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The *Athenian Disease* in Early-Modern England: Rhetoric, Republicanism and the Restoration Cures

Susanna Zinato

1. Rhetoric and Republicanism

This paper aims at highlighting the crucial link between rhetorical education (classical rhetoric and the civic humanism of Quattrocento Italy as handed down through Renaissance rhetorical teaching) and republicanism in mid-seventeenth-century England (1640-1660, the years of the Civil War between Royalists and Parliamentarians, the trial and beheading of Charles I, Cromwell's rule) and, then, on the demonization met by rhetoric at the hands of the men of the Establishment culture, with the return of Stuart Kinship, in the Restoration period. The passage is, bluntly speaking, from a time when the adversary is charged with practising poor rhetoric, or pure sophistry, to a time when the charge is that of being rhetorical, of practising rhetoric as such. The change, in itself, is pregnant with cultural and political implications and, in both cases, rhetoric becomes the fighting ground for the two parties, functioning as their code, as well as their message.

Feeding the anti-rhetorical prejudice of the Restoration period is the indelible republican experience that the 1660 Royal *Act of Oblivion and Indemnity* has only formally disposed of. In the same way, the violence inflicted on the bodies of the republicans disinterred in a mass exhumation in 1661, thus staging a royal spectacle of horror, owes much to the anxiety as to the real possibility for such an erasure from the collective memory of a people that had experienced that it was possible for a nation not to be governed by a king.

Here, it is necessary to take into account the fundamental role played by rhetoric in the education of the protagonists of this experimental founding of a republican culture, if not of a fully republican government, at a time when, with the collapse of royal censorship in the 1640s there opened a public sphere of critical discussion not far (though to be meant in a less economic and more cultural sense), from what Habermas, in *The Structural Transformations of the Public*

Sphere: An Enquiry into the Category of Bourgeois Society, had termed as the 'bourgeois public space', i.e. a space independent of the traditional monopolies of discourse held by the church, the court, and the professions.¹ Habermas passes over the English mid-century revolution that, instead, may be said to inaugurate this phenomenon in Europe. In point of fact, what had begun as a belated rebellion of the nobility and ended with the establishment of a republic was a period in which the sinews of communication through written and printed literature could be seen forming a public opinion whose consent was to be sought through effective rhetorical means. «Men were freed to think hitherto unthinkable thoughts»,² and words and speech acts in both high and low literature were playing a crucial role, creating a linguistic ebullience that could be easily perceived by some scared contemporaries as linguistic disorder and anarchy. Republicanism was a «highly literary affair», imbibing public speculation and printed literature «even though the political reality it claimed to support was in many ways very un-republican»:³ it could emerge in the conjunction and synergy between the civic inheritance of classical humanism and the political events (parliamentary supremacy in the 1640s and, then, a republic in the 1650s) triggered by extra- and even un-monarchical discourses. However, an important point to set from the start, even though, for limits of space, it will not be dealt with in what follows, is that the classical, neo-Roman and, consequently, secular rhetoric *cum* republican faith discussed here are far from both the godly and apocalyptic perspective of the Puritans,⁴ and from the authoritarian mainstream rhetoric of Protestantism.⁵ They are far, that is, from the basically reactionary discourse practices informed by divinely ready-made truths that only need to be communicated: so, from the *enthusiastic* and prescriptive ethos of the first, from the quintessentially authoritarian and militant rhetoric started by Luther and effectively epitomized in the latter's cele-

1. NORBROOK 1999, 13.

2. MORRILL 1993, 19.

3. SMITH 1994, 177-178.

4. On this point, cp. GIMELLI MARTIN 2010, a solidly grounded work that while challenging many received ideas concerning the brand of Milton's philosophy, makes clear the Puritans' position with respect to republicanism.

5. On the role of authoritative rhetoric in Protestant Christianity see HOBSON 2002.

bration of assertive discourse,⁶ as well as from the scriptural literalism of both.

The civic humanism that in the Renaissance substantiates the teaching of rhetoric in English grammar schools and universities makes possible for Norbrook to advance that «the execution of Charles I, sometimes held to mark the end of the Renaissance, could be legitimately taken as its fulfilment».⁷

This statement, while not being provocative at all, means to give due emphasis to the republican ideals accompanying rhetorical teaching, above all through Cicero's heritage. Greek and Roman classical rhetoric re-discovered and valued by the civic humanism of the city-states of Quattrocento Italy (through the work of scholars like Brunini, Salutati, Pontano, Valla) and then spread through Northern Europe, rhetoric, that is, meant as an exercise of public speech, lymph of any republic and menace to any empire, rhetoric seen as a highly civic and civilizing art, does not decline throughout the Continent and, more to our point, in England, even when, invoking Tacitus's *Dialogus de Oratoribus*, its untranslatability into action in absolutist regimes is conceded.⁸

In sixteenth-century English treatises and handbooks - by Richard Sherry (*A Treatise of Schemes and Tropes*, 1550), Henry Peacham (*The Garden of Eloquence*, 1577), and, most renownedly, by Thomas Wilson (*The Arte of Rhetorick*, 1560) and George Puttenham (*The Arte of English Poesie*, 1589) - rhetoric keeps figuring squarely at the centre of a substantially positive and ideal vision of the arts of language, taken as a sign of God's election for man. In Wilson's popular treatise by Wilson rhetoric is the instrument necessary for maintaining social peace. The myth of the civilizing function of rhetoric by virtue of the coupling of eloquence and wisdom (having, among its loci of election, Plato's *Protagora*, Cicero's *De Oratore*, Horace's *Ars Poetica*) substantiates Thomas Elyot's *The Book Named the Governour* (1531), and through Peacham's and Wilson's works.⁹ The public exercise of eloquence is not to be feared, on the contrary it is elevated to the role of guarantor of social

6. HOBSON 2002, 67-71.

7. NORBROOK 1999, 14.

8. FUMAROLI 1980, li.

9. VICKERS 1983.

peace by virtue of the belief in the coupling of eloquence and prudence. This assumption is overturned in the climate of suspicion, when not of demonization of rhetoric, following the mid-century events, when what used to be given as a civilizing force, now becomes force of sedition and source of social anarchy.

But in the rhetorical tradition that nourishes the English education system up to the late seventeenth century it is still Brutus who embodies the ideal ethos, it is the reasons of his tyrannicide that Cambridge and Oxford students are requested to debate by their syllabus when they practice the argumentation *in utramque partem*. And it is Cicero's and the humanists' ideal of *vita activa* that the liberal arts, always aiming at a moral formation, celebrate against any temptation to shun the public agon, therefore against the divorce of Socratic memory between eloquence/rhetoric and philosophy, divorce lamented by Cicero in *De Oratore*, but authoritatively embraced and strengthened by Thomas Hobbes, particularly in the Preface to his translation from Thucydides. True, this divorce is already perceivable in the rhetorical treatises of the late 16th-century, especially those Ramistically-inspired, that subtract relevant space to *actio*, *pronuntiatio*, and *memoria* - a clear index of distrust of the possibility to practice public speech as the essential prerogative of the citizen in a democratic assembly. As remarked by Sloane, in completely abolishing *controversia* and in separating wisdom from eloquence, due to the belief that truth and its communication in no way do depend on discourse, «the Ramist system is profoundly anti-humanist because it is also profoundly not just anti-but nonrhetorical».¹⁰

Where the citizen is a subject, there his prerogative is strongly limited, if not abolished, but it does not stop being kept alive in the rhetorical handbooks and in the translations from Greek and Roman historians. Tacitus's realistic 'balance', therefore, does not kill the ideal of a rhetoric restored to its civic function, a courageous rhetoric that always makes of speech a speech act, action, in favour of the common good: an ideal that most probably made Shakespeare's contemporaries prefer the magnanimous Brutus to the tormented (but tragically inactive and irresponsible) malcontent Hamlet. It is the very superiority of

10. SLOANE 1985, 138.

(active) «prudence to speculation and of the will to the intellect» upheld by Coluccio Salutati in his *De nobilitate legum et medicine* (1399), when he opposes arguments from Aristotle's *Ethics* to Augustine's ideal of *sapientia*.¹¹ Not by any coincidence, Hobbes, in *De Cive*, always translates *civis* as *subject*,¹² as if driven by the need to defuse the Ciceronian-republican implication entailed by the word, as he aims at discrediting the ideal of citizenship underlying the classical and Renaissance theory of eloquence. Which is exactly the political implication that will become a declaration of principle in France a century later, and that England, thus anticipating the French and American revolutions, recuperates and fully re-activates in the mid-century years of the Civil War - years then disposed of by the royalist historians as the 'Interregnum', a blank in English history, to be buried into oblivion. In all this, the teaching of the rhetoric of an Attic, Ciceronian, and, more broadly, humanist tradition, plays a central role, as first feared and then denounced by Hobbes. The philosopher's ambiguities with respect to the art of oratory, in particular, and such that he can be seen to pass from a complete refusal of rhetoric to a mild, lukewarm acceptance of it,¹³ are to be driven back to his invincible suspicion for an art that, exactly by virtue of its in-born dialogic prerogatives - that he was positively aware of, as he was a perfect child of *humane litterae*, having himself translated his own paraphrasis of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (*A Brief of the Art of Rhetorique*, published anonymously in 1637) - is politically unprofitable because supremely seditious. As a matter of fact, as it often happens with the great detractors of the art of persuasion, Hobbes himself recurs to rhetoric with wonderful results, *Leviathan* being «the most stylishly written work of political theory in any language»,¹⁴ and reluctantly reverts to the humanist marriage between *ratio* and *oratio* owing to a «far more pessimistic sense of what the powers of unaided reason can hope to achieve».¹⁵

As effectively put by Victoria Kahn, spurred by the need to distinguish between prudential rhetoric, i.e. a rhetoric of probability, and a

11. KAHN 1985, 61-62.

12. SKINNER 1996, 286 ff.

13. SKINNER 1996, ch. 9.

14. SOMMERVILLE 1992, 1.

15. SKINNER 1996, 347.

scientific method, he turns out to be a «critical figure for understanding the decline of humanism». He finds humanistic rhetoric unable to deal with the civil-war scenario of his times while, at the same time, sharing in Montaigne's Pyrrhonist epistemology. However, «while Montaigne's skeptic needs to invent a new language of doubt», Hobbes aims at establishing «a new language of certainty, a sovereign logic that will effectively exclude all further rhetoric *in utramque partem*».¹⁶

Definitely, the perception that the humanist education informed by rhetoric is the 'Trojan horse' (in Hobbesian words) that inoculates among young English students the infection of the democratic or, at least, anti-royalist, and, positively, anti-tyrannical ideal, is not only Hobbes's. Nigel Smith¹⁷ reports the complaints of a 1644 anti-toleration pamphlet that, with a phrase I couldn't resist from adopting for my title, speaks of the «Athenian disease» of public speaking, that widens more and more in what its author would like to keep as a *nouvelle* Sparta. The causal link between classical/humanist education and sedition or civil chaos becomes commonplace among the anti-republicans. Cambridge undergraduates and Inns of Court students pose as Athenians «with Scorpions taile/ Pretendinge Greekish libertie to raile», to the eyes of an anonymous royalist poet.¹⁸ The Trojan horse is to be singled out in the curricula then active especially at Cambridge university. The most brilliant and (from Hobbes's point of view) dangerous protagonists of this republican culture - classical or neo-Roman republicans such as Thomas May, Henry Marten, Marchamont Nedham, John Harrington, John Hall, and, last but positively not least, John Milton are literally imbued with civic humanism of Aristotelian-Ciceronian bent, and they deem themselves invested with the moral and political responsibility to seize the *kairòs* that history appears to be giving to them, that of reconstituting a new Athens in England. Brilliant protagonists of the republican culture, they do not fail to stress the fundamental role that education plays in the formation of the citizens, which coincides with a solid humanist education having rhetoric at its centre and in which language and polis are never disjointed. In the 'bible' of English republican culture, *Oceana* (1656) by James Harrington, who aims at

16. KAHN 1985, 152-155.

17. SMITH 1994, 36.

18. SMITH 1994, 103.

reviving the tradition of ancient prudence, the ideal Commonwealth is governed by a choice of *prudent* men modelled after the Venetian oligarchy, who have the important duty and honour to safeguard the arts of classical eloquence. The republican culture of the mid-century is born, as it were, as a re-actualization and dramatization of the *lectio* of civic humanism, an *imitatio* in the Petrarchan sense. So, if it is true that the questioning of the status quo is born out of the (scarcely republican) contrasts between a more and more autarchic king and the nobles of Parliament who see their prerogatives of liberty and property jeopardized by the former,¹⁹ still, the humanist heritage enters the field by blowing on the fire, with Attic and Ciceronian exempla on the frontline, and with translations that turn out to be fundamental to English republican culture such as May's translation of Lucan's *Pharsalia*, or with Milton's powerful orations, such as *Areopagitica*, *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio*, *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, and *Eikonoklastes*, a vitriolic meta-rhetorical deconstruction of Charles I's *Eikon Basilike* (1660) that was published posthumously in order to bequeath the English nation a martyr-like, Christological image of himself and of his death.

Hobbes is only the most authoritative among the voices that cry out, in fear, against the new 'clamour' of public debate that literally explodes in the Forties and Fifties, also through pamphlets, petitions (to be read in Parliament), newsbooks (an early-modern form of political journalism), sermons by dissenters and improvised lay preachers. Taking into account this range of rhetorics in action, variously and transversally inflected (and the aesthetic or persuasive efficacy of their less cultivated expressions is beyond the point here), one is plunged into a very active media circuit affording wide access, that has made possible the formation of a public opinion to be persuaded and that has worked in such a way that the Civil War developed as a war on words, as well as through more dramatic actions.

A most fascinating and convincing way to appreciate the rhetorical tenor of the fight, is to consider that while the connection between rhetoric and republicanism increasingly becomes matter of fact in 1640s and 1650s, Charles I reacts with rhetorical indignation at receiving the

19. HILL 1961.

Grand Remonstrance,²⁰ a document whose «argument of persuasion» he says has no place «in all Aristotle's Rhetorics».²¹ Then, more dramatically, his own trial will be dominated by rhetorical disagreement when he charges the law-court with breaching rhetorical decorum in its formal proceedings deemed not sufficiently in conformity with the Aristotelian principles, and refuses to acknowledge any authority of word to the court of justice. Both at the trial and on the scaffold he limits himself to uttering brief comments, or keeps silent, thus subtracting himself to the performance of a polarized symmetry of the parts, a symmetry he is not prepared to endorse by vouchsafing answers. By so doing the king wants to keep the mystique of kinship safe. By so doing, he avoids the open confrontation, the public debate aimed at by the republicans. In *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1650) Milton insists on the «derivative» nature of any king's power, which has been «transferred and committed» to him by his people «not for his own end» but for «the common good», which explains why it is lawful (and here Milton lists pagan and Christian *auctoritates*, starting from Aristotle) «to call to account a tyrant, and after due conviction, to depose and put him to death», as the subtitle reads.²²

In *Eikonoklastes* (1650), he takes upon himself, as the orator/tribune of the English people, to defend the proceedings of the trial in the eyes of the Continent. He vindicates the real cause for pride of the English nation, that lies not in the tyrannicide in itself, which vaunts illustrious historical precedents and defenses, but in their having forced a king to descend from his mystifying empyrean and to face the legitimate claims of his subjects become *cives*, citizens. The king has been constrained to lower himself and to argue his reasons, with very poor results, given the scarce familiarity of the powerful sovereign with the need to persuade about the legitimacy of his prerogatives that, being absolute by definition, are deemed by him to be un-arguable, never to be discussed, and in no need to be defended or proved. In the Preface Milton writes:

20. Presented to the King by some members of Parliament in 1641, the document listed all the abuses perpetrated by his government in church and state since 1625.

21. SMITH 1994, 38.

22. MILTON 1650b, 11.

Kings most commonly, though strong in legions, are but weak at arguments; as they who ever have accustomed from the cradle to use their will only as their right hand, their reason always as their left. Whence unexpectedly constrained to that kind of combat, they prove but weak and puny adversaries.²³

Milton's *Eikonoklastes* provides cogent evidence of how much rhetoric functions as a code and as a message, with radical and (for the times) blasphemous implications. The agonist-orator subtly praises Shakespeare's portrait of Richard III as a sly actor turned tyrant, a role in which king Charles's performance is even worse than his infamous predecessor's, and leaves us with the image of Charles as a poor actor hissed off the stage. But this blasphemy directly stems from the civic humanism that pervades the oration, in which Milton, Brutus-like, declares himself on the side of the Aristotelian-Ciceronian ethos against the demagogic expedients adopted by the king, a new Mark Antony in his shameless exploitation of pathos in *Eikon Basilike*. In this war of arguments, the safety way out for kingship cannot but lie in reticence and in reaffirming the ineffability and mystique of sovereign power. One might also say, by invoking the Sublime *à la Burke*, that it lies in the powerful' (kings and religious idols)'s complete adoption of «obscurity», and avoidance of the «clearness» of the public sphere/word.²⁴ Power does not answer, nor does it hold a dialogue; in no way does it argue. On the contrary, if anything, it gives orders, it asserts, and always appears from afar.

If, on the one hand, one cannot refrain from evoking Edmund Burke's re-working of pseudo-Longinus's *Peri Ypsous*, on the other hand, my mind cannot but go to Milton's God in *Paradise Lost* (VIII, vv. 428-429), who, with some indulgence, acknowledges Adam's vital need for speech-sharing with an 'equal' (a theme that Mary Shelley will brilliantly use in the Creature's requiring by doctor Frankenstein a female companion to talk to), but he himself, in his perfection «seeks not social communication» (which also characterizes Frankenstein in his hubristic delirium). In point of fact, as commonly recognized by Milton's readers, the most eloquent character in the poem is Satan. Exactly through his rhetorical acrobatics he demonstrates his fallibility,

23. MILTON 1650a, A2.

24. BURKE 1990, Iii, Iliii.

his fall into contingency and imperfection but, also, his freedom to choose and to err. God, the universal King, does not, as it were, 'get his mouth soiled' with persuasive language: he does not need that. It will be his son who, as Word made Flesh, will celebrate the apotheosis of the all-too-human word - an Erasmian motif.²⁵

In *Paradise Lost*, I dare say, God's monologic self-sufficiency is obliquely, perhaps unawares, made to be perceived as something like autism, not even arousing envy from man, and such that it may strike in us a blasphemous vibration of sympathy both for Satan's specious rhetoric and, at times, pathetic sophistic convolutions and for Adam's and Eve's rhetorical 'babbling' (if compared to Satan's *bravura*). In *Paradise Lost*, God and his angels' language is mythical, intuitive language that does not know any gap between *signum* and *signatum*: Milton's paradise is in fact a place of absolute 'presence'. The fall from an intuitive to a discursive semiosis begins with the birth of Sin and concerns post-lapsarian creatures. As explained by Raphael to Adam: 'the Soule/ Reason receives, and reason is her being,/ Discursive, or Intuitive; Discourse/ Is ofttest yours, the latter most is ours/, V, ll. 486-489). «The dialect of Men» (in Raphael's words, V, l.761) needs translation and interpretation, whereas in Paradise names are always *consequentia rerum*.²⁶

The post-lapsarian ontological gap between names and *res* is to be reintegrated only in an after-life, Second-Coming perspective and men are left with signs that, having lost their fullness/presence, become potentially unstable, hardly to be controlled or contained. In Milton's perspective, as highlighted by Folena, only the speaker's ethos (in rhetorical terms), i.e. only his moral and spiritual integrity can guarantee that they are not further removed from the Truth they belonged to.

However, even in Satan's language there are no irretrievably fallen signifiers, and the slipperiness (not to be meant as arbitrariness) char-

25. Both in *Encomium Moriae* and in the *Adages*, on discussing interpretation through the Silenus figure, Erasmus observes that it would have been easy for Christ to impose his throne over all the earth but that he preferred to persuade rather than to compel, and the Incarnation was his most compelling persuasion (cp. KAHN 1985, 91-92).

26. FOLENA 2012, 123-126.

acterizing Satan's use of them is given as the condition of *all* human language. At the same time, as suggestively advanced in *Areopagitica*, that Truth, any truth is constitutively open-ended, never to be exhausted and man is called to a life-long rhetorical existence that trusts, rather than disparaging, the probable and the provisional with a firm view on possibility. Milton, in fact, I believe can be said to cherish an early-modern conception of rhetoric that highly values the Aristotelian assertion of possibility as its specific mode; in Struever's words, it is a rhetoric that «both defines and *poses* possibilities, both finds and creates, energises possibilities».²⁷

2. The Restoration Cures

We see we cannot play at chess but that we must give names to our chessmen; and yet, methinks, he were a very partial champion of truth that would say we lied for giving a piece of wood the reverend title of a bishop. (Sir Philip Sidney, *A Defence of Poetry*, 1595)

In the words of the great English Renaissance poet, that signs can never be identical to things, that a 'natural' and stable relationship between them is philosophy's futile fantasy, is playfully denounced by poetry's honest 'lies', which exactly thrive in the fact that words always exceed things. Now, the general tenor of the cures provided in the Restoration period has exactly to do with what, to Milton, and to Sidney's philosopher, can only be of the angels of Paradise: to recapture the prelapsarian semiosis and, by so doing, to do away with problems of interpretation, translation, and contingency. Put bluntly: to do away with rhetoric, that has affected the events of the Interregnum so dramatically. This semiotic ideal, curiously enough, is not alien to the contemporary growth of shorthand systems whose reliance on the semiotics of visual representation, are close to contemporary sign systems for the deaf and dumb.²⁸

Many are the proposals of linguistic systematization and reform on the part of school-masters, virtuosi and divines, most of them organic to the Restoration settlement. More to our point, at least 32 are the schemes for *real characters* and/or *universal schemes* devised

27. STRUEVER 2009, 7.

28. COHEN 1977, 13-18.

in the second half of the seventeenth century,²⁹ all of them sharing an anxiety over the nature and the proper/improper use of the linguistic sign. At the same time, ubiquitous are the crusades in favour of linguistic plainness and naturalness, and discussions on stylistic propriety in conversation, on the pulpit, in literature, and, last, but positively not least, on the stage. Cave Beck's *Universal Character*, 1657, is proposed as a universal, cybernetic-like system with characters based on numbers and letters and punctuation marks for grammatical distinctions (so, "R1745" denotes the noun "eloquence"); Francis Lodovick's *A Common Writing*, 1647, was already based on radicals and derivatives given in pictorial form. Both Cave's and Lodovick's proposals rest on grammatical rather than philosophical principles, i.e. on a sort of hieroglyphic grammars having a standard ideational content and meant for transmission of communications, like numbers and weights. With Seth Ward but, especially, with George Dalgarno (*Ars Signorum*, 1661, based on Ramistic logic) and John Wilkins (*An Essay towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language*, 1668), the claim becomes «philosophical», i.e. scientific, rather than rhetorical, or nonrhetorical in a Ramistic-like perspective in that their proposals aim at regulating and systematizing the supposedly univocal relationship between *verba* and *res*, through the ontological solution of making the former reflect the (divinely hypostatized) essence of the latter.³⁰

The above-mentioned linguistic schemes are so effectively epitomized in Wilkins's *Essay* that «[his] real character [...] might stand as a cultural icon for the unfinished, lost, abandoned, and provisional schemes which make up the 17th century history of attempts to restore Babel».³¹

The semiotic and philosophical assumptions governing the grammar of Wilkins's proposal which, by the way, was attended by national and international interest, may be said to have their roots in the speculative grammar of medieval tradition, where *speculative* refers to the

29. THOMPSON 1984.

30. «We should, by learning the *Character* and the *Names* of things, be instructed likewise in their *Natures*, the knowledge of both which ought to be conjoined» (WILKINS 1968, 21).

31. MARKLEY 1993, 87.

supposed capacity of grammar to reflect reality as in a mirror,³² but only through a striking, therefore suspect, theoretical depletion of it. The algorithms, tables and diagrams of these linguists should be approached in light of the inter-related political and cultural tensions in the aftermath of the Civil War, as well as in the light of the ascendancy of experimental science, with its need for a plain, ‘etherized’ idiom. In the self-servingly ‘natural’ representations of these linguistic panaceas any figurative, and, broadly, rhetorical mode of speech becomes an embarrassing accident. In what appears as a strategy of political/axiological containment through linguistic control, the ideal semiotics is a noiseless communication in no need of interpretation, thus completely relieving the speaker of any responsibility. It stands upon a statically hypostatized world-view, the one espoused by conservatives in general, the high Anglican Church, and, organic to them, by the more media-prominent representatives of the Royal Society, their secretary Thomas Sprat in the first place. If in Wilkins’s *Essay* the word “rhetoric” does not even exist, Sprat shows absolute scorn for it: «Who can behold, without indignation, how many mists and uncertainties, these specious Tropes and Figures have brought to our knowledge? The evil is now so inveterate, that it is hard to know whom to blame, or where to begin to reform».³³ The *History of the Royal Society*’s Baconian motto is «*Nullius in Verba*».

Therefore, the climate is positively unfavourable to all that humanist pedagogy had come to stand for. No matter how explicit the degree of anti-rhetorical prejudice shared in common by eminent voices of the official culture, including divines, the general climate is discouraging to the cultivation of a discipline that is anti-essentialist and anti-authoritarian by its very nature, stubbornly championing the public forum of discussion (through voice or print), which is exactly what causes fear now. Now, order is necessary to the (economic and political) thriving of the English nation after the Babelic flood of civic liberties unleashed during the Interregnum, and this cannot be done but by subtracting language from ‘criminal’ figurativeness, *controversia*, the acknowledgement of contingency and of the need for negotiation. This

32. SALMON 1988, 98.

33. SPRAT 1958.

pre-hermeneutic paradigm of human discourse is a poignant index of the actual fragility and uncertainty of what is being passed off as a *restored* and restorative culture engaged for the sake of a nation regaining peace and magnificence after republican barbarism. *Rhetorical* can now only be the non-conformist adversary in real life and on stage, where it is embodied by the Satanic and master-rhetorician libertine. *The enemy* is the civic humanism and the school of contingency and prudence handed down by rhetorical pedagogy. The enemy is the Athenian ethos celebrated by Milton's *Areopagitica* (1644), a hymn, modelled after Greek oratory, to the free citizen's right to speak out against monopolies of public discourse, and to share in the collective, inexhaustible research for the 'limbs' of truth.

On approaching the conclusion of his oration, in the paragraph tellingly entitled *Truth as a streaming fountain*, in an extension of his Christian reading of the Egyptian myth of Osiris, Milton leaves us with the image of truth as «good Osiris's lovely limbs scattered to the four winds», and of us, the «sad friends of truth» that, Isis-like, are searching and «gathering limb by limb»: «We have not found them all [...] *nor ever shall doe*». Only Christ's Second Coming «shall bring together every joint and member, and shall mould them into an immortal feature of loveliness and perfection».³⁴

Before that time, any body of truth given as complete and final cannot but be a dead body, a corpse with no life in it, in keeping with Milton's unflagging agon against any «autarchic», «intrinsically persuasive»³⁵ conception of truth, and with his deep commitment to the Hellenistic, positive connotations of the word *heresy*.³⁶

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34. MILTON 1998, 70.

35. PIAZZA 2004, 19.

36. On Milton's appropriation of the word *heresy* and its derivatives in a way that recuperates the philological import of Greek *haîresis* in its closeness to Platonic and Aristotelian *proaîresis*, a term for choice that leads to moral action, see MUELLER 1998.

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