character regains his subversive charge in the moment in which, after reaching its peak with Quevedo's *El Buscón* (1626), its originality was declining with the appearance in Spanish literature of the *pícaro-courtier*. In 1646, two years before the end of the Thirty Years War, the anonymous novel *Estebanillo González* was published. *Estebanillo* is a product of Spanish military propaganda: he takes advantage of his participation in the war to go out looting, and then ends up as a servant to numerous distinguished masters. In 1642 Ribera portrayed the *Clubfooted Boy*, which does not depict the *pícaro-courtier*, but his opposite, the ultimate *pícaro* on the fringes of society. This, I believe, conjures up and expands upon the subversive and polemical tone typical of the picaresque.

The conclusions that I have reached during my PhD encourage me to think that my research can be expanded in at least two directions by encompassing other aspects of Ribera's painting.

In the first place, in the course of this thesis I have mainly analysed those of Ribera's humble characters who conceal a philosophical facet. There are, on the contrary, numerous figures by Ribera staged as philosophers of antiquity who are usually classified by scholars as philosophers-beggars [Figs 39-40]. Although the

identities of these two categories overlap to the point that they are interchangeable (according to a visual picaresque mode), I believe that Ribera's threadbare philosophers are endowed with their own specificity. The shortage of archival documentation does not allow us to reconstruct the exact chain of possession of these paintings. Therefore, it is difficult to understand, at the moment, whether Ribera's patrons played a decisive role in the development of the original iconography of these pseudo-sages or not. Nevertheless, some important issues can be addressed. During my research, I have suggested that Ribera might have been acquainted with some members of the Neapolitan Academy of the Idlers, which was founded under the auspices of the Viceroy of Naples, Pedro Fernández de Castro. One of its most prestigious members, Giovan Vincenzo Imperiale (who was a diplomat and a refined art collector), was particularly interested in Ribera's tattered philosophers. Moreover, from archival documentation relating to the meeting of the Idlers, we know that Imperiale lectured on a variety of topics, including philosophy. Although it has been written at great length on both the Academy and its members, the relationship between Ribera and the Academy has never been studied carefully and might lead to new results.

The second aspect that I aim to address in the next future is again related with the Idlers. I believe that it is possible to establish a connection between Ribera's grotesque figures and the works of Francisco de Quevedo and Giovan Battista Della Porta, who were both members of the Academy of the Idlers. The pitiless anatomic sketches of Quevedo and the animal-like physiognomies that populate Della Porta's plays and treatises are midway between the caricature and the 'scientific description'. I therefore aim to further examine Ribera's human anatomies and comprehend whether it is possible to connect them with the interests and tastes of the Neapolitan academicians active in the Academy of the Idlers.

Pursuing these objectives will hopefully contribute to have a better knowledge of Ribera's naturalism and picaresque vein, and of his connection with the Spanish vice-royal court of Naples and its cultural milieus.

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<sup>1</sup> More books by the same author are listed in chronological order. As for the books in alphabetical order by title, I have ordered them regardless of the articles (e.g.: *Il giovane Ribera* is listed under the letter 'g' although the title starts with the article 'Il').

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Scriptum

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