

## NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES IN CANTEMIR'S *SCIENTIAE SACRAE INDEPINGIBILIS IMAGO*

*Scientiae sacrae indepingibilis imago* is the philosophical work written by Dimitrie Cantemir most probably in 1700 while in Constantinople. The dedication in front of the text, *Ieremiae Cacauelae, Praeceptoris suo salutem*, as well as the few pages in the form of an introductory chapter could give the impression to the lecturer that the whole is conceived as an account to be presented to his *Praeceptor*, to demonstrate the progress made by the young student involved in very ambitious humanistic projects. *Scientiae sacrae...* is divided in 6 books, as follows:

- the 1st book treats of Epistemology;
- the 2nd book treats of Physics, the structure and the origin of the matter, different topics clearly dependent upon van Helmont's philosophy;
- the 3rd book describes the Process of Creation;
- the 4th book is about Time
- the 5th discuss the *Universalia*, while the 6th and last book is an introduction into the Ethics.

Only the first book interests the present paper, the book in which the author is describing the reach of knowledge, to be gained neither by *ratio* nor by senses, but by the divine revelation conceived as a direct and revelatory contact with the God. But I will also discuss the introductory chapter, that is emphasizing the relationship with Cacavela and describes the first period of study in Cantemir's life. The main point is to show how Cantemir understands the reach of knowledge and the connection between the *philosophical ego* to be attained and the *individual, historical ego*, the way he uses and interprets his own experience, experience that eventually conducts him to the absolute knowledge, which is both revelatory and *indepingibilis*.

From the beginning, Catemir is recolecting the days when he studied with his reverend teacher, as to establish a *terminus post quem* his experience started: p. I<sup>v</sup><sup>1</sup> *meministi, ni fallor, Pater Reuerende, in their Musaeum*. He takes a very familiar tone every time he mentions Cacavela: p. I<sup>v</sup> *Musaeum nostrum, ut nosti ... nosti*, stressing on Cacavela's participation to all the relevant event of his youth: p. II<sup>v</sup> *et quid plura Tibi connumerem, cum Te fere in omnibus testem habuerim oculatum?* He is then not only *testis*, but even *testis oculatus*. Therefore the teacher must be

<sup>1</sup> I have used Roman numerals to show the page numbers for the Introductory Chapter, where 'v' means *uerso* and 'r' means *recto*. For the rest of the pages I have used the usual Arabic numerals, that refer to the manuscript pages.

the judge of the philosophical experience Cantemir went through, and he is also the authority that has to trust the truth of his writings: p. III<sup>f</sup> *fateor ueritatem*.

The young student, seeking the truth, decides to go again through the *Ethnica scientia*, and carefully reads again and again the *fundamenta studii*, the *puluerosi codices*. This is the beginning of Cantemir's way to the knowledge, but the results are disappointing. At the end of all that, he discovers that that only *Scientiarum titulum et ueritatis nomen celebrari ... scientiae autem simplicem ueritatem et ueram simplicitatem minime*. He is astounded: *ad haec obstupesco!* And so, disappointed by the false knowledge he mastered, he decided to go for *absurdiora*, and chooses the painting as an instrument for seeking the true knowledge, by trying to paint the *unpaintable image of the sacred science*. *The art of painting* is actually the metaphor by means of which he decided to describe his experience to attain the *philosophical ego*. He is enormously daring, but the consequence of his decision is terrible: p. III<sup>v</sup> *Quid sequitur? Frustratus, ut patet, labor. Quid consequor? Inscitiae imperuium labyrinthum*. Anyway, *Scientia Sensitiua* must be banished and *scientia sacra* is the only one to be inquired for: pp. III<sup>v</sup> *sq. Scientiae sensitiuae ualedicendum; sensituios scientificos aufugiendos; rationales adinventiones repellendas; cerebro, partas Mineruas, ut abortiuas, humi sepeliendas, ut intellectus degeneres, uentatis possessione exhaeredandas, et omni uerae scientiae habitu expoliandas esse*.

The story of all this fight seeking the truth and of all the victories and defeats, of all his enduring, is put together in this manuscript directed to Cacavela, the only one able to rightly judge the metaphysical way towards the discovery of the *image of the sacred science* and the *philosophical ego* expounded there. The demand of the author towards his teacher, that ends the introductory chapter, is a proof of his mastery of baroque latin vocabulary, playing with different compounds derived from the latin verb *mittere*:

*Hanc animi mei sententiam, Mi R(euerende) P(ater), Tibi explicandam habui, ideoque Primum hunc Sacrae Scientiae Tomum {p(rae)}mitto, legas perlegasque admitto, iudices submitto, sententiam feras permitto, quod Tibi, idem mihi ratum fore promitto, quod omitto demitte, et, si in totum errorem comitto, dimitte, et correctum quantocyus remitte, atque trans mitte ! Vale!*

Once the book 1 actually begins, we meet the *alter ego* of the young philosopher in the person of a good friend, *amicus syncerus fidusque sodalis*, inquiring *sollicite et anxie* the *dubitans ego* about his engrossment (p. 2). The *alter ego* thinks about the *deliberatio* the author is involved in that it is *indigna*, and simply gives him some advises about how to consider philosophizing. Then, after these recommendations, he disappears, *non ita sensitiue, quam spiritualiter* (p. 4), leaving the philosopher alone in *hypocaustum suae nihilitalis* (p. 4), trying to find the most appropriate way to express his anxieties, while experiencing them both internally (*dubitabam ab ultimo pectore*, p. 4) and externally (*crebris singultibus*,

p. 4). Methaphoric is the account again, when the *ego* is matching his inner sensation to the *amaritudo* that is spread throughout his bones like the venom, or like, just to continue with a new comparison, the springs coming out the soil, *uelint, nolint*, pushed by an inner power. He is now ready to proceed on his way to discover the truth, the decision cannot be postponed any longer and it has to be fulfilled *necessario*, in order to avoid the corruption of the whole<sup>2</sup>.

Even in the Introductory Chapter the author had confessed that he wasn't familiar at all with painting, not being able to trace a *semilineam*. Now, subject to the same ignorance when it comes to uttering by words his inner search for truth, he decides to continue by using the painting, simply substituting the venom with the black color (*niger*) and the *amaritudo* with the dark (*atrum*), by the attempt to root a fine and suitable work<sup>3</sup>. Starting his work, he is complaining about the perfect similarity between the darkness of the human science, by which Cantemir means the *sensitive science*, and his own inner darkness, based on which nothing could actually be carried out: *quid, quaeso, depingendum?*, but something black and dark as well<sup>4</sup>, according to the aphorism he quotes: *propter quod ununquodque est tale, illud magis tale erit* (p. 7).

Eventually all his work proved to be in vain. He creates with great efforts (*aeternis lacrimis*), adding to the Platonical background the Aristotelian colors, but at the end of the day the results are worth of a flock of wool, i.e. nothing<sup>5</sup>, as long as all his ideas tuned out to be *dementes, delirantes et longissime a scopo veritatis effigiei oberrantes* (p. 8).

The philosopher is in very deep despair and about to give everything up: *ludis puerilibus consentanea omnique cachinno digna, prorsus abstine pictura!* (p. 9). He replaces the canvas and takes all the instruments ordinarily used by the painters, and is ready to start again by properly painting this time<sup>6</sup>. But a kind of stroke of lightning stops him abruptly, and the intellect admonishes him by prosopopoeia for the attempt to paint on the canvas the results of his imagination, supposed to be the image of the sacred science. This wouldn't ever be possible, as science deals with cognitive things and art with artifacts<sup>7</sup>. This must be considered, I think, the turning point in Cantemir's demonstration, when he realizes that the connection between the *individual ego* and the *philosophical ego* couldn't be attained without the intervention of a superior revelatory force able to illuminate the subjects with regard to the complete truth, which is of course God. The prosopopoeia that lasts for the whole chapter 6 of the 1st Book is in this sense very

<sup>2</sup> [...] *ne forte, retrocessione facta, insperatam toti inferat corruptionem* (p. 5).

<sup>3</sup> *Itaque ... uiru nigredinem, amarori autem atrum comparando colorem ... elegans conueniens aliquod opus fore statui* (p. 6).

<sup>4</sup> [...] *qualem tincturam ipsas producturas existimandum! Nonne nigram?* (p. 7).

<sup>5</sup> [...] *illico meam flocci pendendam deprehendo opinionem* (p. 7).

<sup>6</sup> [...] *manu ad tabulam, desideratam effigiem depingendi gratia, protensa ...* (p. 10).

<sup>7</sup> [...] *scientia enim de scibilibus et ars de iis, quae sub arte cadunt, praedicatur* (p. 10).

convincing, showing to us an intellect familiar with all the antique rules of oratory and strongly supporting all its argumentation<sup>8</sup>.

As a consequence, the philosopher loses his senses completely: *me quasi extra me essem existimabam, ita ut quis, qualis et ubi sim prorsus non sentirem. Interim, pauor istius intellectiuae facultatis alienationis ... in paralyysi laborantem me reddiderat* (p. 12). He falls off the chair on which he used to seat and paint, down to the ground, striking the shells where he put his colors. He is now in the worst situation ever imaginable to the lowest level of despair: *paene exanimis terrae iacebam prostratus* (p. 12). He is frantic and highly disoriented.

The revelation appears in the form of an old man, *Charitas, Quae ab ipso Aeterno mortales aeterno prosequitur amore* (p. 16), who is very aged and venerable, the *Parens temporum*. All the details in the description of this old man are positively connoted and most of the epithets at the superlative: *profundae uenerandaeque aetatis adeoque dierum uetustissimus, forma uenustus, statura procerus, luminosis hilaritatemque scaturientibus oculis, uiuace decoraque praeditus facie, uoce dulcis, sermone suavis atque colloquio iucundissimus facundissimusque ... uestimentum ita modeste oblongum ... sapientiam miram atque admirabilem ...* (pp. 16–17). The look of the old man is *omni ueneratione digna*, and the poor philosopher is wordless, but also happy<sup>9</sup> when faced to this *magnanimus senex*.

The old man knows everything about his anxieties and is ready to heal the corrupted mind of the philosopher by leading him to the way of the true knowledge, by helping him to attain the *philosophical ego*. The first advice he gives is: *confide, spera et crede*.

The philosopher dares to rise his eyes and suddenly notices that everything changed: *tum ego, subleuato intuitu ... statim uidi quod cuncta in alium transmutata fuerint statum* (p. 18). Further on, this change is underlined in the text by several pairs of adverbs, referring to previous and present state: *ubi prius ... ibi nunc ... et ubi ... ibi ... item, quos antea ... eosdem postea ...* (p. 18).

He is now following the advice of the old man: *Aude, fili, neque metuas id quod metuendum non est, quoandoquidem non aliam ob causam tibi subueni, nisi quod te e praesentibus liberem spectrorum periculis!* (p. 19), and decides to work only for painting the image of the sacred science, abandoning his former pagan arrogance. He is taking the old man as a model and starts painting him, *iuxtam regulam iam usitatae artis, quo artificiosus esset posset* (p. 25), fulfilling in this way his difficult task, *praetergrediens omnes hasce transfigurationes*.

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<sup>8</sup> [...] *sed iocando (per prosopopoeiam inferrebat intellectus) concedamus ... Item tali imagine dignos idoneosque adaptes colores ... Verumtamen ... nuda et simplex debet esse scientiae istius imago* (p. 11).

<sup>9</sup> [...] *interne gaudebam quidem* (p. 17).