




Critical Responses to the Humanist Work Ethic: The Image of the Pedant

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Hard work, diligence, and grit are prominent characteristics of the work ethic in the community of humanist scholars that gradually emerged in the fifteenth century and became a European phenomenon in the sixteenth century. In their ambition to promote knowledge of the literature of Antiquity, they tirelessly compared, transcribed, and corrected manuscripts, exchanged information both through their correspondence and by travelling to consult with one another, published a massive number of books (something made considerably easier by the advent of the printing press), and taught generations of schoolboys and university students. The members of this Latin-speaking community differed considerably in background, interests, and ambitions, and the results of their learning varied accordingly. Yet while they may have lacked a coherent programme, they shared a studious approach in which scholarship “was a

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form of work” which, as a leading intellectual historian recently observed, “required drudgery.”¹

Modern historians were hardly the first to identify hard work as a striking practice of the humanist community. This commitment to work was very much part of the professional identity and self-perception of the members of this community. Styling themselves as inhabitants of an alternative state, a transnational, cross-confessional Republic of Letters, humanists cultivated specific norms and values amongst which diligent, tireless study was a central virtue.² Early biographical collections provided models of excellent behaviour. In his biographical gallery of famous customers, the Florentine bookseller Vespasiano da Bisticci, for example, celebrated the time-management skills of the scholar-diplomat Gianozzo Manetti. “He gave no more than five hours to sleep,” Vespasiano writes, “and devoted the rest to study.”³ In the bibliophile scholar Niccolò Niccoli, he praises his tireless efforts to build a library and highlighted the generous help he provided for fellow students. This went together with a lifestyle of almost cultic studious devotion: “he never took a wife so as not to be hindered in his studies. He had a housekeeper to provide for his wants, and was one of the most particular of men in his diet as in all else...”⁴

As these examples suggest, hard work was an essential part of an ethical code based on the premise that erudition made one a better human being. Scholarly study was not just about acquiring and building on knowledge. It was an instrument of self-realization and a pathway to virtue and self-discipline. Such justifications were similar to those common amongst religious communities, where study and contemplation traditionally served a spiritual purpose. In contrast to the monastic tradition,

¹ A. Grafton, *Inky Fingers: The Making of Books in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2021), 254.

² K. Scholten, D. van Miert, and K. Enenkel (eds.), *Memory and Identity in the Learned World: Community Formation in the Early Modern World of Learning and Science* (Leiden: Brill, 2022); G. Almási, “The Work Ethic in Humanist Biographies: The Case of Willem Canter,” *Hungarian Historical Review* 8 (2019), 594–619; R. Kirwan (ed.), *Scholarly Self-Fashioning and Community in the Early Modern University* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013).

³ Vespasiano da Bisticci, *The Vespasiano Memoirs: Lives of Illustrious Men of the XVth Century*, trans. W. George and E. Waters (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), 373.

⁴ Bisticci, *The Vespasiano Memoirs*, 402.

however, humanist learning was also meant to serve concrete and practical purposes and to be useful in the active life. As teachers, secretaries, diplomats, and historians, humanists promoted studious diligence and erudition as important civic virtues, as attested in a stream of treatises and instructions about the best form of education.⁵

In addition to cultivating virtues within the scholarly community, therefore, such humanist statements were also meant to convince those outside their professional circle, including potential customers, of the value of their knowledge. The potential customer could be a young aristocrat or even a king, as in the case of Enea Silvio Piccolomini's treatise *De liberorum educatione*, written in 1450 as a Christmas gift for Ladislas Posthumus, King of Hungary and Bohemia and also Duke of Austria, then ten years old. "The pursuit of learning," Piccolomini writes, "offers the greatest assistance in acquiring virtue," and he recommended it to princes and prospective rulers.⁶ In another treatise, *De ingenuis moribus et liberalibus adolescentiae studiis liber*, written around 1402–1403 and directed more generally at young men, Pier Paolo Vergerio explains why a zest for work is an important quality in gentlemen. The best students are those with a "liberal temper," he writes, meaning that they are "keen for endeavour, flee inaction, and always love to do what is right." Work, moreover, protects adolescents from potentially harmful, immoral distractions. "Success is most likely if they are never allowed holidays," Vergerio argues, "for leisure makes young people inclined to lust and every intemperance." Yet solitude is also to be avoided, "which caresses a weak mind with constant thoughts."⁷

With these ideas about the ideal training, humanists positioned themselves as brokers of both prestigious and practical knowledge. Some anecdotes even credit humanism with wielding hard political power. The late fourteenth-century ruler Giangaleazzo Visconti, Duke of Milan, for

⁵ On humanist ideas about the political significance of their educational programme, see J. Hankins, *Virtue Politics: Soulcraft and Statecraft in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), 20–2 and 42–3; G. Almási, "Educating the Christian Prince for Learning and Peace: The Cases of Archdukes Rudolf and Ernst in Spain (1564–1571)," *Central European Cultures* 1 (2021), 2–43. For selected examples, see C. Kallendorf (ed. and trans.), *Humanist Educational Treatises* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

⁶ Cited from Kallendorf, *Educational Treatises*, 128–9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 10–1.

example, is famously said to have complained about how the writings of the Florentine chancellor Coluccio Salutati had caused him more harm than a thousand Florentine horsemen. Other indications of the prestige enjoyed by humanist scholars can be found in appointments. Cities, courts, and universities were prepared to pay serious sums of money to attract humanist stars. Even in 1632, Gerardus Vossius was employed by the city of Amsterdam in its newly founded *athenaeum* for the impressive salary of 2,600 guilders.

Success and recognition were not, however, inevitable or uncontested. The social position of humanists was inherently unstable. It required constant justification and advertising of one's learning, services, and added value. The rhetoric of effort on title pages and prefaces testifies to this need. In contrast to the courtly code of *sprezzatura* often associated with Renaissance high culture, many humanist authors actually highlighted their burdensome toils, "herculean" labours, and sleepless nights of work by candlelight (*lucubrationes*).⁸ Many of the confident claims to prestige also have to be understood in this light as active contributions in a struggle for recognition and respect. A significant example of this is the scholarly motif of the learned as part of a nobility of the mind, an intellectual aristocracy, every bit as honourable as the nobility of the sword.⁹

While historians have studied the social challenges faced by professional humanists and the ways in which these challenges impacted their scholarly development, we still have only a limited understanding of the criticism they sought to overcome.¹⁰ Critical voices within and outside the learned community targeted in particular what they perceived to be

⁸ See also Erasmus, *Adage*, 3.1.1: "Labores Herculi," which offers a lengthy exposition on the efforts involved in humanist scholarship. On the use of *lucubratio*, see also M. Lemmer, "Ich hab ettwan gewacht zu nacht. Zum 'Narrenschiff'-Prolog, Vers 90," in *Kritische Bewahrung: Beiträge zur deutschen Philologie: Festschrift für Werner Schröder zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. E.-J. Schmidt (Berlin: E. Schmidt, 1974), 357–70.

⁹ M. Füssel, "A Struggle for Nobility: 'Nobilitas litteraria' as Academic Self-Fashioning in Early Modern Germany," in *Scholarly Self-Fashioning and Community in the Early Modern University*, ed. R. Kirwan (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 92–106. See also the seminal study by E. Trunz, "Der Deutsche Humanismus um 1600 als Standeskultur," in *Deutsche Barockforschung: Dokumentation einer Epoche*, ed. R. Alewyn (Cologne: Kiepenheuer, 1966), 147–81.

¹⁰ Most research in this area focuses on German Späthumanismus: W. Kühlmann, *Gelehrtenrepublik und Fürstenstaat: Entwicklung und Kritik des deutschen Späthumanismus in der Literatur des Barockzeitalters* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1982); G. E. Grimm,

excessive zeal in learning, exemplified in pretentious parading of knowledge or a hypercritical priggishness. Although their objections were not part of a dedicated debate on the idea of the work ethic, they offer an illuminating foil, since they directly address key aspects of the humanist ideal of useful intellectual labour, criticizing them in social terms as forms of excessive, undesirable behaviour.

In tracing these critical responses, this chapter focuses on the representation of humanists as pedants. The caricature of the pedant is a sixteenth-century phenomenon. First appearing in early sixteenth-century Italian comedy but clearly resonating with existing caricatures of the scholar, the image of the humanist pedant developed into a negative stereotype that highlights in particular the anti-social nature of these learned men. Warnings against the risks of excessive studiousness can be discerned early on within the intellectual community.

By analysing these critical perspectives and placing them in their historical context, this chapter seeks to illuminate how the humanist cultivation of a work ethic with an emphasis on the importance of diligence and devotion provoked a counternarrative that would prove at least equally powerful and effective. The success of this critical narrative can be explained at least in part by competition and envy within the community of scholars. It also reflects, in part, the social tensions between humanists and their intended customers, to whom the humanist commitment to classical learning seemed excessive, pretentious, or uncivil.¹¹

Humanists were never entirely blind to the risks of a bookish, studious life. Even before humanism had grown into a full-blown movement, Petrarch already pondered the addictive nature of the return to classical literature in his *Secretum*, staging a therapeutic dialogue with Augustine to explore possible cures. In an assessment of the pros and cons of learning

Letternkultur: Wissenschaftskritik und antigelehrtes Dichten in Deutschland von der Renaissance bis zum Sturm und Drang (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1998); M. Füssel, “Die Experten, die Verkehrten? Gelehrtsatire als Expertenkritik in der Frühen Neuzeit,” in *Wissen, maßgeschneidert: Experten und Expertenkulturen im Europa der Vormoderne*, eds. B. Reich, F. Rexroth and M. Roick (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2012), 269–88.

¹¹ Much research has been done on the role of civility in the Republic of Letters of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. See S. Shapin, *A Social History of Truth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) and A. Goldgar, *Impolite Learning: Conduct and Community in the Republic of Letters 1680–1750* (New Haven: Yale, 1995). K. Thomas, *In Pursuit of Civility: Manners and Conduct in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale, 2018).

in *De commodis litterarum atque incommodis* (c. 1428), Leon Battista Alberti is explicit and extensive about the risks of obsession. Books make the scholar feel guilty about any other form of amusement, and they affect one's rest, health, even one's life expectancy and offer only slim chances for worldly success.¹² Most relevant for our purposes, however, are the critical perspectives that emerge once humanism had become a successful movement of reform in society, visible especially in educational institutions across Europe. We will consider two types of criticism represented by Erasmus and Montaigne which illuminate conflicts within the intellectual community in the case of Erasmus and social tensions outside it in the case of Montaigne.

STYLE OVER SUBSTANCE: ERASMUS AGAINST PURISM

In 1528, Erasmus of Rotterdam published a razor-sharp satirical dialogue against linguistic purism titled *Ciceronianus* (The Ciceronian). Its theme goes back to a fundamental humanist issue: how best to revive classical Latin. The quality of Cicero's style was beyond doubt, but the extent to which his use of language should be normative became the issue of heated debates from the late fifteenth century onward.¹³ As a representative of a pragmatic use of Latin, Erasmus lampoons the Ciceronian as an obsessive scholar whose approach to learning was not simply unproductive but also potentially dangerous.

The central character of Erasmus' dialogue is a talented scholar, Nosoponus (Mr Workaholic). His old friends, Bulephorus (Mr Counsellor) and Hypologus (Mr Backup), knew him as an ebullient, sociable man, but when he enters the scene, he appears seriously ill. Bulephorus knows that Nosoponus suffers from a new, mysterious condition, *zelodulea*, Greek for "imitation-addiction." When the two friends catch up with Nosoponus,

¹² L. B. Alberti, *De commodis litterarum atque incommodis*, ed. L. G. Carotti (Florence: Olschki, 1976).

¹³ On the Ciceronian debate, see Remigio Sabbadini's seminal *Storia del ciceronianismo e di altre questioni letterarie nell'età della rinascenza* (Turin: Ermanno Loescher, 1885), J. DellaNeva, "Following Their Own Genius: Debates on Ciceronianism in 16th-Century Italy," in *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Cicero*, ed. W. H. F. Altman (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 357–76, and P. Mack, *A History of Renaissance Rhetoric, 1380–1620* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), esp. 166–69. For a selection of primary contributions to the debate with English translations, see *Ciceronian Controversies*, ed. J. DellaNeva, trans. B. Duvick (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

we quickly learn that Nosoponus is addicted to Cicero. He refuses to read works by any other author and has put away all his other books to avoid using “some alien phrase.”¹⁴

Erasmus’ satirical portrait shows a scholar with extremely anti-social behaviour. For over seven years, he has essentially been hiding in his study. To protect him from the outside world, the place has been especially adapted “with thick walls and double doors and windows, and all the cracks carefully sealed up with plaster and pitch, so that hardly any light or sound can penetrate even by day.”¹⁵ Social interaction would destroy his concentration. A traditional family life and a job are impossible for similar reasons. To free his mind from emotional disturbance, Nosoponus has assumed a semi-monastic lifestyle and has foregone marriage. He has decided neither to take a job nor to assume any public responsibility, as either one would bring too many worries and distractions. Instead, he is completely devoted to Cicero. Painted portraits of the author hang everywhere in his house, and he always carries with him an image of Cicero carved into gems.¹⁶

In his portrayal of this Nosoponus’ studies, Erasmus presents his approach as hyper-scrupulous and sterile and obsessed with lists, semantic subtleties, and rewriting. Nosoponus spends most of his time compiling three massive indexes from Cicero’s works. The first offers an exhaustive alphabetical lexicon (not just of single words, but of all their different meanings in different contexts), the second lists word combinations (idiomatic expressions, witticisms, figures of style, etc.), and the third gives an overview of the metrical patterns in Cicero’s oeuvre. Nosoponus reports about his scholarly zeal in relentless detail, including his careful approach to referencing:

¹⁴ The English translation is taken from *The Ciceronian: A Dialogue on the Ideal Latin Style*, trans. and annot. B. I. Knott, in *Collected Works of Erasmus* [henceforth CWE], vol. 28 (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1986), 346. For the Latin text, see the edition by P. Mesnard in the *Opera omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami* [henceforth ASD] I.2 (Amsterdam: North Holland Press, 1971), 609: “Iam annos septem totos nihil attingo praeter libros Ciceronianos, a caeteris non minore religione temperans, quam Cartusiani temperant a carnibus.

Bulephorus: quur isthuc? Nosoponus. Ne quid alicunde haereat alienae phraseos...”

¹⁵ CWE28:351; ASD I.2.

¹⁶ CWE28:346; ASD I.2: 609.

And I am not satisfied with recording one or two occurrences, which is what other people do, but every time I come across a usage in Cicero, however similar it is to other examples, without fail I make a note of page, recto or verso, and line, adding a sign to indicate whether it occurs in the middle, beginning, or end of the line.¹⁷

Despite their exhaustive coverage, however, these tools do not make Nosoponus' writing process less cumbersome. Indeed, Erasmus represents his work as overly forced. During his nightly labours (Nosoponus only works when others sleep), he typically manages to produce merely one line. After this tiresome process of composition come the phases of extensive revision, at least ten times, and of putting the text aside, so that even the shortest and most prosaic letters take months to complete. When it comes to speaking, Nosoponus altogether resists the idea of spontaneity. Much to the surprise of his interlocutors, he declares that he generally avoids speaking in Latin and would only agree to speak in public if he had the chance to prepare his speech and learn it by heart. If critics would object that his words "stank of lamp oil," a proverbial reprove of artificial speech, he would not mind at all.¹⁸ This satirical picture of excessive rigour and sterility offers a clear indication of Erasmus' contrasting values, based on the pragmatic use and practical value of Latin.

An arguably more dangerous point of concern behind Erasmus' satirical picture is religious rather than scholarly. He feared that the Ciceronian attitude could raise the spectre of paganism, on account of the fundamental incompatibility of the ancient vocabulary and the Christian culture of his time. Erasmus illustrates this tension with an anecdote about a Good Friday mass that he had attended in Rome. The anecdote is told by Bulephorus, who explains that the sermon was delivered by a true Ciceronian orator in the presence of Pope Julius II and many cardinals. While technically accomplished, the sermon was anything but effective in Bulephorus' eyes. When the preacher had sought to appeal to his audience's emotions, Bulephorus had "wanted to laugh" about the alienating comparisons between Christ's crucifixion and ancient heroes:

¹⁷ CWE28:347; ASD I.2, 610.

¹⁸ CWE28:356; ASD I.2: 616. See also *Adagia*, 1.7.71: "Olet lucernam."

He spoke of the Decii and Quintus Curtius who dedicated themselves to the spirits of the dead to save the republic, and of Cecrops, Menoeceus, Iphigenia, and several others who had set the safety and honour of the fatherland above their own lives. With a sob in his throat he bemoaned the fact that the heroes who came to the aid of the republic of Rome by putting themselves in peril received the thanks of the nation by official proclamation: some were awarded a gold statue in the forum, others became the recipients of divine honours; but Christ, in return for his benefits, received from the thankless Jewish race not a reward but the cross, horrible sufferings, and utter degradation.¹⁹

In Bulephorus' eyes, the sermon completely missed the point of Christian gratitude for God's grace. Instead, it exemplified human arrogance, reducing Christ's death to the level of ancient men such as Socrates.

Also, on a practical level, the linguistic purism of the Ciceronians was problematic. The key words of the Christian faith were all stylistically improper, because they were all "new" words, that is, coined after Cicero had written his oeuvre. In a bravura catalogue of possible Ciceronian alternatives for Christian terms, including "Jupiter Optimus Maximus" for God the Father and "Apollo or Aesculapius" for Christ, Bulephorus points out the absurdity of the ambition to mimic Cicero.²⁰ By thus linking the literary ambition of the Ciceronians to the risk of paganism, Erasmus restated the position of his beloved church father Jerome, who had squarely placed the terms "Ciceronian" and "Christian" in opposition. In a famous letter, Jerome reported of dreaming about an encounter with God, who confronted him with his preference for pagan literature when he declared himself a Christian, saying: "You lie: you are a Ciceronian, not a Christian."²¹

This long-standing tension between ancient and Christian culture gains a new significance in the context of the political and religious tensions of the Reformation. When Erasmus' dialogue was published, the crisis of the Church had also affected relations within the Republic of Letters, notably between scholars from northern Europe and their Italian colleagues.

¹⁹ CWE28:385; ASD I.2, 638.

²⁰ CWE28: 388; ASD I.2: 641: "An pro patre Christi dicit, *Iuppiter opt. Max.*; pro filio dicit *Apollinem*, aut *Aesculapium*...".

²¹ Jerome, Letter 22.30 to Eustochium, in *Epistulae*, ed. I. Hilberg, CSEL 54 (Vienna: Verl. der Österr. Akad. der Wiss., 1996), 1:190: "Et ille, qui residebat: 'mentiris', ait, 'Ciceronianus es, non Christianus; ubi thesaurus tuus, ibi et cor tuum'."

Indeed, Erasmus himself had become a controversial figure on account of his agenda for religious reform and its perceived connections to the rise of Luther. In turn, Erasmus here regarded the Ciceronian movement as a sect, like Lutheranism, only in this case with a particular presence in Italian cities, especially Rome. The *Ciceronianus* thus shows how his critical perspective on scholarly excess was also informed by religious considerations.

Where Erasmus exemplifies criticism of perceived aberrations, Montaigne's essay against pedantry represents a more fundamental type of criticism which questions the intrinsic value of erudition.

QUANTITY OVER QUALITY: MONTAIGNE AGAINST USELESS KNOWLEDGE

Michel de Montaigne may at first sight seem an unlikely candidate for criticism of the humanist work ethic. He was raised in Latin, educated by a humanist teacher, a German physician probably named Horstanus, who simply knew no French. His *Essays* (composed between 1571 and 1592) bear all the marks of his intimate acquaintance with the classics of Latin and Greek literature. Indeed, Montaigne opens his essay "Du pédantisme" by admitting that he used to be "upset" about the ridiculing of pedants "as buffoons" in Italian comedies. And yet he later found out that the picture was true.²² His subsequent moral criticism is socially and politically marked, revealing how Montaigne's aristocratic ethos clashed with humanist educational practice.

Montaigne organizes his essay as an attempt to understand how the pursuit of learning could have such a negative effect. He starts by showing that, historically, learning has never been regarded as a guarantee of good behaviour. Even in Antiquity, some of the brightest minds had been ridiculed for their eccentric manners and social indiscretions. Relying on Plato, Montaigne recounts how some early philosophers indulged in

²² M. de Montaigne, *Les Essais*, eds. P. Villey and V.-L. Saulnier (Paris: Puf, 1965), essay 1.25, p. 133: "Je me suis souvent despité, en mon enfance, de voir és comedies Italiennes toujours un pedante pour badin, et le surnom de magister n'avoit guiere plus honorable signification parmy nous." For the English translation, see *The Complete Essays*, trans. M. A. Screech (London: Penguin, 2003), where the title is translated as "On schoolmasters' learning," 150–62, at 150.

absurd research, spurned public affairs, and exhibited obstinate manners, including a resistance to hierarchy and disrespect for authority:

Do they hear a king or their own ruler praised? To them he is but an idle shepherd who spends his time exploiting his sheep's wool and milk, only more harshly than a real shepherd does. Do you think a man may be more important because he possesses as his own a couple of thousand acres? They laugh at that, used as they are to treating the whole world as their own. Do you pride yourself on your nobility, since you reckon to have seven rich forebears? They do not think much of you: you have no conception of the universality of Nature—nor of the great many forebears each of us has—rich ones, poor ones, kings, lackeys, Greeks, Barbarians...²³

To Montaigne, such behaviour exemplifies the ignorance of these philosophers about “basic everyday matters,” despite their obvious intellectual qualities. The humanist teachers of his time, however, are worse, he believes, because they lack quality altogether, are “incapable of public duties,” and show “base, vile morals.”²⁴

A key reason why this could happen, Montaigne suggests, is a mistaken approach to knowledge, according to which quantity is more important than quality. This is a systemic problem that goes beyond the teachers themselves, resulting from a calculating culture that aims for profit rather than value. Parents pay pedagogues to fill the heads of their children with knowledge. Yet strangely enough, according to Montaigne, “nobody talks about judgement or virtue.”²⁵ This leads to a very shallow use of knowledge, in which learning has become a commodity that can be traded without making a useful difference for its possessor:

The learning is passed from hand to hand with only one end in view: to show it off, to put into our accounts to entertain others with it, as though it were merely counters, useful for totting up and producing statements, but having no other use or currency.²⁶

²³ Trans. Screech, 152; *Essai* 1.25, p. 134.

²⁴ Trans. Screech, 152; *Essai* 1.25, p. 135.

²⁵ Trans. Screech, 153; *Essai* 1.25, p. 136.

²⁶ Trans. Screech, 154; *Essai* 1.25, pp. 136–37.

This culture of learning stimulates parroting behaviour, Montaigne argues, and a lazy reliance on external authority, but it does not improve individual judgement. “We know how to say: ‘This is what Cicero said’; ‘This is morality for Plato’ [...] But what have *we* got to say? What judgements do *we* make? What are *we* doing?”²⁷

These moral considerations lead Montaigne to examine the difference between learned knowledge on the one hand and judgement, or even wisdom, on the other. Becoming wise, he argues, requires moral improvement of the soul, and knowledge should be a means to this end. Montaigne compares it to eating: “What use is it to us to have a belly full of meat if we do not digest it, if we do not transmute it into ourselves, if it does not make us grow in size and strength?” If learning does not lead to this type of improvement, he would rather have the pupil spend his time playing tennis, so that “at least his body would become more agile.”²⁸ For by itself, bookish knowledge only makes students or teachers more arrogant or downright confused. Suggesting that this observation is more widely shared, Montaigne explains how in his local Périgord dialect, such scholars are called “lettreférīts,” as if “their reading has given them, so to speak, a whack with a hammer.”²⁹

This critical view of learning also has a gendered dimension. For Montaigne, knowledge is a “dangerous sword” that can wound “a weak hand.” He suggests that this may also explain why French men “do not require much learning” in their wives.³⁰ On a political level, too, the use of learning is limited. Montaigne approvingly cites classical examples about Sparta, where education was about courageous action and manly valour, contrasting it to Athens, where education was more about successful talking. Such examples clearly show that “studying the arts and sciences makes hearts soft and womanish rather than teaching them to be firm and ready for war.”³¹ Contemporary examples confirm this, Montaigne argues. The Turks are raised with respect for arms and

²⁷ Trans. Screech, 154; *Essai* 1.25, p. 137.

²⁸ Trans. Screech, 155–6; *Essai* 1.25, pp. 137–38.

²⁹ Trans. Screech, 156; *Essai* 1.25, p. 139.

³⁰ Trans. Screech, 158. *Essai* 1.25, p. 140.

³¹ Trans. Screech, 162; *Essai* 1.25, p. 143. For the reverse image of the Latinate scholar as a representative of crude and unsophisticated masculinity that emerged in the seventeenth century, see A. J. La Vopa, *The Labor of the Mind: Intellect and Gender in Enlightenment Cultures* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), esp. 33–35.

contempt for learning, and their state is the strongest of the age. The other example tells of Charles VIII and his easy conquest of Naples (1495), which took place without any armed conflict. Charles' entourage explained this as a result of the fact that the Italian leaders "spent more time becoming clever and learned than vigorous and soldierly."³²

Montaigne's essay thus culminates in a strong affirmation of valour over learning as a key to virtue. Yet in drawing such a strong contrast between the traditional aristocratic ethos and the value of learning as promoted by professional humanists, it also raises new questions about Montaigne's own copious use of learning in his *Essays*. Montaigne seems aware of this and tries to mitigate the idea of double standards. "Am I for the most part not doing the same when assembling my material?" he writes, labelling it "foolishness." By showing such awareness, Montaigne subtly marks his own sense of judgement and separates his use of learning from that of pedants he criticizes.³³

CRITICISM FROM OUTSIDE: THE CARICATURE OF THE PEDANT

Montaigne's essay took its cue from recent satirical portrayals of "pedants" in Italian comedies. This development can be pinpointed to the first quarter of the sixteenth century, arising in the *commedia erudita*, the genre of scripted comedy. The earliest example is a play entitled *El pedante* by the relatively unknown Roman writer Francesco Belo.³⁴ The title character displays the traits that would become the pedant's standard features as a farcical type. A messy, unkempt figure, he speaks in a barbarous mixture of Latin and Italian and prides himself on his superior knowledge even as he patently acts like a fool. His comic potential thus revolves around a series of contrasts and oppositions: pretension and incompetence, wisdom and foolishness, words and deeds, high culture and low.

The term "pedant" was initially neutral, signifying a professional teacher of Latin grammar, literature, and rhetoric. Yet it is also clear that it

³² Trans. Screech, 162. *Essai* 1.25, p. 144.

³³ Trans. Screech, 154; *Essai* 1.25, p. 136.

³⁴ F. Belo, *El pedante* (Rome: Valerio Dorico e Luigi fratelli bresciani, 1529 [lost]; edn 1538).

concerned a profession that occupied a relatively modest status.³⁵ Indeed, the earliest known uses of the term foreshadow the satirical potential that would eventually be drawn from it. A sonnet by the Florentine barber and poet Burchiello (1404–49) disparages a group of fellow poets as “a band of ignorant pedants” engaged in literary studies.³⁶ Around the same time, another sonnet belittles an aspiring poet as a pedant “who with his speech puffs himself up like a barrel.”³⁷

The caricature of the pedant proved an instant success. During the sixteenth century, he became one of the most frequently used stock characters in Italian comedy. Antonio Stäuble has identified 47 plays featuring pedants by diverse authors, including the master satirist Pietro Aretino and experimenters such as Giordano Bruno and the Neapolitan polymath Giambattista della Porta. The type also appears in the moralizing comedies of Sforza Oddi and Bernardino Pino.³⁸ Apart from the learned, scripted comedy, the pedant also became a popular stock figure in its popular, unscripted counterpart, the *commedia dell'arte*. Working from brief scenarios that served as a basis for further improvisation by professional actors, these comedies offered a set cast of types that frequently included the figure of the old man Graziano, also known as “il dottore,” often said to be an academic from Bologna, who spoke in a learned yet incomprehensible gibberish of Latin.³⁹

³⁵ On the social position of grammar teachers, see P. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300–1600* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 17–20, 36–41.

³⁶ “Un nugol di pedanti marchigiani / che avevano studiato il Pecorone / vidi venire in ver settentrione / disputando le legge colle mani [...]” Cited from M. Zaccarello (ed.), *I sonnetti del Burchiello* (Turin: Einaudi, 2004), sonnet CLII, pp. 214–5. See for more early references the lemma “pedante” in the *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana* 12 (1961–2002), 917–18.

³⁷ “Deh, va’, dormi in servizio in un fenile / novel Petrarca, imitator de Dante / omuncol che ti stimi esser gigante / va’ guarda i porci e statte in qualche ovile! / S’tu portasse per lancia un campanile / e cavalcassi sopra uno elefante, non sireste però se non pedante, ché te gonfi nel dir come un barile” The citation is taken from a series of ‘*rimedi di corrispondenza*’ by a group of poets surrounding Comedio Venuti (1424–?), a notary and poet from Cortona. See Antonio Lanza (ed.), *Lirici toscani del Quattrocento*, vol. 2 (Roma: Bulzoni, 1975), 741–42.

³⁸ A. Stäuble, “Parlar per lettera.” *Il pedante nella commedia del cinquecento e altri saggi sul teatro rinascimentale* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1991), esp. 11–3.

³⁹ P. Jordan, “Pantalone and Il Dottore: The Old Men of Commedia,” in *The Routledge Companion to Commedia dell'Arte*, eds. J. Chaffee and O. Crick (London: Routledge,

The pedant's success as a recurring character trope soon spread beyond the Alps. Beginning in the second half of the century, pedants stepped onto the stage in France, as exemplified in several plays by Pierre de Larivey based on Italian examples. We find new uses of the pedant in the seventeenth century in plays by Cyrano de Bergerac and Molière.⁴⁰ In English drama, the impact of the Italian invention is also visible, for instance in the character of Holofernes in Shakespeare's early comedy *Love's Labour's Lost*. Moreover, the phenomenon of pedantry became increasingly a theme of interest off the stage and beyond comedy, finding a place in other literary genres. It appears in dialogues, novels, poems, and essays.

The theatrical pedant is especially interesting for our purposes because it brings us closer to the humanists' customers. These comedies mostly originated in the elite environments of local courts and academies, where amateur actors performed the plays for private audiences of highly educated aristocrats, both male and female. Reflecting this social context, the humour in the plays often served to confirm an upper-class ethos. The critical approach to the pedant should thus be located in precisely the social circles that humanist educators sought to serve with their educational agenda. It seems generally to have functioned as a means of putting the authority and standing of this new class of humanist teachers into perspective. Two specific strategies of this critical script will be examined here: the deflating of intellectual pretensions and the exposure of vanity.

DEFLATING PRETENSIONS

The first strategy, in which the schoolmaster's pretensions are mocked, magnifies in particular the pedant's most conspicuous affectation: his manner of speaking, marked by a mix of Latin and Italian, along with a preference for obscure words, technical jargon, and the abundant use of quotations. Competence in Latin implied membership in an elite,

2015), 62–69. For the form and use of scenarios, see R. Andrews (trans. and ed.), *The Commedia dell'Arte of Flaminio Scala: A Translation and Analysis of 30 Scenarios* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2008).

⁴⁰ J. Royé, *La figure du pédant de Montaigne à Molière* (Geneva: Droz, 2008); K. Breiding, *Untersuchungen zum Typus des Pedanten in der französischen Literatur des 17. Jahrhunderts*, PhD thesis Frankfurt on the Main, 1970.

whether academic or clerical. So when Latin was introduced into an otherwise vernacular speech context, this second language could be seen as an attempt to mark out distinction and claim symbolic capital.

In the plays, however, the use of Latin is presented as ridiculous rather than impressive. One form of ridicule is the inversion of high and low culture through the fusion of prestigious knowledge and banal situations. A good example is the first appearance of the pedant Prudenziio in Belo's *Il pedante*. In the play, the middle-aged Prudenziio is madly in love with a young girl, itself a well-known scenario for laughter. Yet what makes him look especially ridiculous is his manner of speaking:

Omnia vincit amor et nos cedamus amori. It certainly seems, to the judgement of the experts, that *totiens quotiens* a man leaves the age of adolescence, *verbi gratia* in my case, *non deceat sibi* to love these tender-aged girls; although *dicitur* that an old cat suits a young mouse. Ah *terque quaterque* miserable Prudenziio! Of how little use are his virtues, his extensive night-works and daily studies.⁴¹

Rather than impressing the viewer, Prudenziio's classical allusions and pompous style of reasoning provoke laughter, especially because of the sharp contrast between his style and the lustful sentiments his words express.

Besides being mocked as pompous, the pedant's language was also derided as obscure. When, in Pietro Aretino's play *Il Marescalco* (The Stablemaster, 1533), the pedant enters the scene, he greets the title character in Latin. Instead of being impressed, however, the stablemaster finds it annoying to be addressed this way:

Pedant: Bona dies. Quid agitis, magister mi?

Marescalco: Ah, pardon me, Professor. I'm very upset and didn't see you.

Pedante: *Sis letus.*

⁴¹ "Omnia vincit amor et nos cedamus amori. Certamente pare, al giudizio dei periti, che *totiens quotiens* un uomo esce delli anni adolescentuli, *verbi gratia* un par nostro, non deceat sibi l'amare queste puellule tenere; benché *dicitur* che a fele, senio confetto, se lli convenga un mure tenero. Oh *terque quaterque* infelice Prudenziio! a cui poco le virtù e le lunghe lucubrazioni e i quotidiani studi prosunt." Belo, *Il pedante* I, 4. Italian text taken from the edition of G. D. Bonino, *La commedia del Cinquecento*, in *Il teatro italiano*, vol. 2 (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), 17, henceforth: Bonino. The English translation is mine.

Marescalco: Speak Italian; I have things on my mind other than your astrological jargon.⁴²

Many other instances offer characters complaining that they could not understand what the pedant had meant. “Speak to us as much as you can in everyday language,” the pedant is told in *The Stablemaster*, “because all this ‘ibus, ibas’ business is too constipated for us to be understood.”⁴³ The original performance context of the play, which Aretino composed during his stay at Duke Federico Gonzaga’s court at Mantua in 1526, suggests that the pretensions of the pedant must have been as laughable to the Duke of Mantua as they were annoying to the stablemaster. In the context of the *commedia dell’arte*, the comic potential of incomprehensible Latin was taken a step further by having the character of the dottore, Graziano, speak in a completely garbled version of it. Actors also used this mock language off stage, as a form of riddle, in playful correspondence with their patrons, complete with translations in Tuscan.⁴⁴

Obscurity particularly became an object of ridicule when it was coupled with self-righteousness. One could cite the exchange between the pedant Messer Piero and the servant Stragualcia in *Gl’Ingannati* (*The Deceived*, 1538), written by members of the Accademia degl’Intronati, a cultural society of aristocrats and literati in Siena. When Messer Piero warns a gluttonous Stragualcia against overindulgent eating, the servant responds to his Latin words with an angry set of mock-Latin terms that sound like Italian profanities:

Messer Piero: Variorum ciborum commistio pessima generat digestionem.

Stragualcia: Bus asinorum, buorum, castronorum, tatte, batatte, pecoronibus! What the devil are you up to? May you catch the pox, you and

⁴² “Pedante: Bona dies. Quid agitis, magister mi? Marescalco: Perdonatemi, maestro, che non vi avea visto, si son fuor di me. Pedante: Sis letus. Marescalco: Parlate per volgare, che ho altro da pensare che a le vostre astrologie.” Pietro Aretino, *Il Marescalco* I, 9. Italian text taken from the edition of G. Petrocchi, in *Teatro* (Milan: Mondadori, 1971), 20–21, henceforth: Petrocchi. Italian text from *Five Comedies from the Italian Renaissance*, trans. by L. Giannetti and G. Ruggiero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 134, henceforth Giannetti and Ruggiero.

⁴³ *Il Marescalco* V, 10: “Parlateci più alla carlona che voi potete, ché il vostro in bus et in bas è troppo stitico ad intenderlo.” Giannetti and Ruggiero, 200.

⁴⁴ For examples, see R. Henke, *Performance and Literature in the Commedia dell’arte* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 137–46.

all the other pedants in the world! You're a scoundrel, as far as I'm concerned.⁴⁵

Stragualcia's use of mock-Latin thus aggressively dismisses Piero's claim to authority, ridiculing it as quasi-scholarly and sanctimonious. Giordano Bruno applies the same technique in *Il Candelaio* (*The Candlebearer*, 1582), but he goes a step further. Here, the character of Sanguino uses suggestive, quasi-Latin terms to tell Manfurio plainly how ridiculous his manner of speaking is:

Master, with this infernal way of talking in grammouldian, with all these catacombries and smellegant latrinities, you infect the air, and make yourself a laughing stock.⁴⁶

With these mock-pedantic terms intentionally botched according to key humanist concepts (grammar, elegance, Latin), Bruno not only makes fun of the pedant's intellectual pretentiousness but also puts his finger on the sore spot. Rather than a source of respectable knowledge, the pedant's language is a social embarrassment.

Another way to deflate pretension was to question the relevance of the pedant's knowledge. Whereas humanists prided themselves on the usefulness of rhetoric and the pedagogical value of their teachings, the comedies took the opposite perspective. They represent pedants as experts in pointless rhetorical *copia*, offering synonyms and circumlocutions and presenting tedious catalogues of examples. In Bruno's *Candlebearer*, for example, the pedant Manfurio is always prone to correct the Latin wording of his interlocutors, but when he is asked to write a love letter for someone else, he produces a text whose high-flown style makes it virtually incomprehensible, and thus, the text is useless.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Giannetti and Ruggiero, 247. *GIngannati* III, 2, ed. Bonino, 142: "Messer Piero: Variorum ciborum commistio pessima generat digestionem. Stra. Bus asinorum, buorum, castronorum, tatte, batatte pecoronibus! Che diavolo andate intrigando l'accia? Che vi venga il cancro a voi e quanti pedanti si trova! Mi parete un manigoldo, a me..."

⁴⁶ English translation by G. Moliterno from *Renaissance Comedy: The Italian Masters*, vol. 2, ed. D. Beecher (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 354. *Il Candelaio* I, 5, ed. Bonino, vol. 3, 164: "Mastro, con questo diavolo di parlare per grammuffo o catacumbaro o delegante e latrinesco, amorbate il cielo, e tutt'il mondo vi burla."

⁴⁷ *Il Candelaio* II, 7, in Bonino, vol. 3, 193-4.

The targets of derision include the philological teaching practices that the humanists themselves promoted as the ideal preparation of rhetorical skills.⁴⁸ The same Manfurio, for example, is mocked for his use of absurd etymologies, a standard feature of the analysis of classical texts. Upon being addressed as “magister,” he explains the term as “magister: three times really great.” This prompts his interlocutor, the painter Gianbernardo, to ask for the meaning of the term “pedant.” Manfurio hypothesizes that it goes back to three words: PE for “perfectos,” DAN for “dans,” and TE for “thesauros”: giving perfect treasures. Gianbernardo, however, keen to expose the pedant as a pompous fool, suggests another etymology: PE for “pecorone,” DAN for “da nulla,” TE for “testa d’asino,” or: silly idiot, donkey head.⁴⁹

Similarly, Aretino lampoons the practical uses of classical rhetoric in *The Stablemaster*. When the pedant is asked to convince the stablemaster to marry (something the stablemaster absolutely does not want to do), he delivers a verbose speech about the opportunities for honour that offspring could bring. This oration includes a catalogue of illustrious examples which is particularly impressive because of its length, which prompts the other characters to make ironic comments which underline his complete lack of authority: “He’s just getting warmed up,” “The words of the learned are certainly enjoyable,” “You know lots of names,” “You sound like a parish priest reading the calendar of saints to the peasants,” “O dear devil, save us!” and “This could go on until nightfall.”

⁴⁸ For a modern assessment of the contrast between ideal and practice, see A. Grafton and L. Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

⁴⁹ Beecher and Moliterno, 383–84. *Il Candelaio* III, 7, ed. Bonino, vol. 3, 203: “Gio. Bernardo: Sapete, *domine Magister*...? Manfurio: *Hoc est magis ter, tre volte maggiore: “Pauci, quos aequus amavit Iuppiter, aut ardens exivit in aethera virtus [Verg. Aen. VI.129–30, AV]. Gio. Bernardo: Quello che voglio dir è questo: vorrei sapere da voi che vuol dir: pedante. Manfurio: Lubentissime voglio dirvelo, insegnarvelo, dichiararvelo, esporvelo, propalarvelo, palam farvelo, insinuarvelo, et, – particula coniunctiva in ultima dictione apposita, – enuclearvelo; sicut, ut velut, veluti, quemadmodum, nucem ovidianam meis coram discipulis, – quo melius nucleum eius edere possint, – enucleavi. Pedante vuol dire quasi *pede ante: utpote quia* ave lo incesso prosequitivo, col quale fa andare avanti gli *erudiendi* puberi; vel, *per strictiorem arctioremque aethymologiam*: Pe, perfectos, – Dan, dans, – Te, thesauros. – Or che dite de le ambidue? Gio. Bernardo: Son buone, ma a me non piace né l’una né l’altra, né mi par a proposito. Manfurio: Cotesto vi è dirlo lecito, *alia meliore in medium prolata, idest* quando arrete apportatene un’altra vie piú degna. Gio. Bernardo: Eccovela: Pe pecorone, – Dan, da nulla, Te, testa d’asino.”*

The skills he possesses, moreover, are presented as pointless. “What do all these names have to do with me?”, the stablemaster interrupts at one point, only to be told he should regard the catalogue as “the precious gems adorning an embroidered robe...” In the end, the Stablemaster gives up, exasperated: “Oh, God, what a way to die!”⁵⁰

The critical perspective on the pedant’s pretensions culminates in its sharpest form in takedowns of the sense of superiority possessed by this learned fool. Such a deflation occurs when the pedant is exposed (as he is fairly frequently) as incompetent. With their dramatic irony, these scenes offer some indication of how erudite the audience was expected to be. Audiences and readers of Aretino’s *Stablemaster*, for instance, will have noticed that the pedant’s knowledge of the classics is decidedly shaky when he refers to the non-existent works *De agilibus mundi* and *De insomnio Scipionis*, the former supposedly by Seneca and the latter by Plutarch. Similarly, the misattribution of a verse from Ephesians to Revelation may cause a chuckle.⁵¹ Incompetence becomes an explicit subject in a scene in which the pedant speaks of ten muses:

Knight: Sir, there are only nine, unless you want to include among them your housekeeper.

Pedant: What do you mean, nine? I count Clio, one; Euterpe, two; Urania, three; Calliope, *quatuor*; Erato, *quinque*; Thalia, *sex*; Venus, seven; Pallas, eight; Minerva, nine, *verum est*.

Stablemaster: Play the pipes for the second act.

Knight: Ha, ha, ha!

Count: Ha, ha, ha, ha!

Jacopo: Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!⁵²

⁵⁰ Giannetti and Ruggiero, 186–193; *Il Marescalco* V, 3, ed. Petrocchi, 74–79: “Ei s’ha affbiato la giornea” [lit. “girded the philosopher’s toga”]; “E pur bella cosa il parlar di i dotti”; “Voi sapete di molti nominativi”; “Voi mi parete un piovano che sfoderi il calendario a i contadini”; “O diavolo, riparaci tu!”; “Noi ci siamo per fino a notte”; “Che ho io a fare di tanti nomi?” “A ricamartene, perché sono margarite, unioni, zaffiri, iacinti e balasci”; “Oimè, che morte è questa!”

⁵¹ *Il Marescalco* IV, 5, ed. Petrocchi, 61, 63, and 64.

⁵² Giannetti and Ruggiero, 191–192; *Il Marescalco* V, 3, ed. Petrocchi, 78: “Cavaliere: Domine, le son nove, se già non ci volete mettere la vostra massara. Pedante: Come nove? saldi: Clio una, Euterpe due, Eurania tre, Caliope quatuor, Erato quinque, Talia sex, Venus sette, Pallas otto, e Minerva novem, verum est. Marescalco: Risonate i pivi al secondo. Cavaliere: Ah, ah, ah! Conte: Ah, ah, ah! Messer Jacopo: Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah!”

Punctured with dramatic irony, the pedant's pretence to expertise thus becomes the basis of a farcical scene.

EXPOSING VANITY

The second comic strategy which exposes the pedant's vanity reveals underlying tensions over social status. Moving beyond intellectual qualities, the aim here is to represent pedants as being excessively concerned with status. In contrast to the perception of those surrounding him, he considers himself a man of high standing who deserves great respect due to his profession and position.

This representation resonates with contemporary debates about the meaning of nobility and its proper forms of virtue.⁵³ In the fifteenth century, many humanists began cultivating the idea of the nobility of the mind, according to which learning, rather than ancestry or wealth, signalled true, moral virtue. A studious life, in their view, produced a noble mind, equal in status to the traditional nobility.⁵⁴ The argument of a "nobilitas litteraria" followed, in a way, similar claims made by legal scholars, who had been asserting their right to noble status since the late twelfth century.⁵⁵ The lawyers' claim to the status of the traditional nobility is exemplified by a famous anecdote, gleefully related by the humanist and future pope Enea Silvio Piccolomini, about Georg Fischel, an early fifteenth-century lawyer and vice-chancellor to Sigismund, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Recently knighted by Sigismund, Fischel arrived at the Council of Basel (in 1433) and hesitated when the moment came for him to take his proper place: should it be amongst the jurists or amongst the knights? He decided to join the latter group, only to be berated by the emperor: "You are acting foolishly

⁵³ For selected contributions to this debate, see A. Rabil, Jr, *Knowledge, Goodness, and Power: The Debate over Nobility Among Quattrocento Italian Humanists* (Binghampton, NY, 1991).

⁵⁴ Füssel, "A Struggle for Nobility."

⁵⁵ M. Vester, "Social Hierarchies: The Upper Classes," in *A Companion to the Worlds of the Renaissance*, ed. G. Ruggiero (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 227–42, at 229.

to prefer arms to letters. For I could make a thousand knights in one day, but I could not make a doctor in a thousand years.”⁵⁶

The humanists’ claim to honour went hand in hand with a critical assessment of aristocratic conduct, resulting in a distinction between true and false nobility.⁵⁷ Accordingly, the discourse of the nobility of the mind reflects the humanist scholars’ strong aura of confidence in their social position. This sense of identity clearly benefitted the communicative ideals of the Republic of Letters by removing social hurdles amongst like-minded scholars. Outside this Latin-speaking community, however, this stance was more subversive, since it challenged the traditional social order by emphasizing a meritocratic alternative to the class system.

The humanist sense of honour prompted an equally aggressive response in our comedies. Many jokes attack the pedant’s misguided social vanity, reflected for example in the pedant’s obsession with forms of address. In Aretino’s *Stablemaster*, a servant seeks to flatter the pedant by addressing him as a nobleman (Your Lordship; Vostra Signoria) and calling him a “valiant man” with a weapon of his own. The double entendre is lost on the pedant, who, highly pleased, confirms his social pride with a nod to Virgil: “Both with *arma virum* and with books, I do not give a quarter to any man.”⁵⁸ Elsewhere in the play, the pedant can be seen to trample etiquette by changing the order of precedence to his own advantage, entering a house before a knight with an accompanying citation of Cicero: “Let arms give way to the toga.”⁵⁹

On a nonverbal level, the pedant’s outward appearance signals that his vanity is misguided: the pedant is generally presented as ugly, dirty, and badly dressed. He wears a toga, from antiquity onwards a symbol of authority and respectability, but it is nothing more than a shoddy piece of cloth. Taking its place within a long tradition of depicting intellectuals

⁵⁶ “Stulte agis, inquit Sigismundus, qui literis militiam praefers. Nam ego milites mille una die fecerim, doctorem mille annis non fecerim.” Latin text and English translation taken from Barbara C. Bowen, *One Hundred Renaissance Jokes: An Anthology* (Birmingham, AL: Summa Publications, 1988), 14–15. See also Füssel, “A Struggle for Nobility,” 93.

⁵⁷ See Hankins, *Virtue Politics*, esp. 38–45; see also, e.g., Erasmus’ *Christiani matrimonii institutio*, ASD 5.6, 164–6.

⁵⁸ *Il Marescalco* II, 2: “E con arma virum e con i libri non cedo a niuno...,” ed. Petrocchi, 26; trans. Ruggiero, 138–9.

⁵⁹ Ruggiero 193; *Il Marescalco*, V, 3, ed. Petrocchi, 79: “Cedant arma togae”; see Cicero, *De officiis*, 1, 22, 77.

as slovenly, this visual presentation was a powerful way of discrediting the pedant's respectability.⁶⁰ Physical appearance and dressing habits were often taken to reflect a person's character, as we know from sixteenth-century conduct books such as Castiglione's *Courtier* and Erasmus's *On Good Manners for Boys*.⁶¹

The pedant's shoddy appearance was also exported beyond the theatre, often with the aim of discrediting literary critics with classical tastes. In a chapter "On grammar teachers and pedants" in his encyclopaedia of professions, Tomaso Garzoni depicts him as wearing "a bare gown that survived for at least 250 years" or, elsewhere, "a saggy gown, completely moth-ridden, without a single trace of fur."⁶² Similarly, in a mock-biography of Maecenas in verse dating from the early 1590s, Cesare Caporali listed the sartorial attributes of the pedant as "two worn-down gowns, a stained cap, an old shirt without laces."⁶³ The point of these representations is to demonstrate the foolishness of the pedants' social aspirations as a group. Despite their language and pretensions, their appearance shows who they really are. In some cases, pedants are explicitly described as being of humble background. Messer Piero in *The Deceived*, for example, is scolded by a servant for being "the son of a mule driver."

⁶⁰ In learned treatises on scholarly vices this is also known as *misocosmia*, see S. Kivistö, *The Vices of Learning: Morality and Knowledge at Early Modern Universities* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 240–1; Stäuble, "Parlar per lettera," 22–24; Royé, *La figure du pédant*, 38 and 59–69.

⁶¹ Erasmus, *On Good Manners for Boys – De civilitate morum puerilium*, trans. B. McGregor, in *CWE* 25, p. 278; Castiglione, *Il Cortegiano*, 2, 27–8.

⁶² Garzoni, *La piazza*, discorso iv, p. 165 "De' grammatici e pedanti" ("con quella toga pelata che non ha visto manco di cinque iubilei") and in the preliminary "Lettera del Garzoni al supremo coro de' dei," p. 59 ("l'abito non è altro che una toga labile, tutta tarmata, che non ha pur un pelo per testimonio?").

⁶³ C. Caporali, *Vita di Mecenate*, ed. D. Romei (Rome: Lulu, 2018), p. 106, part 10, lines 310–21. See also his poem "Il pedante," in *Capitoli Con le Osservazioni di Carlo Caporali suo nipote. Nuovamente messi in luce per cura di mastro Stoppino filologo maccheronico*, ed. Danilo Romei, published online <http://www.nuovorinascimento.org/n-rinasc/default.html>, accessed 9 December 2019: "Or veniamo ai legati dei pedanti,/ Presuntuosi e brutti animalacci,/ E de le carni altrui viziosi amanti,/ Che lasciò loro un valigion di stracci,/ Due toghe rotte, un berrettin macchiato/ E una camicia vecchia e senza lacci..."

The pedant in *The Stablemaster* is derided for his lowly position as “a soup slurper, bean eater, lasagna pit.”⁶⁴

Based on the contrast between the pedant’s claims to status and the actual class to which he belongs, this comic strategy reveals the social setting in which these learned comedies were performed. Staged at courts and in the venues of literary societies, they were offered as entertainment for highly educated aristocrats and courtiers. The perspective on the pedant betrays a sense of superiority on the part of the audience. By exposing his social vanity, the comedies confirm the codes of civility famously explored in Castiglione’s *Courtier*, which restricts the ideal of graceful *sprezzatura* to the nobility. Conversely, ostentation and visible effort are presented as examples of rude conduct, including, significantly, typically scholarly forms of behaviour, such as the use of overly learned language.⁶⁵

CONCLUSION

Scholarly dedication, diligence, and hard work were key values in the intellectual culture of Renaissance humanism. The ethos of hard work was expressly articulated on several levels. Within the transnational community of the Republic of Letters, humanists cultivated hard work as a cardinal scholarly virtue that was not just a sign of excellence and a condition for scholarly success, but an intrinsic part of their shared identity. Biographical collections of humanist scholars celebrated, often in almost hagiographical terms, the perseverance and stamina of the model scholars who embodied this ideal. But in addition to using it in their presentations of themselves and their identities as scholars, humanists also cast hard work as an important civic virtue which they sought to promote in their teachings. In educational treatises, famous humanists eloquently emphasized the importance of diligence and dedication as cornerstones of the new approach to learning.

And yet, these presentations of the humanist ethos with their confident claims to cultural authority did not go uncontested. This chapter has traced two strands of criticism regarding perceived excesses in humanist

⁶⁴ Ruggiero 138; *Il Marescalco* II, 1, ed. Petrocchi, 25: “Paggio: Ah, ah, ah, non mi potea imbatter meglio che a questo sorbi-bruodo, a questo pappa-fava e a questo trangugia-lasagne.”

⁶⁵ Castiglione, *Il Cortegiano*, e.g. 1.27, 1.37, and 3.17.

attitudes to work. The first consisted of critical voices within the scholarly community who cautioned that excessive humanist diligence could cause social, moral, and religious problems. With his characteristic satirical humour, Erasmus presented the studious attitude of the Ciceronians as extreme, eccentric, anti-social, and dangerously disconnected from Christian spirituality. The humanist project should not lose itself in stylistic purism, he argued, but be of practical use to contemporary Christian society. While Erasmus did not believe hard work to be harmful per se, it was harmful when humanist scholarship was pursued as a purely anti-quarian end in itself. Writing in 1528, in the starkly polarized context of the early Reformation, Erasmus also wanted to free humanism from associations with paganism. Italian humanists, and particularly a circle of scholars in Rome led by Girolamo Aleandro and Alberto Pio, often seemed to Erasmus like a “pagan society of erudites” or even a “sect.”⁶⁶ Significantly, these Italian humanists in turn suspected Erasmus of sympathizing with Luther, which illustrates the extent to which Erasmus’ criticism of excessive scholarly zeal was not just about hard work, but part of larger religious and scholarly conflicts.

Half a century later, Montaigne voiced his sweeping moral critique of the quantitative orientation of humanist teachers. In his view, the laborious accumulation of erudition was pointless because there was no direct relationship between learning on the one hand and virtue or sound judgement on the other. Studious diligence, in his eyes, was not enough for self-realization. In fact, it could prove morally stultifying and debilitating. Paradoxically, Montaigne deployed an impressive array of classical sources to confirm the aristocratic ethos of virtue and valour, thus showing that his sense of judgement went together with a deep, inside knowledge of the matter as a humanistically trained intellectual.

A second strand of criticism emerged outside the scholarly community in the form of the caricature of the pedant. A product of the Italian *commedia erudita* (scripted comedies produced in the elite setting of local aristocratic courts and academies), this caricature represented humanist

⁶⁶ *Opus epistolarum Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami*, ed. P. S. Allen (et al.), vol. 6 (Oxford: In Typographico Clarendoniano, 1926), ep. 1717 to Franciscus Molinius, [c. 6 June] 1526, ll. 34–36: “Romae paganum illud eruditorum sodalitiū iam pridem fremit in me, ducibus, ut ferunt, Aleandro et Alberto quodam Principe Carpensī.” And in the same letter, ll. 51–53: “Ad haec, exorta est nova secta Ciceronianorum, quae non minus incruduit quam Lutherānorum, vetus quidem sed per Longolium innovata.”

teachers and secretaries from the perspective of the patrons and employers who used their services. Some of these plays are set in the same environment where they were meant to be performed, as in the case of Belo's *Pedant*, situated in Rome, and Aretino's *Stablemaster*, first written at the court of Federico II Gonzaga in Mantua in 1526–27 (even if the surviving text is the revised version published in Venice in 1533). Others situate the action in a different but still recognizable contemporary context, such as *The Deceived*, which was staged by the Accademia degl'Intronati in Siena on the closing day of carnival in 1532 but set in Modena.

As a medium of social critique, the comedies targeted misapplications of humanist learning in particular. Still, in selecting these misapplications, they question key aspects of the humanist work ethic. Refracted through the lens of comedy, the humanist ideals of classical erudition and studious dedication were associated with different forms of unsociable conduct, ranging from mildly amusing eccentricity (obscure and laboured language, pompous self-presentation) to more subversive forms of improper behaviour (arrogance, social climbing). The nature of the jokes indicates that both producers and audiences of these plays were intimately familiar with humanist culture but they were also keen to mark their superior social position. Complementing the critical arguments of humanist authors, these sixteenth-century representations of the pedant thus illuminate how humanist values of scholarly dedication and classical erudition clashed with prevailing codes of sociability.