

CICERONIANUS: THE LITERARY MANIFEST OF ERASMUS
OF ROTTERDAM

ON THE OCCASION OF THE FIVE-HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE BIRTH OF THE GREAT DUTCHMAN (1469–1969)*

By

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In the year 1528 the presses of the famous Froben printing house in Basel released the dialogue of Erasmus of Rotterdam entitled *Ciceronianus seu de optimo genere dicendi*. This work is aimed at the over-zealous imitators of Cicero's language, who, particularly in Italy, are at this time starting to establish themselves as practically omnipotent arbiters of the style of Latin prose¹.

One of the characters in the dialogue, Nosoponus, an eager worshipper of Cicero, has not touched any work by another author for seven years, removing himself from public life and shutting himself in a study filled with the writings and portraits of his master and loaded with all kinds of indexes to the works of the orator he adores, as he perfects his Latin syle. Although, after proper preparations and fasts (in order to avoid burdening his mind, he eats only ten Corinthian raisins before working and throws a special type of imported wood on the fire that does not crackle in the hearth and break his concentration), during one long winter night he sometimes succeeds in composing one Ciceronian sentence, he fortifies himself with the thought that he might gain that most esteemed epithet, Ciceronianus, before the end of his life. Nosoponus's friends, Bulephorus and Hypologus, are afraid that this admirer of Marcus Tullius will work himself

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¹ Extensive literature is devoted to the question of Ciceronianism, among other works: R. SABADINI, *Storia del Ciceronianismo*, Torino 1885; T. ZIELIŃSKI, *Cicero im Wandel der Jahrhunderte*, Leipzig 1897; J.E. SANDYS, *The History of Ciceronianism*, in: *Harvard Lectures on the Revival of Learning*, Cambridge, MA 1905. Lately this problem was addressed by B. OTWINOWSKA in the book *Modele i style prozy w dyskusjach na przełomie XVI i XVII wieku*, Wrocław 1967 (with ample bibliography).

to death, just as the half-French, half-Brabantian Christophorus Longolius² has recently done. He was the only person north of the Alps to have gained the epithet of Ciceronianus from the envious Italians, but he paid for it with his life, since his exaggerated efforts brought him to an early death. Nosoponus' companions wish to save him from this fate. They use a ruse, pretending that they too belong to the caste of blind imitators of the Roman orator, and they draw Nosoponus into a discussion from which he emerges cured of his sickly mania and abandons his rigorous efforts to imitate Cicero's style. He discovers the truth that authentic imitation of Cicero does not consist of literal imitation but extends beyond stylistic constructions. Bulephorus, the main participant in the discussion and the *porteparole* of Erasmus himself in the dialogue, calling time and again upon the writings of Quintilian, Seneca, and even Cicero, convinces Nosoponus that he will never be able to make himself completely like his ideal model, Marcus Tullius. Even the ideal itself cannot, at present, be discerned in its entirety. A large part of the writing of Cicero has been lost, and expressions which the Ciceronianists say should not be used might well have existed in those lost texts. If these works were to be found, many expressions now condemned as non-Ciceronian would acquire "citizen status". Furthermore, even though it is without doubt easier to limit one's imitation to one ideal model, no such blameless model for imitation actually exists. Even Cicero had his faults. There are certain characteristics of style that should preferably be taken from other authors. Following Quintilian's advice, each writer should adopt the best features of other writers. In fact, this was what Cicero himself did. He, too, did not always follow the same model, but was able to select from the writings of various authors what was most suitable. In order to make oneself like Tullius, Bulephorus continues, one must possess the identical talent. For each one of us has his own individual gifts. A man with the talent for one type of speaking will vainly try to train himself in another direction; he should realize his innate aptitudes and perfect them instead. The "complete" Cicero, in Bulephorus' opinion, "must be sought only and exclusively within oneself". This is the reason he reminds Nosoponus:

If you wish to imitate Cicero with great rigour, you will not be able to express your own personality, and then your words will sound false and artificial [...] We can speak about a real imitation of Cicero only if we do not try to achieve those same characteristics, but rather, based on the example of our own ideal we nurture similar attributes and even, if at all possible, we try to surpass him in virtue [...] Then it might happen that someone who does not at all resemble Cicero becomes a real Ciceronianist. Only the man who is as talented as Cicero, speaks as well as Cicero

² Christophorus Longolius (1488–1522), called the French Pico della Mirandola, a Brabantian humanist educated in Paris and in universities in Italia; he owed his name of Ciceronianist to his speeches which were modelled after Cicero, including *Oratio apologetica in Urbis encomium* (1518), *Orationes duae pro defensione sua in crimen laesae maiestatis* (1519).

and is as well versed in the affairs of his own time as Cicero was in his own pagan times is able to speak in the Ciceronian manner.

Bulephorus mentions in the discussion that in his arguments he does not take under consideration speeches that have no practical end; it is fine to declaim them in schoolrooms and in them, a literal imitation of Cicero's style suffices. There is a great difference between one who declaims and a real speaker. For a real speaker speaks for a specific reason and before a specific audience, whom he should properly instruct and convince ("oratio non potest esse Tulliana id est optima, quae nec tempori, nec personis, nec rebus congruit"). The speaker must be involved in the affairs of his times. Speaking the language of Cicero in the 16th century, in times completely different from republican Rome, examining the issues he examined, but which are now irrelevant, is an exercise in futility.

Thousands of things exist in our world and we must speak about them frequently, even if our Tullius never saw any of them even in his dreams. If he were living, he would discuss them with us [...] Upon such a changed scene of human history can we really speak as befits the circumstances if we follow blindly after Cicero? What can a speaker who uses only words found in the Ciceronian corpus possibly have to say to us? Surely the complete change of conditions throughout the world has introduced a completely new lexicon?

Bulephorus attempts to prove that the efforts of the Ciceronianists are not only worthless to society but also do not lead to the longed-for goal, i.e., the complete and excellent imitation of Cicero. As proof, Bulephorus provides a catalogue of writers from ancient times up to his own time and demonstrates that no one has as yet truly merited to be called a second Cicero. He emphasizes one more aspect: if the Ciceronian style was to be used in all writing, the reader would be bored by the uniformity. Bulephorus quite rightly asks, "Who would wade through all the literature if all authors had the same style and language?"

In this way, Erasmus of Rotterdam uses the form of light satire in order to defend the right of the author to a style of his own and revolts against a rigorous imitation that does violence to the writer's nature. In that period, Cicero's style was being recognized as the only model worthy of being imitated, and the attitude to this ideal model defined the position towards questions about the individuality of the writer's art. The defence of independence of style had to lead to taking a stand against a too-narrow imitation of Cicero's language and against a too-narrow conception of Ciceronianism. Equally important was the problem of the social function of the writer, which is also addressed in the dialogue *Ciceronianus*. In the opinion of Erasmus, a writer should be closely involved with his own time, in his particular case, with the Christian era. The writer must proclaim the ideas of his time in the same way that, as consul, Cicero proved to be the best at expressing the views of his own time, republican Rome. "If we believe that the greatest worth of Cicero's speeches was their relevance to their

own time, no modern speech should be adjusted to suit the situation of those pagan times”, announces Erasmus through the lips of Bulephorus. Connected to the subject of the relevance of literary works is in turn the issue of their word-garb, or the language that is used to express these ideas. Erasmus proves that the principles of the ultra-Ciceronianists, which are bolstered by the argument “Cicero did not speak this way”, actually cause the language to become impoverished, make the expression of thought more difficult and lead to artificiality.

The work of the Dutch humanist, the dialogue of Bulephorus and Hypologus with Nosoponus, who is caricatured as a blind imitator of Cicero’s style, should be counted among the early works in the field of literary criticism and theory. The issues raised and discussed in the *Ciceronianus*, mainly that of imitation and its relationship to the works of Cicero, were already touched upon in ancient times, and they also occupied the intellects of leading humanists³. Petrarch focused on these problems, while the discussion between Angelo Poliziano and Paolo Cortesi, conducted on the topic of literary imitation was famous. Erasmus himself, in the second edition (1529) of his dialogue, mentions the dispute waged by Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola and the leading representative of the Ciceronianists, Pietro Bembo. Erasmus explains⁴ also that, only after having written his book, he discovered the correspondence of these humanists on the very topics that Bulephorus found so interesting.

Although the first edition of the *Ciceronianus* appeared only eight years before the death of the Dutch humanist, the issues presented there had attracted Erasmus’ attention much earlier. The great scholar discusses the issue of the relationship of Christianity to learning and pagan literature in his youthful little work *Antibarbarorum liber*, in which he encourages “mala illis (*scil.* ethnicis) relinquamus, bona vero nobis usurpemus”, and he calls upon⁵ the examples of Augustine, Jerome, John Chrysostom and Basil, who benefitted from the output of pagan writers. In this youthfully passionate attack on barbarian teachers who were hindering the development of humanists, alongside the works of the Church Fathers and the Latin poets so enthusiastically worshipped by the Augustinian al-

³ Humanistic works devoted to the theory of imitation are discussed by OTWINOWSKA, *op. cit.* (n. 1), and in her study *Imitacja – Eklektyzm – Spontanizacja*, in: *Studia estetyczne*, vol. 4, Warszawa 1967, pp. 25–38.

⁴ Cf. A. 2088: “multo post aeditum Ciceronianum comperi hoc ipsum argumentum fuisse tractatum tribus epistolis inter Franc. Picum Mirandulanum et Petrum Bembum”. I am giving the numbering of the letters of Erasmus according to the edition of P.S. ALLEN, H.M. ALLEN, H.W. GARROD, *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami*, Oxford 1906–1958 (employing the abbreviation A. in further notes).

⁵ *Antibarbarorum liber* LB X, 1710 B: “Sic contempsit Augustinus ethnicas disciplinas, sed tum posteaquam principatum in his esset assecutus. Sic litteras ciceronianas et platonicas Hieronymus, ut nihilo minus egrege teneat, et passim utatur, sic Basilius, sic Chrysostomus...”.

umn, the influences⁶ of the work of Laurentius Valla, *Elegantiae linguae Latinae*, can be discerned. In this work, the Italian humanist was calling also for the study of classical works, proclaiming this to be the duty of a Christian⁷. Erasmus, in his earliest work, repeats Valla's thoughts and sometimes even his very words. In the *Elegantiae*, Valla analyzes the antithesis of Jerome: Ciceronianus – Christianus, being the first, it seems, to introduce this motif into literature. Erasmus, following in the Italian humanist's footsteps, also takes up this topic. In his little work *De duplici copia verborum ac rerum* (first edition from 1511) he introduces it only as a motif worth working on in order to take it up in the *Ciceronianus*, where he draws on many ideas of Valla. It would also seem that it was from the *Elegantiae* that Erasmus borrowed the comparison⁸ of writers who draw imitation from many authors to a bee that makes into honey the pollen taken from many flowers (although he could have borrowed it directly from Seneca⁹). Already in his earliest letters, Erasmus declares his judgement that one's reading should not be limited to Cicero, but rather enlarged. That he remained faithful to this principle is attested by a school reading list which he prepared as a lecturer at Queen's College in Cambridge in the paedagogical treatise *De ratione studii ac legendi interpretandique auctores* (first edition from 1511), which is based to a great degree on the directions of Quintilian and the Church Fathers. At the same time, already in the early period of his literary activity¹⁰ the learned Dutchman comes to the conclusion (likely following Quintilian) that style is something innate, the most individual characteristic of every author, and that it needs to be formed by taking as models the writers to whom one feels the most attracted, even omitting Cicero at times. For this reason in his Paris letter¹¹ of 1497, Erasmus instructs Christian Northoff: "Id autem genus potissimum eligendum ad quod te potissimum natura composuit. De te coniecturam sumere licet. Videris ad Timonis propius quam ad Ciceronis formam accedere". The principle that no author should be

⁶ In his early letters, Erasmus is amazed by the work *Elegantiae*. Cf. A. 20, 23, 24, 26, 29, 34.

⁷ Cf. L. Valla, *In quartum librum Elegantiarum praefatio* in: *Prosatori Latini del Quattrocento*, ed. E. GARIN, Milano 1951, p. 620: "At qui ignarus eloquentiae est hunc indignum prorsus qui de theologia loquatur existimo. Et certe soli eloquentes, quales ii quos enumeravi columnae ecclesiae sunt etiam ut ab apostolis repetas. Non modo non reprehendum est studere eloquentiae, verum etiam reprehendum non studere [...] Non lingua gentilium, non grammatica, non rhetorica cetereque damandae sunt".

⁸ Valla, *op. cit.* (n. 7.), p. 622: "Veteres illi theologi videntur mihi velut apes quaedam in longinqua etiam pascua volitantes, dulcissima mella cerasque miro actificio condidisse, recentes vero formicis simillimi, quae ex proximo sublata furto grana in latibulis suis abscondunt. At ego, quod ad me attinet, non modo malim apes quam formica esse, set etiam sub rege apium militare quam formicarum exercitum ducere".

⁹ Seneca, *Epist.* 84. Although OTWINOWSKA omits Valla, she rightly draws attention to the presence of this motif in the letters of Petrarch as well, *Modele i style...* (n. 1), pp. 24, 137.

¹⁰ Cf. A. 20, 27, 31, 38, 39, 63.

¹¹ A. 54.

disrespected is made manifest by Erasmus in his collection *Adagia*, where, in addition to the Bible, he gathers sayings from as many as 363 sources¹². The scholar includes here writers of every period, from the earliest times up to the time of his teacher Hegius, the grammarian Perotti and the famous historian Sabellicus. He likes to include these sayings in his works and letters, particularly in his later years, which would have been totally inadmissible for any rigorous Ciceronianist who was entirely limited to Ciceronian phrases. It would be very interesting to analyse the characteristics of the style of Erasmus himself. Unfortunately, such an undertaking would demand a very detailed analysis of every work of this great humanist, which is at present impossible¹³. Nevertheless, just on the basis of a very incomplete reading of his works, it is possible to conclude that, unlike the ultra-Ciceronianists, he draws his lexicon from Latin authors of all periods: from Plautus, Terence, Cato, Varro, Caesar or Cicero up to Gellius and the Church Fathers. Cicero's style does not suit Erasmus very well, as he concludes in his letter¹⁴ to Francis Verger:

Ego tantum abfui semper, ut Ciceroniana phraseos figuram exprimerem, ut etiamsi possim, assequi malim aliquod dicendi genus solidius, astrictius, nervosius, minus comptum magisque masculum, quamquam alioqui leviter mihi curae fuit verborum ornatus, etiamsi mundiciem, cum ulro praesto est non asperner.

The Dutchman's Latin has nothing of unctuous artificiality; the author is able to express all his thoughts with great freedom and clarity. His works are written with great liveliness and do not bore his readers with a monotonous or unchanging style. Alongside Seneca's short sentences we find Cicero's long rhetorical phrases; in addition, the rhythm of periods is irregular and the length of sentences never evokes a feeling of heaviness. Alongside regular constructions we also find anacolutha. Short and unexpected historical or mythological allusions also serve to add life to the style. The author possesses an exceptional ease of expression, easily shapes his tongue to every thought, astounds by his richness of synonyms, unexpected associations of words and mastery of the use of antithesis and metaphor. In the prose of Erasmus of Rotterdam we will find a Ciceronian turn of phrase seasoned with irony next to a stinging sentence of Seneca and a Plinian observation of great finesse. This is a language that does not follow the stylistic rules of any one particular classical writer. It is the language of Erasmus.

¹² Cf. M. MANN-PHILLIPS, *The Adages of Erasmus*, Cambridge 1964, pp. 393–403.

¹³ The style of *Dulce bellum inexpertis* was characterized in the preface to the J. REMY, M.R. DUNIL-MARQUEBRECQ edition, Bruxelles 1953, p. 14; the style of the work *Declamatio de pueris statim ac liberaliter instituendis* is characterized by J.C. MARGOLIN in his edition of the work, Genève 1966, pp. 599–612.

¹⁴ A. 1885.

The writer himself several times describes his stylistic tendencies. His reply in a letter¹⁵ to Budaeus from 15 February 1517, is interesting. The Dutch humanist explains that he does not care as much if his style is beautiful as that he might convince his reader, sway him towards his ideas. Not the choice of words but the thought itself conveys the greatest meaning:

Ego ad hoc ut grandis sit dictio, verborum apparatus minimum momenti adferre existimo, nec ita multum conferre schematum ornamenta, nisi si qua in rebus sita sint, non in verbis.

He does not, however, completely renounce attention to style. He observes:

Magis affectavi mundam orationem quam phaleratam et solidam masculamque potius quam splendidam aut scenicam, quae rem ostenderet citius quam quae scriptoris ingenium ostentaret. At ego ut phaleratam orationem non ambio, ita puram, aptam, facilem ac dilucidam optarim si contingat, sed ita facilem ut tamen neque nervis neque aculeis, ubi res poscit, deficiatur. Quam si minus assequor, ingenii culpa est, non instituti.

In Erasmus' opinion, the author, instead of showing off his erudition and masterful style, will achieve his goal when "quod voluit persuasit". An excessive artifice of language often discourages and scares readers away: "Maxime probatur oratio, quae maxime congruat rei". Included in this interesting conversation with Budaeus is also Erasmus' defence of stylistic freedom as opposed to the rigorism of the Ciceronianists. He asserts:

Inter tot scriptorum species nullos minus fero quam istos quosdam Ciceronis simios [...] praesertim cum fatearis ut suam cuique faciem, suamque cuique vocem, ita suum cuique stilum et institutum semper fuisse.

Here also, from the position of a Christian philosopher, the Dutchman also stresses his right to a language other than that of the rhetoricians, citing the authority of Cicero himself:

Quo mihi videris iniquius facere, qui scenicam etiam eloquentiam exigis a theologo Christiano, cum Cicero ab ethnico philosopho non requirat omnino ullam, hoc contentus, si intelligatur modo.

In the same letter, he strongly emphasizes the meaning of his mission as a writer. According to his tenets, he does not want to be an elitist writer:

Tu maluisti ab eruditibus dumtaxat intellegi, ego si possim a plurimis; tibi propositum est vincere, mihi aut docere aut persuadere.

¹⁵ A. 531.

These characteristics of Erasmus' style were already noted by his contemporaries, including Longolius¹⁶, Vives¹⁷, and Beatus Rhenanus¹⁸.

The historical sense of Erasmus of Rotterdam, his ability to observe the continual changes occurring in each period, and also his knowledge of his own individuality and deep comprehension of his mission as a writer influenced the humanist to publish a literary manifesto, for this indeed is the true nature of the work *Ciceronianus seu de optimo genere dicendi*. When we compare this rather late work of the scholar with his earlier writings, it is difficult for us to agree with what J. HUIZINGA says in his book on the Dutch humanist¹⁹: "Was Erasmus aware that he here attacked his own past? [...] We here see the aged Erasmus on the path of reaction, which might eventually have led him far from humanism". As we have demonstrated, however, the thoughts expressed in the dialogue *Ciceronianus* had already been appearing in his earlier works. According to his earlier formulations²⁰, the Erasmian imitator of Cicero was not to limit himself to literal translation but rather to take over the most beautiful characteristics of the Arpinate's personality and talent. Over and over, from his first works until his death, he repeats²¹ "totum Ciceronis pectus requiro", referring to the similar words of Augustine²². For him as for Laurentius Valla, the terms *Ciceronianus* – *christianus* are not opposing concepts. As Bulephorus explains to Nosopomus,

There are no obstacles to speaking simultaneously as a Christian and after the fashion of Cicero. If, of course, you would call a man who speaks clearly, concisely, forcefully and fittingly for both the circumstances and the position of those interested a Ciceronianist.

By nature, Erasmus is a moralist and an educator of society and he always considers his own literary activity from this standpoint. His works have nothing of the declamatory performances of the schoolroom; he never forgets his mission. Given these assumptions, the Ciceronianists' method of working, of slowly forging their periods with great pains, is impossible. In Erasmus' opinion, a scholar must write quickly, at times trying to keep up with the printer who is

¹⁶ A. 914.

¹⁷ L. Vives, *De epistolis conscribendis*, Paris 1534, p. 38.

¹⁸ A. I, III, pp. 52–72.

¹⁹ J. HUIZINGA, *Erasmus and the Age of Reformation*, transl. by F. HOPMAN, New York 1957, pp. 172 f.

²⁰ The reply contained in letter A. 396 is interesting: "Equidem sic opinor, si quis cum Tulio (ut hunc exempli causa nominem) complures annos domesticam egisset consuetudinem, minus noverit Ciceronis quam faciunt hi, qui versandis Ciceronis scriptis cum animo illius cotidie confabulantur". Cf. also A. 152, 1013, 1390.

²¹ Cf., among others, A. 1794, 1885, 1948, 2044, 2249, 2453.

²² Augustinus, *Confessiones* III 4, 1.

setting up his work. “Certamen erat inter typographum ac me, utrum ille plus excuderet singulis diebus suis formulis ac ego meo calamo describerem” – he is reporting the development of his work on *Paraphrasis in duas Epistolas ad Corinthios* to bishop of Leodium (letter 918). “Effundo verius quam scribo” – he confesses elsewhere (letter 935). On yet another occasion he explains: “Nunc adeo non vacat expolire, quod scribo, ut crebro nec relegere liceat [...] Mihi nonnunquam uno die liber absolvendus est” (letter 1885). The scholar’s first care is for the contents of the work and he is prone to correct, if necessary, erroneous thoughts and beliefs rather than the manner in which they are delivered. Erasmus, who refers to himself as a theologian²³, believes that his literary production demands a different language, one that is adequate to this specific task. “Caelestis illa philosophia ut habet suam sapientiam ab humana diversam, ita suam habet eloquentiam” (letter 3043) – this is the argument with which he defends himself against the attacks of language purists. This thought, already expressed in the previously mentioned letter to Budaeus, is underlined with particular emphasis by the author in the *Ciceronianus*. In it, Bulephorus is arguing with Nosoponus that each domain of knowledge is entitled to its own lexicon. Grammarians are entitled to use the terms *supinum*, *gerundium*. Mathematicians have their own terminology in the same way that farmers and artisans possess terms that are proper for their tasks. It is the same with Christian literature. It can have its own language, create its own, necessary words and expressions. In any case, Cicero acted in this way, when he was acquainting the Romans with the basic tenets of Greek philosophy. We should also remember (Bulephorus is repeating the words of Erasmus from the letter to Budaeus) that Marcus Tullius did not demand oratorical skill from the philosopher of his times, so there is no basis to demand them from a philosopher-Christian. Even Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus, frowned-on by humanists who accuse them of a certain barbarism of speech, when addressing topics relevant to their times resemble Cicero more closely than those *Ciceronis simiae* who mechanically imitate his style. For like the Arpinate, those mediaeval writers are able to speak as befits the circumstances, while the imitators of Cicero are not speakers but only declaimers.

The arguments presented here are strangely familiar; they resemble the words of the letter²⁴ (from 3 June 1485) of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (the elder) to Hermolaus Barbarus. In it, Mirandola is dealing with questions pertaining to Latin style and he defends the right of the philosophers to possess their own language by calling upon Cicero’s authority: “Non desiderat Tullius eloquentiam in philosopho, sed ut rebus et doctrina satisfaciatur”. He also shields the writings of Thomas Aquinas and Scotus from the accusation of critics concerned with the

²³ E.W. KOHLS, *Die Theologie des Erasmus*, Basel 1996, draws particular attention to this facet of Erasmus’ personality.

²⁴ *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento*, ed. E. GARIN, Milano 1952, pp. 804–823.

purity of language. In Mirandola's opinion, the language of Cicero is not proper for the philosopher who has other tasks to carry out.

Non omnia omnibus pari filo conveniunt [...] Sciebat tam prudens quam eruditus homo nostrum esse componere mentem potius quam dictionem, curare ne quid aberret ratio non oratio.

It is sufficient when the philosopher is teaching in a correct and understandable tongue:

Non exigo a vobis orationem comptam, sed nolo sordidam, nolo unguentatam, sed nec hircosam. Non quaerimus ut delectet, sed querimur quod offendat.

When the reasoning is correctly developed, when it builds conviction, the argument: "hoc non est Latinum" has no meaning. Philosophers express themselves in ways that they find suitable. It should not be demanded that they also simultaneously be orators. The principles of what constitutes correct language are themselves relative also ("Anacharsis apud Athenienses soloecismum facit, Athenienses apud Scythas"). The arguments presented above lead us to the conclusion that the words of Erasmian Bulephorus are like an echo of Mirandola as well. His opinions could easily have influenced the author of the *Ciceronianus*.

Researchers analyzing the dialogue of Erasmus devoted a lot of attention to the connections between this work and mediaeval and humanistic literature, they indicated possible sources of the author's thoughts and the influence of his readings, the reflections of which we find in the treatises of the great Dutchman. Not without reason did they see²⁵ in his dialogue many formulations resembling the judgements of Quintilian, and also of Cicero. They also recognized the relationship between the *Ciceronianus* and Laurentius Valla's *Elegantiae*, which was already emphasized by the generation contemporary with Erasmus²⁶. Lately, there has been a rather unceremonious attempt to link²⁷ the writings of Erasmus on the topic of imitation with the opinions of the younger Mirandola, Giovanni Francesco, contained in his correspondence with the Ciceronianist Pietro Bembo, while ignoring the assertion of the author that he did not know of these letters at the time he was composing his dialogue. It is true that many of Mirandola's beliefs overlap with the assertions of Bulephorus, the main character in the dialogue. But is it permissible to completely ignore Erasmus' assurances that he

²⁵ Cf. A. GAMBARO, *Il Ciceronianus di Erasmo da Rotterdam*, in: *Miscellanea, Scritti Vari*, Torino 1950, and the critical edition of the text: *Il Ciceroniano o dello stile migliore*, ed. A. GAMBARO, Brescia 1965.

²⁶ Cf. A. 2064.

²⁷ Cf. G. SANTANGELO, *Le epistole De imitatione di Giovanfrancesco Pico della Mirandola e di Pietro Bembo*, Firenze 1954 (Nuova collezione di testi umanistici inediti o rari XI); M. POMPILIO, *Una fonte italiana del Ciceronianus di Erasmo*, GIF VIII 3, 1956, pp. 193–207.

had not read this work? It may be more correct to turn one's attention to the fact that Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola, a student of Poliziano, follows his master closely with respect to the principles of imitation and does not depart from his theories. Perhaps truly, therefore, the letters of Mirandola were at that time not known to Erasmus? The observed correlations between the *Ciceronianus* and the correspondence of Pico stem from the fact that they both, Erasmus and Giovanni Francesco, drew upon the same source, from the letters²⁸ of Poliziano to Paolo Cortesi which were dedicated to questions of style. Poliziano's judgments on the topic of imitation are congruent with the beliefs of Erasmus. It is worth mentioning here that the Dutchman was an eager reader of the works of Poliziano, and he most probably acquired his admiration for Poliziano's talent from his French (Jaques Lefèvre d'Étaples) and English (Linacre, Grocyn) students who worshipped the Italian humanist. His interest in Poliziano and his thorough familiarity with Poliziano's correspondence²⁹ also spurred Erasmus to become familiar with the addressees and the friends of the Italian humanist: Mirandola the elder and Hermolaus Barbarus. Already in his early correspondence, Erasmus jointly names these men, placing them *in maximis authoribus*. He is also lavish in his praise for them in the *Ciceronianus*, where, as it seems, both Poliziano and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola provide arguments for Bulephorus in his fight for the independence of style.

²⁸ *Prosatori...* (n. 24), pp. 902–911.

²⁹ Cf. *Declamatio de pueris*, ed. J.C. MARGOLIN, pp. 587–590, where 26 references to Poliziano were cited in the correspondence of Erasmus, as well as his knowledge of the letters of Poliziano to Mirandola (among others in the treatise *Declamatio de pueris*). Erasmus' use of the works of Poliziano in the *Adagia* is asserted by M. MANN-PHILLIPS, *op. cit.* (n. 12), pp. 392, 400.