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Article abstract

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"My Own Worst Enemy": Translating *Hamartia* in Sixteenth-Century Italy[1]

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This article considers the ways in which Aristotle's notion of hamartia *(ἁμαρτία) in the* Poetics*—the tragic fault that leads to the protagonist's downfall—was rendered in sixteenth-century translations and commentaries produced in Italy. While early Latin translations and commentaries initially translated the term as* error*, mid-Cinquecento literary critics and theorists frequently used a term that implied sin:* peccatum/peccato*. Was this linguistic choice among sixteenth-century translators indicative of a broader attempt to Christianize the* Poetics*? While there were significant attempts on the part of translators and commentators to moralize the* Poetics*, this study of how* hamartia *was translated suggests that such interpretations were not Counter-Reformation distortions of Aristotle's* Poetics *but rather part of a broader program of cultural translation—expressing the linguistic influence of a religious public, but not necessarily a moralizing interpretation—domesticating the Greek philosopher for an early modern Christian audience.*

*Cet article considère les façons dont l'*hamartia *(ἁμαρτία) aristotélicienne—la faute tragique qui déclenche la chute du protagoniste—a été rendue dans les traductions et les commentaires de la* Poétique *produits en Italie au seizième siècle. Alors que les premières traductions et commentaires en latin, traduisaient le terme par* error*, dès le milieu du siècle on emploie fréquemment* peccatum / peccato*, un terme qui dénote le péché. Ce choix linguistique révèle-t-il un effort en vue d'imposer une*

1. Research leading to this publication was funded by the European Research Council under the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP/2007–2013) / ERC Starting Grant 2013 – 335949 ("Aristotle in the Italian Vernacular: Rethinking Renaissance and Early-Modern Intellectual History"). Additional research support was provided by a postdoctoral research startup grant from the Fonds de Recherche du Québec, Société et Culture (B2) and by grants from the University of Warwick's Humanities Research Centre (Summer Research Fund, Transatlantic Fellowship). Heartfelt thanks are due to David Lines and Simon Gilson for their encouraging feedback, insightful comments, and patience throughout the research and drafting of this article. Daniel Javitch, Alessio Cotugno, Peter Mack, Shannon McHugh, and Claudia Rossignoli were helpful interlocutors on various aspects of the argument. Thanks are also due to Danilo Facca, Valentina Lepri, Cecilia Muratori, and Eugenio Refini who organized the 2016 "Renaissance in Translation" conference (funded by Villa I Tatti and held at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw), where I received excellent feedback on an early version of this paper; equal thanks are due to David Lines and Anna Laura Puliafito for their organization of the 2017 "In Other Words: Translating Philosophy in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries" conference at the University of Warwick, which again enabled me to obtain constructive feedback on this topic. I am also grateful to the patient and helpful staff in the rare books and manuscript collections at the Newberry Library (Chicago) and the British Library (London).

interprétation chrétienne de la Poétique*? Certes, il y a eu d'importantes tentatives de moralisation de la* Poétique *au seizième siècle, mais cette étude montre que ces manières de traduire l'*hamartia *résultent d'un effort pour proposer une traduction du philosophe grec accessible au public chrétien de la Renaissance que d'une distorsion du texte induite par la Contre-Réforme.*

Introduction

Aristotle's notion of *hamartia* (ἁμαρτία)—the error that precipitates a character's tragic downfall—was translated and adapted for sixteenth-century audiences within a context of fierce literary debates over Aristotle's *Poetics* and the religious upheaval of the Catholic Church's theological, political, and cultural responses to the threat of the Protestant Reformation.[2] It may not be surprising, then, that a number of commentaries, translations, and poetic treatises in the period rendered Aristotle's *hamartia* with the Italian word for sin, *peccato*, rather than *errore*. Yet, this phenomenon leads us to ask to what extent did the religious culture of the sixteenth century impact the vernacular reception of Aristotle's *Poetics*? Despite the rich material available to scholars, this topic remains largely unexplored. This article confronts the question through a focused case study on the interpretation of Aristotle's concept of *hamartia*. More specifically, it investigates why *hamartia* was often translated as *peccatum* or *peccato* in commentaries and translations from the period. Was this rendering simply a lexical variant handed down by earlier translators and commentators? Or did it instead indicate a broader strategy of cultural domestication on the part of authors and translators who aimed to adapt Aristotle's notion of *hamartia*—and the *Poetics* more generally—for an early modern Christian readership? With respect to the concept of *hamartia*, it appears that heavy-handed religious interpretations did not occur as neatly or as evenly as may be assumed. While *peccato* and *errore* were not used interchangeably, *peccato* was rarely used to posit a religious interpretation

2. See James Hankins, "The Popes and Humanism," in *Rome Reborn: The Vatican Library and Renaissance Culture*, ed. Anthony Grafton (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 47–85. For an excellent overview of the Counter-Reformation's impact on poetry and literature, see Jennifer Helm, *Poetry and Censorship in Counter-Reformation Italy* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015). A broader discussion of the Counter-Reformation's impact on Italian culture is available in Adriano Prosperi, *Il Concilio di Trento e la Controriforma* (Trent: UCT, 1999) and *Tribunali della coscienza: inquisitori, confessori, missionari* (Turin: Einaudi, 1996); and Weitse de Boer, *The Conquest of the Soul: Confessions, Discipline, and Public Order in Counter-Reformation Milan* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2001).

of *hamartia*. Nevertheless, the use of *peccato*, combined with the glossing of *hamartia* by recourse to other Aristotelian works—such as the *Nicomachean Ethics*—led to an increasing emphasis on whether the tragic error was voluntary or involuntary and thus worthy of forgiveness.

In order to address this topic, the article will first review Aristotle's definition of *hamartia* in the *Poetics* and consider how the term *peccato* was defined in sixteenth-century Italy. It will then examine how the major published commentaries of the period rendered Aristotle's notion of *hamartia* in Latin and in Italian. While such analysis is certainly important for intellectual history and classical reception, this article primarily employs lenses borrowed from cultural and translation studies; its focus will thus be on the lexical choices made by various commentators and translators, rather than their understandings—now often considered to be incorrect—of how *hamartia* fits within the broader dramatic ecology of the *Poetics*. Scholarship on commentaries on Aristotle's *Poetics* has often been driven by philological concerns regarding the accuracy of interpretation; readings that deviate from our contemporary understanding of Aristotle's text have often been ascribed to the distorting moralizing influence of the Counter-Reformation and summarily dismissed. This approach, moreover, is not limited to sixteenth-century commentaries; up until quite recently, interpretation of *hamartia* in the *Poetics* continued to be the subject of virulent debates, which included the persistence of moralizing interpretations.[3] The present article, however, treats a number of perspectives that played a key role in domesticating *hamartia* for a sixteenth-century audience conversant with both Christian belief and Aristotelian moral philosophy, most notably the complex interpretation provided by Lodovico Castelvetro.

Aristotle's *Poetics* was the subject of many translations and commentaries in early modern Italy.[4] Despite initial interest in the text by Angelo Poliziano

3. See, for example, Alexandre Ničev, "À propos de la *Poétique* d'Aristote," *Revue des Études Grecques* 99.470–71 (1986): 153–60, 158–59, and *La catharsis tragique d'Aristote. Nouvelles contributions* (Sofia : Éditions de l'Université de Sofia "Kliment Ohridski," 1982).

4. For a comprehensive, albeit dated, account of the reception of the *Poetics* in sixteenth-century Italy, see Bernard Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 2:349–634. A more recent and succinct summary regarding this reception is provided by Enrica Zanin, "Les commentaires modernes de la *Poétique* d'Aristote," *Études littéraires* 43.2 (2012): 55–83, and by Daniel Javitch, "The Assimilation of Aristotle's *Poetics* in Sixteenth-Century Italy," in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: Volume 3, The Renaissance*, ed. Glyn P.

and Giorgio Valla, the first complete Latin translation of the text by Alessandro Pazzi de' Medici was not published until 1536. In the early 1540s, Alessandro Piccolomini invited Bartolomeo Lombardi to give a series of lectures on the *Poetics* to the Accademia degli Infiammati in Padua, which were ultimately delivered by his student Vincenzo Maggi after Lombardi's untimely death in 1541.[5] Maggi also held a series of lectures on the *Poetics* in Ferrara, and would go on to publish an important commentary on the text in 1550.[6] The first major commentary, however, was published by Francesco Robortello in 1548, followed rapidly by the first translation and commentary in the Italian vernacular by Bernardo Segni in 1549, and a Latin commentary by the Florentine scholar Piero Vettori in 1560.[7] The latter half of the sixteenth and the early seventeenth centuries then saw an explosion of vernacular commentaries, treatises, and literary debates focused on ideas emerging from the *Poetics*.[8]

Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 53–65. For the importance of the *Poetics* as a text used to provide categories for emerging conceptions of genre, see Daniel Javitch, "The Emergence of Poetic Genre Theory in the Sixteenth Century," *Modern Language Quarterly* 59.2 (1998): 139–69. For a rich discussion of the vernacularization of the *Poetics* in sixteenth-century Italy, particularly with reference to the first Italian translation and commentary by Bernardo Segni (1548), see Simone Bionda, "La *Poetica* di Aristotele volgarizzata: Bernardo Segni e le sue fonti," *Aevum* 75.3 (2001): 679–94.

5. On the relationship between Piccolomini, Maggi, and Lombardi see Alessio Cotugno, "Le *Annotationi* di Piccolomini e la *Poetica* di Castelvetro a confronto: tecnica argomentativa, vocabolario critico, dispositivi esegetici," in *Forms of Conflict and Rivalries in Renaissance Europe*, ed. David A. Lines, Marc Laureys, and Jill Kraye (Bonn: Bonn University Press, 2015), 161–206, 167–68.

6. Vincenzo Maggi and Bartolomeo Lombardi, *Vincentii Madii Brixiani et Bartholomaei Lombardi Veronensis in Aristotelis librum de poetica communes explanationes* (Venice: Valgrisi, 1550). Notes from Maggi's lectures in Ferrara taken by one of his students, Alessandro Sardi, are preserved in a manuscript in the Biblioteca Estense di Modena, lat.88=alfa.Q.6.14, 18r–86v. While the manuscript is dated "15 Cal. Februarj MDXLVI" (18r), the notes appear to be those on Maggi's lectures from 1543. An overview of the manuscript's contents and Maggi's method is provided by Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism*, 1:376–78. Having consulted the manuscript for this research, I must concur with Maggi in his assertion that "Sardi's handwriting, notorious among scholars at the Estense, is practically undecipherable" (1:376).

7. Francesco Robortello, *In librum Aristotelis de arte poetica explicationes* (1548; repr., Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1968); Bernardo Segni, *Rettorica e Poetica d'Aristotile tradotte di greco in lingua vulgare fiorentina* (Florence: Lorenzo Torrentino, 1549); Piero Vettori, *Petri Victorii commentarii, in primum librum Aristotelis de arte poetarum* (Florence: Giunti, 1560).

8. Of the twenty-two works on the *Poetics* with known dates included in the *Vernacular Aristotelianism in Renaissance Italy* (VARI) database, only three are published prior to 1550. See Eugenio Refini, David

Scholarship on the reception of Aristotle's *Poetics* in early modern Italy has often emphasized how the text was read within a tradition that considered poetry from a rhetorical perspective. Weinberg's seminal *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance* and Baxter Hathaway's *Age of Criticism* both emphasized how the *Poetics* was distorted in order to be assimilated to a tradition of rhetorically-inflected literary criticism influenced by Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Horace's *Ars Poetica*, and the rhetorical treatises of Cicero and Quintilian.[9] This rhetorical emphasis of poetry's effects upon an audience was combined with the assumption that Aristotle's *Poetics* served as a response to Platonic condemnations of poetry, prompting many critics, translators, and commentators to find justification in the *Poetics*—particularly in Aristotle's notion of catharsis—for the moral function of poetry.[10]

Despite their immense value in mapping and delimiting the field, the New Critical biases of Weinberg's and Hathaway's studies—what Kristine Louise Haugen has termed an interest in "actively redeploying Aristotle's literary ideas" of formal criticism—continue to shape current scholarship on early modern literary criticism, which often dismisses eclectic and moralizing interpretations

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Lines, and Bryan Brazeau, *Vernacular Aristotelianism in Renaissance Italy Database*, accessed 4 April 2017, vari.warwick.ac.uk/.

9. Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism*, 1:111–55; Baxter Hathaway, *The Age of Criticism: The Late Renaissance in Italy* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1962). On the Horatian reception of Aristotle's *Poetics* see Adelheid Conte, "La rinascita della poetica nel Cinquecento italiano," in *La Poetica di Aristotele e la sua storia: atti della giornata internazionale di studio organizzata dal seminario di greco in memoria di Viviana Cessi (Pavia, 22 Febbraio 2002)*, ed. Diego Lanza and Viviana Cessi (Pisa: ETS, 2002), 45–58, 51. Weinberg notes that many of the early treatises on "arts of poetry" in the first half of the Cinquecento, such as Marco Girolamo Vida's *De arte poetica* (1527), Gian Giorgio Trissino's *La poetica I–IV* (1529), and Bernardino Daniello's *La poetica* (1536), all demonstrate strong rhetorical and Horatian inflections in their emphases on rhetorical devices and on the poet's role in teaching men to live well (*A History of Literary Criticism*, 2:715–30).

10. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1449b25–28. The classic discussion of catharsis in Renaissance commentaries is Hathaway's analysis in *The Age of Criticism*, 205–300. For a philological approach to Aristotle's use of catharsis and the influence of ancient medical terminology, see Carlo Diano, "La catarsi tragica," in *Saggezza e poetiche degli antichi* (Venice: N. Pozza, 1968), 215–80; and Diano, "Francesco Robortello interprete della catarsi," in *Studi e saggi di filosofia antica* (Padua: Antenore, 1973), 321–30. For a linguistic approach to the term in Renaissance translations of the *Poetics*, see Riccardo Tesi, *Aristotele in italiano: i grecisimi nelle traduzioni rinascimentali della 'Poetica'* (Florence: Accademia della Crusca, 1997), 117–69.

of the *Poetics* from the period as misguided.[11] For example, Michael Lurje has recently commented on how most early modern commentaries on the *Poetics* integrated Aristotle's text to contemporary critical approaches by eliciting unwilling responses from the text to their own theoretical and increasingly moralistic concerns.[12] Within this line of thought, it would seem that the translation of *hamartia* with *peccatum/peccato* lends further evidence for moralizing—even religious—approaches to the *Poetics* in this period. As will be discussed below, careful attention to key translations and commentaries, however, demonstrates that the substitution of *peccato* for *hamartia* appears to be primarily a lexical variant on the part of such authors, handed down from one commentator and translator to another, rather than indicative of a religious interpretation. *Hamartia* was primarily interpreted through the lens of Aristotelian moral philosophy in the literary debate on Speroni's *Canace* and in commentaries by Robortello, Maggi, Vettori, and Piccolomini, while only Lodovico Castelvetro offered an explicitly religious interpretation. This inquiry will thus also serve to highlight two important interpretive frameworks that shaped the reception of the *Poetics*, yet which have often been ignored by

11. Kristine Louise Haugen, "The Birth of Tragedy in the Cinquecento: Humanism and Literary History," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 72.3 (2011): 351–70, 352. Weinberg's New Critical approach is evident throughout his *History of Literary Criticism*. His thesis, that increasingly powerful moralizing lenses were applied to Aristotle's text, has rarely been questioned. It is only in recent years that scholars such as Brigitte Kappl have begun to revisit this approach, highlighting instead an increasing emphasis on formal elements of poetry as a signal of growing aesthetic independence; see Kappl, "Profit, Pleasure, and Purgation: Catharsis in Aristotle, Paolo Beni and Italian Late Renaissance Poetics," *Skenè Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies* 2.1 (2016): 105–32. Kappl has also argued through attentive close reading of Renaissance commentaries that we may read the increased focus on formal aspects of poetry in these texts as evidence of a new independence of the aesthetic realm from moral concerns; see Kappl, "Aristotelian Katharsis in Renaissance Poetics," in *La poètica renaixentista a Europa: una recreació del llegat clàssic*, ed. Josep Solervicens and Antoni L. Moll (Barcelona: Punctum & Mimesi, 2011), 69–97.

12. Michael Lurje, "Facing up to Tragedy: Toward an Intellectual History of Sophocles in Europe from Camerarius to Nietzsche," in *A Companion to Sophocles*, ed. Kirk Ormand (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 440–55, 444–45. Lurje's teleological emphasis is also evident in his broader discussion of the history of interpretation of *hamartia* with relation to Sophocles's *Oedipus*. See Lurje, *Die Suche nach der Schuld, Sophokles' Oedipus Rex, Aristoteles' Poetik und das Tragödienverständnis der Neuzeit* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004).

scholarship: the religious culture of the Catholic Reformation and the firmly established traditions of Latin and vernacular Aristotelian thought.[13]

Hamartia in Aristotle's *Poetics*

Hamartia is a complex term in Aristotle's *Poetics*. As Jan Bremer has demonstrated, while it originally meant "missing the mark" in Homeric Greek—used for arrows and spears that failed to hit their targets—it subsequently acquired connotations of moral errancy or offence in the works of ancient orators, tragedians, and historians. By the time of Plato and Aristotle, the term was widely used to indicate a moral error worthy of condemnation, a metaphoric usage that would continue throughout the Alexandrian period and later be used to indicate "sin" in the Christian Bible.[14] Aristotle, however, often

13. On Renaissance Aristotelianism see the pioneering studies of Charles Schmitt, *Aristotle and the Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983) and *The Aristotelian Tradition and Renaissance Universities* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1984); F. Edward Cranz, *A Bibliography of Aristotle Editions, 1501–1600*, 2nd ed., addenda and corrections by Charles Schmitt (Baden-Baden: V. Koerner, 1984); and Charles Lohr, *Latin Aristotle Commentaries II: Renaissance Authors* (Florence: Olschki, 1988). More recently, see Luca Bianchi, *Studi sull'aristotelismo del Rinascimento* (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2003) and "Per una storia dell'aristotelismo 'volgare' nel Rinascimento. Problemi e prospettive di ricerca," *Bruniana & Campanelliana* 15.2 (2009): 367–85; David Lines, *Aristotle's Ethics in the Italian Renaissance (ca. 1350–1600): The Universities and the Problem of Moral Education* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2002) and "Beyond Latin in Renaissance Philosophy: A Plea for New Critical Perspectives," *Intellectual History Review* 25.4 (2015): 373–89; Jill Kraye, *Classical Traditions in Renaissance Philosophy* (London: Ashgate, 2002); David A. Lines and Eugenio Refini, eds., *Aristotele fatto volgare* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2014); and Luca Bianchi, Simon Gilson, and Jill Kraye, eds., *Vernacular Aristotelianism in Renaissance Italy* (London: The Warburg Institute, 2016).

14. Jan Maarten Bremer, *Hamartia: Tragic Error in the Poetics of Aristotle and in Greek Tragedy* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1969), 1–63. Bremer provides a rigorous philological analysis that traces the usage and various meanings of ἁμαρτία in ancient Greek from Homer to Aristotle. His study also convincingly demonstrates "a continuous semantic shift" from the Homeric sense of ἁμαρτία toward a connotation of moral offence (in the works of Plato, for example). Indeed, as Bremer demonstrates, the widespread metaphoric usage of ἁμαρτία already in his own day prompted Thucydides to use διαμαρτάνειν in order to indicate the original Homeric sense of "missing the mark." This shift from literal to metaphorical registers continues to the extent where in both the Septuagint and the New Testament, ἁμαρτία never "occurs in its literal [i.e., Homeric] meaning, and even *dihamartanein* is used to denote sin" (Bremer, 60). For a clear and succinct discussion of Aristotle's use of *hamartia* within the *Poetics*, see Stephen Haliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics* (1986; repr., London: Duckworth, 1998), 215–26. Haliwell concludes that "the inherent indeterminacy of tragic hamartia should be seen to be the consequence of a tension within

uses the term in the *Poetics* to indicate "artistic mistakes committed by a poet or a playwright," not moral errors worthy of condemnation or punishment. Such usage sets Aristotle's text apart from that of contemporary orators, and from Plato himself who used *hamartia* primarily to indicate vicious actions worthy of moral condemnation.[15]

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle writes that the best tragedies should induce pity and fear in the audience by representing "terrifying and pitiable" events; pity is felt for a person undeserving of her misfortune, while fear is felt for someone like one's self. After dismissing various plots that would fail to do this (i.e., good men undergoing a change from fortune to misfortune, bad men passing from misfortune to good fortune, or completely villainous men falling from good fortune into misfortune), Aristotle settles upon the following description of the tragic protagonist:

> There remains, then, the person intermediate between these. Such a person is one who neither is superior [to us] in virtue and justice, nor undergoes a change to misfortune because of vice and wickedness, but

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the theory of tragedy itself"; as the term possesses "no particular English translation," he advocates "for avoiding a consistent translation for the term" (222).

15. Bremer, 53–54. Bremer's argument for Aristotle's anachronous use of the term is supported by his readings of chapters 10–11, 14, and 16 of the *Poetics*, where he demonstrates that Aristotle's definitions of the key notions of *peripetia*, *pathos*, and *anagnorisis* all rely upon and continuously suppose "something like ignorance or blunder," rather than a morally condemnable action (61–63). Françoise Lamoureux has noted that while the Platonic definition of *hamartia* contains pre-Christian intimations of the concept of sin, it ultimately diverges in its emphases on inattention and involuntary action. See Françoise Lamoureux, "Peccato o *hamartia* in Platone?," *Sapienza* 36 (1993): 313–21. Recent scholarship has called attention to the harmonization of Platonic and Aristotelian ideas in Neoplatonic thought and its influence during the Italian Renaissance. See, for example, Lloyd P. Gerson, *Aristotle and Other Platonists* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), particularly 242–74 with regard to Aristotle's *Ethics*; and Ilsetraut Hadot, *Athenian and Alexandrian Neoplatonism and the Harmonization of Aristotle and Plato*, trans. Michael Chase (Leiden: Brill, 2015). For the enduring influence of Neoplatonism on Renaissance literary theory, even after the rediscovery of Aristotle's *Poetics*, see Michael J. B. Allen, "Renaissance Neoplatonism," in *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, ed. Norton, 435–41. While it is outside the scope of this article to fully investigate Neoplatonic usage of *hamartia* in translations and commentaries from the period, this tradition certainly played an important role for early modern commentators of the *Poetics*, and its influence in this regard merits further study.

> because of some error [*hamartia*], and who is one of those people with a great reputation and good fortune.[16]

In the next chapter, Aristotle details the four types of possible incidents that can arouse dread or compassion in the audience and lists these from worst to best: 1) the protagonist may have full knowledge of an event and not do a certain deed, 2) the protagonist may have full knowledge of an event and still do the deed, 3) the protagonist may do the deed, but be ignorant of a certain relationship (as in the case of Oedipus and his father), or 4) the protagonist may be about to do a deadly deed in ignorance, but recognizes a friendly relationship before acting.[17] Aristotle's emphasis when describing these possibilities is on the relative ignorance or knowledge of the tragic protagonist and on the dramatic effect of acting (or refraining from action) on the basis of such knowledge. Indeed, most scholars now concur that Aristotle's concept of *hamartia* in the *Poetics* was tied to ignorance on the part of the protagonist.[18]

16. Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. and ed. Richard Janko (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1987), 1453a7–10. I have opted to use Janko's translation in this article rather than the standard English translation by Ingram Bywater included in the revised Oxford translation of *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, edited by Jonathan Barnes. While Bywater's 1909 translation is valuable, and has been revised in light of Rudolf Kassel's 1965 critical edition of the *Poetics*, Janko's translation bases itself on Kassel while also incorporating material from two manuscripts of the *Poetics* that have been given greater prominence since Bywater's translation and Kassel's critical edition (MS B and a medieval translation of the text into Arabic). This new translation also includes more detailed notes concerning the comments of medieval copyists and is notable for its clarity and stylistic elegance. See Janko, "Introduction," in *Poetics*, xxii. The most recent critical edition of Aristotle's text, which replaces Kassel's, is Leonardo Tarán and Dimitri Gutas, *Aristotle Poetics: Editio Maior of the Greek Text with Historical Introductions and Philological Commentaries* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012).

17. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1453a26–36. While Aristotle does not explicitly associate the deed mentioned in chapter 14 with the *hamartia* mentioned one chapter prior, such an association may be implied from context.

18. A recent study of *hamartia* in the *Poetics* convincingly defines the term as meaning "ignorance of particulars" when committing a specific action. See Ho Kim, "Aristotle's 'Hamartia' Reconsidered," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 105 (2010): 33–52. A range of earlier scholarship also arrived at similar definitions, demonstrating that the common idea of the "tragic character flaw" does not find justification in the text of Aristotle's *Poetics*. See Leon Golden, "Hamartia, Ate, and Oedipus," *The Classical World* 72.1 (1978): 3–12; T. C. W. Stinton, "Hamartia in Aristotle and Greek Tragedy," *The Classical Quarterly* 25.2 (1975): 221–54; R. D. Dawe, "Some Reflections on Ate and Hamartia," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 72 (1968): 89–123, doi:10.2307/311076; and Robert R. Dyer, "'Hamartia'

As Lurje has shown, the concept of *hamartia* had a marked impact on the reception of Sophocles's *Oedipus Tyrannus*, as thinkers throughout the early modern period and beyond searched for what constituted the protagonist's guilt: whether killing his father and sleeping with his mother were simple mistakes committed in ignorance, or whether they reflected flaws in Oedipus's character.[19] The question was a vexed one, as the first answer would indicate a fatalistic tragedy where the Delphic oracle's prediction to Laius would come true regardless of circumstances, creating a tragedy that might move an audience to pity and fear but would not be morally instructive, while the second possibility allowed for moral instruction but required the audience to ignore the prediction of the oracle, and was inconsistent with Aristotelian virtue ethics.[20] In spite of the value of Lurje's scholarship, his work is strongly polemic; his treatment of sixteenth-century readings of Aristotle's *Poetics* is entirely in a negative key, lamenting the interpretive tradition under the "dark star" of Robortello's misinterpretation, and more broadly, the "bleak" history of interpretation of *Oedipus* prior to the work of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century classical philologists.[21] Such a teleological emphasis ignores the complex interpretation of *hamartia* advanced by critics such as Castelvetro, and fails to inquire about the cultural domestication and interpretive creativity present in such commentaries.[22] Other recent work on sixteenth-century interpretations of *hamartia* includes Enrico Mattioda's analysis of Piero Vettori's approach to *hamartia* as an attempt to save classical drama from accusations of heretical

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in the 'Poetics' and Aristotle's Model of Failure," *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 4.4 (1965): 658–64. Though dated, Bremer's monographic study on *hamartia* remains indispensable, as does Suzanne Saïd's *La Faute Tragique* (Paris: Maspero, 1978).

19. Lurje, *Die Suche nach der Schuld*, 28–65.

20. Lurje, "Facing up to Tragedy," 449.

21. When discussing the interpretation of *hamartia* in Italy, Lurje claims that the exegetical activity of the Italian commentators was "von vornherein unter einem schlechten Stern" (ill-fated from the outset) due to Robortello's problematic definition of *hamartia* "per imprudentiam"; later, Lurje condemns the centuries of interpretation prior to the work of Ulrich Wilamowitz-Moellendorff as "trostlose Deutungsgeschichte" (dismal interpretation history), in Lurje, *Die Suche nach der Schuld,* 108, 241–42.

22. When discussing sixteenth-century interpretations of catharsis, Lurje condemns the moralizing interpretations of Bernardo Segni, Vincenzo Maggi, and others as "scarcely founded" and "highly eclectic"; Castelvetro is summarily dismissed as one to whom nothing was sacred, in *Die Suche nach der Schuld*, 19–21, 88–89.

fatalism.[23] Additionally, Davide Messina has studied the influence of the *Poetics* upon Niccolò Machiavelli's *Il Principe*.[24]

While scholars such as Lurje and Weinberg have emphasized an increasing tendency to moralize the *Poetics* in late sixteenth-century commentaries, with respect to the concept of *hamartia*, such moralization does not appear to have occurred as evenly as has been assumed. *Hamartia* was translated as both *peccato* and *errore* in sixteenth-century commentaries, yet *peccato* was rarely used to suggest a religious interpretation of *hamartia*. Nevertheless, the use of *peccato* combined with the interpretation of *hamartia* by recourse to the *Nicomachean Ethics* led to an increasing emphasis on the role of the protagonist's

23. Enrico Mattioda, "La discussione sulla colpa tragica nelle interpretazioni della *Poetica* di Aristotele tra XVI e XVIII Secolo," *Horizonte* 12 (2011): 33–50. Mattioda interprets the increasing emphasis in mid-century discussions of *hamartia* on imprudence and ignorance as evidence of literature's autonomy from theological dogma during the Counter-Reformation. The centrality of Aristotle's *Poetics* for discussions of literary theory, he argues, furnished critics with a classical authority to whom they could appeal when faced with critiques from the Catholic theologians. While it is true that one could accuse Greek tragedies, such as Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*, of fatalism—particularly in Giovanni Andrea dell'Anguillara's 1565 rendition—such accusations appear to have been quite rare in the early Cinquecento. Indeed, Mattioda only cites one instance in a 1550 letter from the Sicilian theologian Giorgio Siculo which refers to Protestant beliefs of predestination as "per via di tragedia." Moreover, Mattioda does not discuss the *Canace* controversy where—despite the intervention of the Gods—the most shocking aspect of the play appears to be the willingly incestuous coupling of brother and sister.

24. Davide Messina, in "L'arco Tragico del *Principe*: Machiavelli e l'intrigo poetico," *Italian Studies* 71.3 (July, 2016): 287–310. doi:10.1080/00751634.2016.11189248, links Machiavelli's *Principe* to the tragic genre, and therefore with Aristotelian *hamartia*, based on a noted passage in Machiavelli's letter to Guicciardini (October, 1525). The article overlooks contemporary readings of the *Poetics* by humanists such as Poliziano who was uninterested in matters of genre (see Peter Godman, "Poliziano's Poetics and Literary History," *Interpres* 13 (1993): 110–209, and *From Poliziano to Machiavelli: Florentine Humanism in the High Renaissance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 31–79). Nor does the article discuss the problematic gap between the 1498 Latin paraphrase of the *Poetics* by Giorgio Valla and the broader appeal of the text in the 1540s and 1550s, making the bold claim that Machiavelli was a pioneer of genre theory—a later mid-century development—with little supporting evidence or refutation of existing scholarship on the generic identity of *Il Principe*, such as that provided by Robert Hariman, "No Superficial Attractions and Ornaments: The Invention of Modernity in Machiavelli's Realist Style," in *Political Style: The Artistry of Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 13–49. More problematic, however, is the article's unsupported claim that the manuscript of William of Moerbeke's Latin translation was available to Machiavelli and his contemporaries (10), while current scholarship on the *Poetics* agrees that Moerbeke's translation was lost, rediscovered in 1895, and only attributed to the author several decades later. See Tarán and Gutas, 43, 65, and especially 69.

will in committing the tragic error, and thus the question of whether he or she deserved forgiveness.

Hamartia: a tragic sin?

What did it mean to translate *hamartia* with *peccatum/peccato* in sixteenth-century Italy, a period when the Protestant and Catholic Reformations were engaged in heated debates over theological issues? The discussions on original sin from the fifth session of the Council of Trent provide contemporary perspectives on sin. This session resulted in a decree issued on 17 June 1546 that re-affirmed the church's position on the issue.[25] While the decree itself does not provide a clear definition of sin, two seventeenth-century accounts of the Council do: Pietro Soave's *Historia del Concilio Tridentino* (1619, pseudonymously published under the name of Paolo Sarpi) and Pietro Sforza Pallavicino's orthodox rebuttal, the *Istoria del Concilio di Trento* (1656–57). Both accounts are partisan, yet agree that the theologians present at this session concurred in their definition of sin as entailing concupiscence and the voluntary disobedience of a divine law.[26] This position is summarized in Sarpi's account by the Dominican theologian Fra Ambrosio Catarino: "non si è mai inteso nella Chiesa, peccato esser altro, che l'attione volontaria contra la legge"

25. *Canones, et decreta sacrosancti oecumenici, et generalis concilii Tridentini* (Rome: apud Paulum Manutium, Aldi F., 1564), xxiii–xxx. See also John O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 102–06.

26. Pietro Soave [Paolo Sarpi], *Historia del Concilio tridentino* (London: Giovanni Billio, 1619), 169; Pietro Sforza Pallavicino, *Istoria del Concilio di Trento* (Rome: Angelo Bernabó dal Verme Erede del Manelfi, 1656), 643 (7.10). On the reliability of Sarpi's account and the importance of Pallavicino's *Istoria* in Catholic circles, see Owen Chadwick, *Catholicism and History: The Opening of the Vatican Archives, the Herbery Hensley Lectures in the University of Oxford, 1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 47–48. For a recent reassessment of Sarpi as a historian and political philosopher see Jaska Kainulainen, *Paolo Sarpi: A Servant of God and State* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 254–55. For a succinct summary of the historiography of the Council, including the important roles played by Sarpi and Pallavicino's accounts, see Nelson H. Minnich, "Councils of the Catholic Reformation: A Historical Survey," in *The Church, the Councils and Reform: The Legacy of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Christopher M. Bellitto (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 27–59, 53–55.

(within the church, sin has never been understood as anything other than a voluntary action against the law).[27]

These definitions reflect the most basic understanding of sin expressed in Augustine's *Contra Faustum* as "any transgression in deed, or word, or desire, of the eternal law."[28] As Paula Fredriksen has noted, however, early Christian interpretations of sin differed widely.[29] For Paul, sin was a cosmic agent that defined the human condition, held everyone in its power (*Romans* 3:9), and was the root cause of a conflict between the mind which "serves the law of God" and the flesh which "serves the law of sin" (*Romans* 7:25).[30] Several centuries later, Augustine would come to emphasize the notion of original sin and the damage effected by the Fall on the human will, internalizing the Pauline dichotomy to posit a defective and divided will which, despite its recognition of what is right, nevertheless desires other things, memorably summarized in the prayer for celibacy in book 8 of the *Confessions*: "grant me chastity and continence, but not yet."[31] Augustine's discussion of the defective will in committing sin raises the question of *akrasia* (ἀκρασία), the problem whereby one may know the best course of action, but nevertheless not follow it. For Socrates in Plato's *Protogoras*, true *akrasia* was not possible, as no actor would willingly pursue what they truly knew to be harmful, while for Aristotle in book 7 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, *akrasia* was possible if due to a perceptual error; in both cases, bad actions were ultimately rooted in the intellect or perception rather than in the

27. Sarpi, 171. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine, and punctuation in all Latin and Italian quotations has been modernized. While Pallavicino does not mention this specific comment, he also highlights the link between sin and voluntary action, when objecting to Sarpi's depiction of the dismissal of Franciscan positions on penitence: "la colpa volontariamente contratta non si rimette finch'ella non cessa di rimaner volontaria; il che aviene per mezzo del pentimento" (the guilt that results from voluntary action is not resolved until it ceases to be voluntary; which occurs through penitence), Pallavicino, 1116 (12.12).

28. Augustine, *Reply to Faustus the Manichean*, trans. Richard Stothert, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Augustine*, 8 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 4:155–345, 283.

29. Paula Fredriksen, *Sin: The Early History of an Idea* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 93.

30. Fredriksen, 34–35.

31. Fredriksen, 118; Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 8.7.17.

will.[32] For Augustine, however, as T. D. J. Chappell underlines, *akrasia* is not only possible but exists as a "fully voluntary action" of willful wrongdoing, and is "therefore culpable, even if it is not rationally explicable."[33] With regard to Augustine's notion of the divided will, J. Caleb Clanton suggests that *akrasia* and akratic sins occur in the temporal period "between the cognitive effects of divine illumination and the full volitional transformation brought on by God's grace," or, in other words, in an agent's "post-grace *perversio*," as Augustine discusses with reference to his old and new wills in book 8, chapter 5 of his *Confessions*.[34] Augustine's interpretation of the divided will had a profound impact on later thinkers, and would famously lead Martin Luther to write in the preface of his commentary on Paul's *Letter to the Romans* that sin "means not only the outward works of the body, but [also] the inmost heart, with all its powers"; the defective nature of the will implied that man could not be justified through good works, but only through faith (*sola fide*).[35] The Tridentine and post-Tridentine church rejected such a view, relying instead on the positive interpretations of human will expressed by Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus, key theologians of the Dominican and Franciscan orders respectively.[36]

32. Plato, *Protogoras*, trans. W. K. C. Guthrie, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato,* ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 308–52, 349 (358c–d); Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. W. D. Ross, rev. J. O. Urmson, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 2:1729–1869, 2:1809–12 (1145b21–1147b20). For an excellent collection of recent studies on *akrasia* in Greek thought, see Christopher Bobonich and Pierre Destrée, eds., *Akrasia in Greek Philosophy: From Socrates to Plotinus* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

33. T. D. J. Chappell, *Aristotle and Augustine on Freedom: Two Theories of Freedom, Voluntary Action, and Akrasia* (London: Macmillan, 1995), 206–07.

34. J. Caleb Clanton, "Teaching Socrates, Aristotle, and Augustine on *Akrasia*," *Religions* 6 (2015): 419–33, 429–31; Augustine, *Confessions*, 8.5. For an extensive discussion of the role of *akrasia* in Augustine, and its impact on Augustinian notions of the will and freedom (particularly with reference to *Confessions* 8.10), see Risto Saarinen, *Weakness of the Will in Medieval Thought: From Augustine to Buridan* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 20–42.

35. Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Classics, 1976), xv. For a thorough discussion of *akrasia* in Renaissance thought, including Italian humanism, the Lutheran Reformation, and the Calvinist Reformation, see Risto Saarinen, *Weakness of the Will in Renaissance and Reformation Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

36. As John W. O'Malley has noted, Aquinas's emphasis on the goodness of "the natural" was achieved through the application of Aristotelian metaphysical theory of matter and form to the body–soul relationship. See O'Malley, "Trent, Sacred Images, and Catholics' Senses of the Sensuous," in *The*

It is doubtful that sixteenth-century commentators and translators of the *Poetics* had such complex theological definitions of *peccato* in mind when discussing *hamartia*. While few poetic theorists of the period were also theologians, linguistic sources from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries confirm the religious significance of the term. The *Vocabolario degli accademici della Crusca* (1612) defines *peccato* along the same lines as the Tridentine theologians: as a voluntary action that violates God's law.[37] Yet, the *Vocabolario* also indicates that *peccato* may be used in a more general sense to indicate a fault or a defect (equivalent to the Latin *vitium* or *menda*), citing examples of such usage in the works of both Boccaccio and Petrarca.[38] These two uses of *peccato* are also reflected in John Florio's 1598 Italian-English dictionary, where the term is defined as "a sin, a fault, an offence, a crime, a trespasse."[39] A variety of non-theological uses of the term are also reflected in Florio's definition of the verb *peccare*: "to sinne, to trespasse, to offend, to commit a fault, to faile in something, to do amisse, not to do what we ought, to swarve from the law."[40] Was the lexical choice between rendering *hamartia* as *peccato* or as *errore* in sixteenth-century commentaries on the *Poetics* simply a matter of style or was it indicative of a spiritual interpretation of Aristotle's text?

Translating *Hamartia* in Sixteenth-Century Italy

For literary critics and commentators in sixteenth-century Italy, *hamartia* was a term that could be translated in several different ways. In Alessando Pazzi de' Medici's 1536 translation, the *hamartia* passage from *Poetics* 1453a7–10 is rendered as follows:

Sensuous in the Counter-Reformation Church, ed. Marcia B. Hall and Tracy E. Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 28–48, 40.

37. "Peccato è ogni detto, e fatto e ogni cosa disiderata contr'alla legge di Dio […] che cosa è il peccato, se non un trapassamento della legge d'Iddio, e disubbidienza de' comandamenti celestiali," *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* (Venice: Giovanni Alberti, 1612), 603.

38. "E generalmente per difetto, e mancamento" (*Vocabolario*, 603).

39. John Florio, *A Worlde of Wordes, or Most Copious and Exact Dictionarie in Italian and English* (London: Arnold Hatfield for Edw. Blount, 1598), 263.

40. Florio, 263. We may detect an echo of the Tridentine theologians' definition in Florio's reference to "swerving from the law."

> [R]eliquum est, ut ad haec maxime idoneus is habeatur, qui medius inter tales sit. Is autem erit qui nec virtute, nec iustitia antecellat minimeque per vicium pravitatemque in ipsam infelicitatem lapsus fuerit, verum *humano* quodam *errore*, ex magna quidem existimatione atque felicitate.
>
> (Finally, the most suitable person for this purpose [for tragic plots] should be considered to be the one who stands between two such men. He will be one who does not surpass others in virtue nor in justice. Also, he should not fall through great vice into unhappiness, but rather should fall from great reputation and happiness due to some *human error*.)[41]

Following Giorgio Valla's partial 1498 Latin translation of the *Poetics*, Pazzi renders *hamartia* as "humanus quidam error."[42] Pazzi's addition of the adjective *humanus* to describe this error is worth noting as it implies the protagonist's agency and human fallibility, an implication that had a marked impact in later discussions.

41. Aristotle, *Aristotelis Poetica per Alexandrum Paccium… in latinum conversa…* (Venice: Aldus Manutius and Andrea Torresani di Asolo, 1536), 31. For a discussion of this translation and its importance for sixteenth-century commentaries, see Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism*, 1:361–73. See also Bryan Brazeau, "no.33 Alessandro Pazzi de' Medici, Aristotelis Poetica…," in *Venezia e Aristotele (ca. 1450–1600): Greco, Latino, e Italiano* (exhibition catalogue), ed. Alessio Cotugno and David A. Lines (Venice: Marcianum Press, 2016), 102–03.

42. Valla renders the passage as follows: "inter hos reliquum est sane is, qui neque virtute excellit et iusticia neque vitio et improbitate mutet in fortunam adversam, sed *errore aliquo eorum*" (Between those men that are left, there is reasonably that one who is preeminent neither in virtue nor in justice, and does not fall into misfortune by vice and wickedness, but on account of some error of his). In *Rhetorica aristotelis cum Egidii de Roma … commentariis … addita eiusdem aristotelis Poetica, cum averroys in eandem Summa novissime recognita cunctisque erroribus castigate* (Venice: Giorgio Arrivabene, 1515), 4. The text contains a reprint of Valla's 1498 Latin paraphrase along with Hermannus Alemannus's 1256 translation of Averroes's commentary. As Javitch observes, Valla's paraphrase of the text seems to have held little interest for contemporary readers in the early Cinquecento; in Valla's own *De poetica*, Aristotle is cited "only occasionally and mostly for his views on the origins of drama." See Javitch, "The assimilation of Aristotle's *Poetics*," 55. Valla's interest in the *Poetics* seems to be rather similar to that of his contemporary, Angelo Poliziano, whose interest in the *Poetics* has been described by Godman as filtered through an "Alexandrian optic" that emphasized literary history (the names of poets, their compositions, and protagonists) and paid little attention to elements of literary form. See Godman, *From Poliziano to Machiavelli*, 60–65, and "Poliziano's Poetics."

Interpretations of *hamartia* in the 1540s were not limited to commentaries and translations of the *Poetics*. The concept also played an important role in mid-sixteenth-century poetic debates, such as the one surrounding *La Canace* (1546). Authored by the Paduan humanist Sperone Speroni and read at the Accademia degli Infammati in Padua in 1542, this tragedy depicts the incestuous love between a brother and a sister who are led into the act by Venus.[43] The controversy was ignited by an anonymous polemic dialogue, the *Giudizio d'una tragedia di Canace e Macareo*, which was published in 1550 (despite internal dating from 1543).[44] The work is heavily informed by Aristotelian poetic tenets. *Hamartia* and the moral character of the ideal tragic protagonist are two key problems debated at the very beginning of the *Giudizio*. Speroni's play is condemned by the dialogue character Lodovico Boccadiferro on account of its lack of efficacy; if the tragic protagonists are simply immoral, he claims, the audience will be unable to identify with them and their punishment will thus induce neither fear nor pity.[45] The crucial problem underlined at the outset of the *Giudizio* is thus not the incestuous coupling of brother and sister, nor the fatalism of the act's motivation by a pagan goddess; rather, it is the fact that Canace and Macareo lay together *willingly*, with full understanding of their familial relationship.

A short while later in the dialogue, Boccadiferro explains why the incest plot in Sophocles's *Oedipus* functions as an effective tragic element, and why the play's eponymous protagonist is of appropriate moral character:

> [Q]uello che potria essere di scelerato nella Tragedia *non venne per scienza e volontà e consentimento o di Giocasta o di Edipo, ma per errore*;

43. For a discussion of Speroni's relationship with the Accademia degli Infiammati, see Francesco Bruni, "Sperone Speroni e l'Accademia degli Infiammati," *Filologia e letteratura* 13 (1967): 24–71. Concerning Speroni's role in Padua and his influence on Alessandro Piccolomini, see Eugenio Refini, *Per via d'annotationi: le glosse inedite di Alessandro Piccolomini all'*Ars poetica *di Orazio* (Lucca: M. Pacini Fazzi, 2009), 55–56.

44. An overview of the *Canace* controversy is provided by Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism*, 2:912–53. There is evidence to suggest that the *Giudizio* was circulating in manuscript throughout the mid-to-late 1540s and that its author was Giambattista Giraldi Cinzio, the famed Ferrarese poet and dramatist. See Christina Roaf, ed., *Canace, e scritti in sua difesa; Giudizio ed Epistola latina* (Bologna: Commisione per i testi di lingua, 1982), x–xv. See also Roaf, "A Sixteenth Century Anonimo: the Author of the Giuditio Sopra la Tragedia di Canace e Macareo," in *Italian Studies* 14 (1959): 49–74.

45. Roaf, *Canace*, 98. Emphasis mine.

> perché Giocasta non conosceva Edipo per figliuolo, né Edipo Giocasta per madre.[46]
>
> (Whatever aspects of wickedness there may be in the tragedy do not occur *through the knowledge, will, and consent of either Jocasta or Oedipus, but rather through error*. Jocasta did not know Oedipus to be her son, nor did Oedipus recognize Jocasta as his mother.)

Tragic *hamartia* thus seems to be understood as a mistake of fact, and is translated as *errore*, following Valla and Pazzi. The author of the *Giudizio*, however, adds a new emphasis on the role of the will. Voluntary actions committed in full knowledge (as in the case of Canace and Macareo) are opposed to involuntary tragic actions committed in ignorance (Oedipus). While Aristotle's discussion of *hamartia* in the *Poetics* emphasized knowledge or ignorance of the tragic action and the different plots this made possible, Boccadiferro's perspective in the *Giudizio* adds a volitional element to Aristotle's definition of the tragic error. Elsewhere in the *Giudizio*, participants in the dialogue will use the term *peccato*, such as when il Fiorentino later returns to a discussion of Oedipus's crimes. Yet, the term is used with reference to ignorance, arguing that the ignorance of one's sins excuses wickedness and makes a protagonist worthy of pity and compassion:

> La qual cosa non ha voluto alcuno de' buoni autori che fusse mai in Edipo; anzi hanno finto che 'l miser si congiunse colla madre *non di propria volontà* ma oltre ogni suo pensiero, e questo solo per farlo atto a Tragedia, il che non avria potuto avvenire (volendo far nascere sopra di lui la compassione) se senza riguardo alcuno si fusse colla madre congiunto; ma *l'ignoranza del suo peccato ha levato da lui ogni sceleraggine e l'ha fatto degnissimo di compassione.*[47]
>
> (No good authors ever wanted Oedipus to have this trait; rather, they pretend that the poor man lay with his mother, *not of his own will* but beyond any of his knowledge, and this was only done to make him

46. Roaf, *Canace*, 100. Emphasis mine.

47. Roaf, *Canace*, 124.

> appropriate for Tragedy (wishing to make him provoke compassion). This could not have occurred if he had slept with his mother without a care in the world; but the *ignorance of his sin forgives him of any wickedness and makes him worthy of compassion.*)

The *Giudizio* thus bears witness to the cultural translation of *hamartia* as *peccato*, coupled with a new emphasis on voluntary action; ignorance of particular knowledge leads to an action that is not accompanied by the will and is therefore worthy of compassion. Later commentators would not only adopt the term *peccato* but would also return to the themes of the protagonist's ignorance and volition.[48]

***Hamartia* as *peccatum* in Latin commentaries: involuntary action, ignorance, and imprudence**

Francesco Robortello's 1548 *Explicationes* was the first sustained commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics* produced in early modern Italy, and its translation of *hamartia* as *peccatum* would have a profound impact on later interpretations.[49]

48. Several translators and commentators retained Pazzi's translation of *hamartia* as *error* rather than *peccatum*. The Florentine Bernardo Segni reverted to the Italian *errore* in the first vernacular translation of the *Poetics* (1559). So, too, did Antonio Minturno, a humanist bishop who served on the Council of Trent, referring to *hamartia* as an "error quidam humano" in his Latin treatise *De poeta* (1559) and later in his Italian treatise *L'Arte poetica* (1563) as "humano errore." Yet, these examples were the exception. *Hamartia* was increasingly translated with *peccatum/peccato* and accompanied by a growing emphasis on the will of the tragic protagonist in this act. See Bernardo Segni, *Rettorica e Poetica d'Aristotile tradotte di greco in lingua vulgare fiorentina* (Florence: Lorenzo Torrentino, 1549), 306–07; Antonio Minturno, *De poeta* (Venice: Franciscus Rampazetus, 1559), 180, and *L'Arte poetica, nella quale si contengono i precetti heroici, tragici, comici, satyrici, e d'ogni altra Poesia: con la dottrina de sonetti, canzoni, et ogni sorte di rime thoscane* (Venice: Valvassori, 1563), 78. For a discussion of Minturno's commentary and its context, see Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism,* 2:737–44.

49. Robortello taught Latin and Greek in various Italian universities in the 1530s and 1540s—in Lucca, Venice, Bologna, and elsewhere—before settling in Padua, which was a key site for the development of poetic debates in the period. Robortello's commentary on the *Poetics* is discussed at length in Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism*, 1:66–68 and 1:388–406. For a succinct discussion of Robortello's biography and academic career, along with how these may have impacted his interpretation of the *Poetics*, see Déborah Blocker, "Elucider et équivoquer: Francesco Robortello (ré)invente la catharsis," in *Stratégies de l'équivoque*, ed. J.-P. Cavaillé, special issue, *Cahiers du Centre de Recherches Historiques* 33 (2004): 109–40. Also useful is Paul F. Grendler, *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns

Robortello retains Pazzi's Latin translation of the passage in question, describing *hamartia* as "humanus quidam error," but changes *error* to *peccatum* in his commentary.

> Quaerendum igitur est, qualis hic sit. Ac plane inter bonum ac malum is est collocandus, qui *peccat* quidem, sed *imprudens peccat*; huiusmodi enim neque bonus appellandus, quia iam peccavit; neque rursus malus, quia non consulto *peccavit*, sed per imprudentiam.
>
> (Therefore it ought to be asked, "what kind of person is this [ideal tragic protagonist]?" And plainly he is placed between good and bad, who *sins, but sins imprudently*; for indeed such a man ought not to be called good, because he sinned at that time; nor on the other hand ought he to be called evil, because he did not sin on purpose but through imprudence.)

Robortello then refers to Aristotle's *Ethics* and the philosopher's distinction between voluntary and involuntary acts to make sense of *hamartia* later in the same section:

> Aristoteles libro tertio Ethicorum, omnia quae homines agunt, aut voluntaria esse, aut non voluntaria appelanda. Voluntaria sunt, quae ἐκ τῶη προαιερεσεῶη idest ab electione proveniunt. Non voluntaria sunt ea, quae aliquis invitus facit: atque sane invitius videtur agere aliquid tribus modis, aut vi coactus; aut ignoratione & imprudentia adductus; aut metu maioris alicuius mali […] Qui vero per ignorantionem agit, scit quidem quid aequum, quid oportet; imprudenter tamen, & invitus agit. *Hic quidem particulare ignorat, quod agit, ut Oedipus, qui peremit Laium patrem, sciebat enim nefas esse perimere patrem; sed ignorabat illum esse patrem*. Hi quidem igitur, qui per imprudentiam peccant, excusatione, & commiseratione digni, ut idem ait Aristoteles libro tertio Ethicorum sub initium, his verbis. ἐπὶ δὲ τοῖς ἀκουσίοις συγγνώμης, ἐνίοτε δὲ καὶ ἐλέου, τὸ ἑκούσιον. Si igitur huiusmodi commiseratione digna patet referri posse

Hopkins University Press, 2002), 229–39. A detailed yet possibly unreliable biography of Robortello is found in Gian Giuseppe Liruti, *Notizie delle vite ed opere scritte da letterati del Friuli*, 4 vols. (Venice and Udine, 1760–1830; repr. in 2 vols., Bologna: Forni, 1971), 2:413–83. Citations refer to the 1971 edition.

> ad tragoediam, quae eam perturbationem in primis studet excitare in animis auditorum.[50]
>
> (Aristotle in the third book of the ethics [says that] all things which men do ought either to be called voluntary or involuntary. Those things are voluntary which are chosen or willed, that is which come from choice. Non-voluntary [acts] are those things which someone does against his will: and reasonably it seems that something is done against our will in these three ways, either 1) [being] compelled by force, or 2) having been persuaded by ignorance and imprudence, or 3) by fear of some greater evil. […] But he who acts on account of *ignorance*, indeed knows what is just and what is necessary; nevertheless he acts carelessly and against his will. *Indeed this man ignores the particular element of what he does, just as Oedipus who killed Laius his father, for he knew it was an impious act to kill his father; but he did not know that that man was his father.* So these men, therefore, who sin through *ignorance* are worthy of being excused and pitied, as Aristotle likewise says in the third book of the *Ethics* after the beginning with these words: those [actions] that are involuntary are condoned, and sometimes even pitied. Therefore, if such actions are worthy of pity, it is possible that [this] may be referred to as tragedy, which chiefly seeks to excite that emotion [i.e., pity] in the souls of spectators.)

Robortello has expanded upon the volitional element of *hamartia* suggested in the *Giudizio*, defining it with reference to Aristotle's *Ethics*. While Lurje has described Robortello's coupling of *imprudentia* and *ignorantia* as a confusion of terms, the Paduan humanist's use of syntactic dittology can be explained with reference to Aristotelian ethics.[51] In book 6 of the *Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle qualifies prudence (φρόνεσις) as being concerned not only with

50. Robortello, 131.

51. Lurje notes how Robortello chooses the Ciceronian term *imprudentia* as a more elegant, albeit misleading, equivalence of *ignorantia*. Indeed, Robortello frequently describes *hamartia* as an error committed "per imprudentiam et ignorantiam," while later authors will break his use of hendiadys, privileging one term over the other. See Lurje, *Die Suche nach der Schuld*, 84–85. See particularly 84n15 for a rich list of examples detailing Robortello's usage of these terms in his commentary.

general principles, but also with particular facts.[52] An imprudent action, then, is one that ignores particular facts but may still observe general principles. Yet, Robortello's reference to particular facts may equally reflect another passage of Aristotle's *Ethics*: the discussion of *akrasia* in book 7. While Plato had denied the possibility of full *akrasia*, noting that it was primarily an intellectual error made in ignorance of true knowledge, Aristotle responds that we are still left with the phenomenon that many act in the opposite way of what they believe to be the good. Thus, Aristotle posits that such behaviour occurs not because of ignorance of universal knowledge but rather because of a perceptual error. As Clanton notes, he frames this deliberation as a tripartite practical syllogism: "1) universal premise = "Everything sweet must be tasted"; 2) particular premise = "This particular thing here is sweet"; 3) conclusion (assuming the agent is free and rational) = ["This must be tasted"]."[53] The akratic person then may still be in possession of full knowledge of the right path of action, but makes a perceptual error by ignoring or incorrectly applying the particular premise (i.e., in the example above, assuming a lemon to be a sweet fruit). By shifting the problem of *akrasia* from the intellect to the realm of perception, Aristotle is able to explain how agents may act against their own better judgment by comparing the akratic agent to one influenced by passion:

> But now this is just the condition of men under the influence of passions; for outbursts of anger and sexual appetites and some other such passions, it is evident, actually alter our bodily condition, and in some men even produce fits of madness. It is plain, then, that incontinent [akratic] people must be said to be in a similar condition to these.[54]

52. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. W. D. Ross, rev. J. O. Urmson, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 2:1729–1869, 2:1802 (1141b14–16).

53. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 7.3, 1812 (1147a1–30); Clanton, 423.

54. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 7.3, 1812 (1147a14–19). More recently, Nancy Sherman has noted the similarities between explanations of *hamartia* as "mistake of fact" and *akrasia*, while also remarking on the unsatisfactory explanations of both, as neither elucidates the link between ignorance or misperception and "aspects of character, such as belief, desire, emotion, and memory." See Nancy Sherman, "Hamartia and Virtue," in *Essays on Aristotle's* Poetics, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 177–96, 179.

Thus, for Robortello, Oedipus's ignorance could be described in terms of Aristotle's treatment of *akrasia* ("*Indeed this man ignores the particular element of what he does, just as Oedipus who killed Laius his father, for he knew it was an impious act to kill his father; but he did not know that that man was his father*"). For Robortello, then, both an imprudent action (committed in ignorance of particular facts) and an action committed in ignorance ultimately appear to be non-voluntary actions, worthy of being excused and pitied, and therefore appropriate for tragedy. Despite Robortello's use of *peccatum/peccare*, his emphasis on the non-voluntary nature of such action seems to suggest a reading of *hamartia* through the lens of Aristotle's discussion of *akrasia*, rather than Augustine's.[55] In this passage, Robortello also notes that those who "sin through imprudence" are worthy of *excusatio* and *commiseratio*. This emphasis on excusing the protagonist's *hamartia* is also Robortello's addition; whereas the Aristotelian definition of the ideal tragic protagonist claimed that he should induce pity and terror in the audience, Robortello has substituted the forgiveness of the protagonist's sin for the terror he might inspire in the audience. While his discussion is rigorously Aristotelian, Robortello's use of *excusatio*, emphasis on the will, implicit reference to Aristotle's discussion of *akrasia*, and use of *peccatum/peccare* all suggest the possibility of an implicit Christianizing interpretation of *hamartia*, one that would have a profound impact throughout the remainder of the Cinquecento.

The term *peccatum* also occurs in other commentaries on the *Poetics* produced in this period. In an analogous passage from Bartolomeo Lombardi and Vincenzo Maggi's 1550 *Explanationes*, the term appears alongside a similar discussion of voluntary and involuntary action, suggesting that Maggi was building much of his analysis upon Robortello's:

> Iam igitur apparet cuius conditionis homines Tragoediis materiam praestent, viri inquam illustres ac felices, hoc est, qui copiis ac imperio reliquos antecellunt, sed non virtute; cum non animi pravitate, sed *ignorantia* patrando scelus in infelicitatem labuntur. Quod hominum

55. The absence of Augustinian language is significant, particularly when considered alongside the increasing use of Augustinian ideas in the period to interpret and, at times, harmonize Aristotelian and Platonic definitions of *akrasia*, as Saarinen notes with respect to Francesco Piccolomini's 1583 *Universa philosophia de moribus*. See Saarinen, *Weakness of the Will in Renaissance and Reformation Thought*, 101–04.

> genus inter bonos ac pravos medium esse dicit: quoniam *peccantes* bonos non appellamus. Qui vero *peccant*, neque ex proposito id praestant, sed ob *imprudentiam* efficiunt, mali prorius [*sic*] dici non debent: iccirco inter bonos ac pravos medii erunt.
>
> (Now therefore it appears that men of this condition supply material for tragedies. I say illustrious men, and happy ones, that is those who surpass [others] in wealth and available power, but not in virtue; since they do not fall into unhappiness by depravity of soul, but by having done an evil deed out of ignorance. [Aristotle] says that this kind of man is in the middle between good and bad men; since we do not call sinners [peccantes] good. But those who sin and do so, not on purpose, but rather on account of imprudence should not be called absolutely evil: therefore they will be midway between good and bad people.)[56]

A careful reader will note that Maggi begins by describing a deed done out of *ignorantia*, and quickly shifts to one committed on account of *imprudentia*, following Robortello's Aristotelian definition of imprudent deeds being committed in ignorance of particular details. Maggi expands on Robortello's use of *peccatum*; the tragic protagonist is now qualified as *peccans*—a sinner—and the ideal protagonists between good and bad men are those sinners who err on account of imprudence.

The third great Latin commentary on the *Poetics* continues Robortello and Maggi's use of the term *peccatum*. In 1560, the Florentine philologist Piero Vettori provided a new translation of the *Poetics* along with extensive commentary in his 1560 *Commentarii in primum librum Aristotelis de arte*

56. Maggi and Lombardi, 154, emphasis mine. A useful overview of this commentary is provided by Weinberg, 1:406–18. Maggi's commentary is often read as overtly moralizing, particularly in his interpretation of catharsis. Despite Hathaway's and, more recently, Eugene Ryan's nuanced rebuttals of Giuseppe Toffanin's view that Maggi's perspective on catharsis was complicit with the demands of the Counter-Reformation church, this perspective of Maggi's moralizing distortions continues to hold sway in more recent works, such as Enrico Bisanti, *Vincenzo Maggi: Interprete tridentino della* Poetica di *Aristotele* (Brescia: Ateneo di Brescia, 1991). See Giuseppe Toffanin, *Il Cinquecento* (Milan: Vallardi, 1950), 489, along with rebuttals in Hathaway, 221–24; and Eugene E. Ryan, "Robortello and Maggi on Aristotle's Theory of Catharsis," *Rinascimento* 22 (1982): 263–74.

poetarum.[57] In his definition of *hamartia*, Vettori follows Robortello and Maggi by using the term *peccatum* and discussing the protagonist's volition:

> Quid autem proprie ἁμαρτία foret, docuit ipse in quaestione xxvi segmenti eius, quo explicat ea, quae pertinent ad harmoniam. Inquit enim: ἁμαρτία | δέ ἐστι τοῦ χείρονος πρᾶξις. Cum igitur aliquis relicto eo, quod facere praestabat, propter imprudentiam id, quod est deterius gerit, tunc labitur ac peccat. Exempli causa. Oedipus lapsus est quia ira commotus interfecit Laium: nec cognovit eum patrem esse: praestabat autem iniuriam eam quam acceperat ab eius satellite aequo animo ferre, nec tantopere excandescere.
>
> (What however [Aristotle] specifically meant by *hamartia*, he teaches in question xxvi of the fragment, in which he explains it as that which pertains to harmony. For he says "*hamartia* is doing what is worse." Therefore, when someone leaves behind that which he ought to have done, and commits an act for which he is responsible on account of imprudence, he behaves wrongly, and thereupon falls and *sins*. For example: Oedipus acted wrongly because he killed Laius when moved by rage: he did not know him to be his father. However, it was better for him to bear his injury which he received from one of his [Laius's] attendants with a level head, rather than to burn up with rage.)[58]

Hamartia, for Vettori, is choosing the worse of two possible paths of action. Oedipus's *hamartia* is thus linked to his inability to manage his rage. Vettori uses the term *peccatum* and even provides the steps by which such a sin occurs; Oedipus first receives an injury from Laius's attendant, imprudently burns up with rage, and then commits murder. While Lurje and Mattioda have emphasized the impact of Vettori's claim of Oedipus's moral responsibility for subsequent critics, neither has remarked on how Vettori incorporates both Robortello's characteristics of *ignorantia* and *imprudentia*.[59] Vettori specifies that Oedipus "did not know him to be his father," referring back to Robortello's

57. On Vettori's commentary, see Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism*, 1:461–66.

58. Vettori, 124.

59. Lurje, *Die Suche nach der Schuld*, 113–15; Mattioda, 41–42.

emphasis on Oedipus's ignorance of particular circumstances and reference to Aristotle's explanation of *akrasia* via a practical syllogism.[60] Yet, Vettori also changes Robortello's *imprudentia* from ignorance of circumstances to an impetuous rage that takes hold of Oedipus, making explicit Robortello's implicit reference to Aristotle's discussion of *akrasia* as ignorance of the particular premise when overcome by passions due to an error in perception.[61] Vettori's emphasis, however, on an alternative course of action for Oedipus suggests a volitional element that was not present in earlier commentaries. While Vettori's discussion is not overtly Augustinian or Christianizing, *hamartia* is nevertheless transformed from its definition in the *Poetics* as an error committed in ignorance to a moral failure; Oedipus could not control his rage and thus his *hamartia* consists in abandoning the better path (controlling his anger) for the worse.

While it may seem tempting to interpret the increased usage of *peccatum*, the discussions of voluntary and involuntary actions, and Vettori's suggestion of moral responsibility in mid-century commentaries on Aristotle's *Poetics* as a Christianization of *hamartia*, the appearance of *peccato* rather than *errore* does not appear to signal the rise of strongly-inflected religious interpretations. Such elements might instead be seen as an effort on the part of commentators to linguistically domesticate Aristotle's text for a Christian audience. Translators and commentators did not ask, for example, whether a tragic protagonist's *hamartia* was a venial or mortal sin, how it might be expiated through penance, or whether tragedies should represent the sacrament of confession—all of which were concerns of great importance to the Tridentine council. More importantly, despite the influence of Aristotle's discussion of *akrasia* from Robortello onward, there appears to be no evidence of Augustinian influence, which would

60. Robortello, 131.

61. Indeed, later in book 7, Aristotle characterizes anger due to *akrasia* in terms similar to Vettori's description of Oedipus's murder of Laius: "anger by reason of the warmth and hastiness of its nature, though it hears, does not hear an order, and springs to take revenge. For reason or imagination informs us that we have been insulted or slighted, and anger, reasoning as it were that anything like this must be fought against, boils up straightaway." Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2:1815 (1149a25–32). Thus, if Vettori is also reading *hamartia* through the lens of *akrasia*, this passage would reinforce and justify his interpretation by providing the practical syllogism: "Any slight or insult received must be fought against in order to defend one's honour" (universal), "This man's attendant has insulted me" (particular), "This man and his attendants must be attacked" (conclusion). Oedipus's error in perception would result from his ignorance of a key aspect of the particular premise: namely, that "this man" is his father.

have made it easy for a commentator to link his discussion of *akrasia* to the Christian conception of sin. Precise and strictly theological definitions of sin thus appear to be less relevant than the translational strategy that motivated the translation of *hamartia* as *peccato*. Discussions on the voluntary or involuntary nature of a tragic protagonist's actions seem to have been motivated by the very same concerns present in the *Giudizio*: providing precepts for the composition of successful tragedies that could create the effect of catharsis through pity and fear. Nevertheless, despite their intentions, these commentaries laid the conceptual groundwork for a Christianizing interpretation of *hamartia*, which would occur in the work of Castelvetro.

***Hamartia* Christianized in Castelvetro**

Lodovico Castelvetro's 1570 *Poetica d'Aristotele vulgarizzata e sposta* provides a profoundly spiritual and Christianizing interpretation of *hamartia*. The Catholic Reformation had a significant impact on Castelvetro, who fled Italy in 1561 after being accused of heresy for importing and distributing banned Protestant texts. His commentary on the *Poetics* was composed in Geneva and Lyon after his flight from the Italian peninsula, before finally being published in Vienna in 1570.[62] In this text, Castelvetro sets himself the unique and daunting task of not only translating or commenting on Aristotle's *Poetics* but also—recognizing the fragmentary nature of the text—filling in the gaps with what Aristotle could or should have written.[63] A notable example of Castelvetro's procedure occurs in his comment on the *hamartia* passage:

62. Valerio Marchetti and Giorgio Patrizi, "Castelvetro, Ludovico," *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani,* ed. Alberto M. Ghisalberti (Rome: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1925—), vol. 22 (1979), 8–21. Available at treccani.it/enciclopedia/ludovico-castelvetro_(Dizionario-Biografico)/, accessed 21 December 2016. For an excellent overview of Castelvetro's biography and his relationship with the Counter-Reformation see Stefano Jossa, "Exchanging Poetry with Theology: Ludovico Castelvetro between Humanism and Heresy," in *Beyond Catholicism: Heresy, Mysticism, and Apocalypse in Italian Culture*, ed. Fabrizio de Donno and Simon Gilson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 77–104.

63. Lodovico Castelvetro, *Poetica d'Aristotele vulgarizzata e sposta*, ed. Werther Romani, 2 vols. (Bari: Laterza, 1978), 1:2. As Weinberg notes, while his sixteenth-century predecessors were "respectful and subservient" toward the text of the *Poetics*, Castelvetro uses Aristotle both as a point of departure and as a theoretical opponent (Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism*, 1:503). For Castelvetro's approach to the *Poetics* see Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism* 1:502–511; Weinberg, "Castelvetro's Theory of Poetics," in *Critics and Criticism*, ed. R. S. Crane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952),

> Ma, prima che procediamo più oltre, è da por mente che Aristotele in questo luogo pare presupporre che Dio abbia cura speziale degli uomini particolari, e spezialmente degli uomini da bene, in quanto dice che non si deono gli uomini di santissima vita rappresentare che trapassino da felicità a miseria, percioché questa non sarebbe cosa né spaventevole né compassionevole, ma abominevole, *cioè sarebbe cosa che indurrebbe gli uomini a credere che Dio non avesse providenza speziale de' suoi divoti e che fosse ingiusto*, poiché così male meritasse coloro che gli rendono il debito onore, permettendo che caggiano di felicità in miseria.[64]

> (Yet, before we continue, one must recall that in this passage Aristotle appears to presuppose that God takes special care of particular men, and especially of good men, where he says that one should not represent men who lead most holy lives falling from happiness into misery, because this would not be frightening nor pathetic, but rather abominable, *that is it would be the sort of thing that would induce men to believe that God does not have special providence over his faithful and that he is unjust*, since he rewards those who pay him due honour so poorly, allowing them to fall from happiness into misery.)

What in the *Poetics* had simply been men who excelled beyond others in goodness, in Castelvetro is transformed into men who lead holy lives ("di santissima vita"). The only danger in representing the downfall of such a man for Aristotle was that it was neither terrifying nor pitiable.[65] Castelvetro's Christianizing addition—that such a play could inspire the audience to doubt God's personal providence—is noteworthy insofar as it adds spiritual and political dimensions to the tragic protagonist's effect on an audience. Rather

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349–71; and Andrew Bongiorno, *Castelvetro on the Art of Poetry: An Abridged Translation of Lodovico Castelvetro's* Poetica d'Aristotele vulgarizzata et sposta (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1984), xiv–xix. On the relationship of Castelvetro's commentary to earlier Cinquecento translations and commentaries on the *Poetics*, see Anna Siekiera, "La *Poetica vulgarizzata e sposta per Lodovico Castelvetro* e le traduzioni cinquecentesche del trattato di Aristotele," in *Lodovico Castelvetro: letterati e grammatici nella crisi religiosa del Cinquecento. Atti della XIII giornata Luigi Firpo. Torino, 21–22 settembre 2006*, ed. Massimo Firpo and Guido Mongini (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2008), 25–45.

64. Castelvetro, 1:361.

65. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1452b35–36.

than forbid such a representation due to lack of poetic efficacy, Castelvetro forbids it due to its seditious potential to foment resentment against God:

> Adunque la persona di singolare santità trapassando da felicità a miseria non era da rifiutare perché non potesse generare spavento e compassione. Ma dice Aristotele che non genera né spavento né compassione, ma sdegno contra Dio, il che è cosa abominevole. E io dico che non seguita, posto che sia vero che simile trapassamento di simile persona generi sdegno contra Dio, che non generi ancora spavento e compassione; né lo sdegno contra Dio annulla lo spavento e la compassione.[66]
>
> (Therefore, a person of singular holiness passing from happiness into misery was not rejected because it could not generate fear and compassion. Rather, Aristotle says that such a person does not generate fear nor pity, but resentment against God, which is a terrible thing. Assuming that such a change of this kind of person does indeed generate resentment against God, I say that it does not follow that such a person does not also generate fear and pity, nor that resentment against God cancels out fear and pity.)

We might also note Castelvetro's sleight of hand when it comes to the Aristotelian text. He claims that the case of a holy man falling into misfortune is refuted by Aristotle since it does not generate fear or compassion, but rather disdain against God. One the one hand, Castelvetro seems to ignore Aristotle's claims in this passage that "pity is felt for a person undeserving of his misfortune" and "fear is felt for a person like ourselves" (1453a1). Aristotle condemns tragic plots depicting the downfall of a wholly virtuous character not because they are incapable of eliciting pity, but because the audience will be unable to identify with them and thus not experience fear. On the other hand, Castelvetro also ascribes to Aristotle statements not found in the *Poetics*. While the Stagirite claims that such plots are shocking, nowhere does he claim that virtuous characters are holy, or that their downfall can elicit resentment against God.

Castelvetro's addition of such religious, political, and social dimensions to the *Poetics* further informs his translation of *hamartia*:

66. Castelvetro, 1:362.

> Ora, secondo Aristotele, se la persona santissima trapassa da felicità a miseria, presta cagione alla gente di mormorare contra Dio e di dolersi di lui che permette così fatto trapassamento; ma se la persona mezzana trapassa da felicità a miseria, non dà cagione alla gente di mormorare contra Dio né di dolersi di lui, percioché sì come ci possiamo immaginare, è assai ragionevole che avenga questo così fatto trapassamento a quella persona per gli peccati suoi, avegna che non sieno de' più orribili del mondo e sieno mischiati tra alcune buone operazioni.[67]
>
> (Now, according to Aristotle, if a most holy person falls from a state of happiness into a state of misfortune, this gives the people reason to grumble against God and to complain about him, that he should allow such an unjust fall; but if a person of middle station falls from happiness into misfortune, this does not give the people any reason to grumble against God, nor to complain about him, thus, as we can imagine, it is quite reasonable that such a fall should happen to this person on account of his sins, so long as they are not the worst in the world, and that they are mixed in among several good acts.)

Once again, Castelvetro has transformed Aristotle's description of a man preeminent in virtue and justice into a "persona santissima." Following the other commentators discussed above, Castelvetro translates *hamartia* as *peccati*, yet for the first time seems to provide an explicit Christian interpretation of it.

This substitution of the Christian concept of sin for Aristotle's notion of "missing the mark" is made explicit when Castelvetro reverses Aristotle's logic of *hamartia* as precipitator of tragic consequences; if tragic events happen to a person who appears virtuous, the audience will not assume that God is unjust, but rather that this person is being punished for her sins, since there is no one who does not occasionally sin and since God as a fair judge will not let sins go unpunished.[68] These passages demonstrate a profoundly Christian reading of Aristotle's notion of *hamartia*, which builds on themes present in earlier Latin commentaries—the protagonist's will and moral responsibility, and the

67. Castelvetro, 1:370.

68. Castelvetro, 1:363.

use of the term *peccatum*—to effect a specific strategy of cultural translation for a Christian audience.

Castelvetro's interpretation was certainly different than those of earlier commentators, perhaps due to the composition of his commentary outside of Italy and his contact with reformist circles on the peninsula. As Lurje has noted, already in 1534, Joachim Camerarius's edition of a commentary on Sophocles contained an introduction that summarized elements of Aristotle's *Poetics*. The choice of an appropriate tragic protagonist was rendered as follows:

> At ubi vir bonus & honestatis virtutisque amans, indignum in malum impellitur quasi fatali vi, aut peccata vel non voluntate, vel ignoratione, quoque comissa, poenas extremas sustinent, tum et metus et misericordia talibus ab exemplis homines invadit, et lamenta horroresque excitantur.[69]
>
> (But when a good man who loves virtue and integrity is driven into cruel evil as if by fate, or likewise [where] sins committed either ignorantly or non-voluntarily draw down great punishments, then both fear and pity for such examples invade [the hearts of] men, stirring up dread and laments.)

While Lurje draws attention to the discussion on *hamartia* as an act committed non-voluntarily or in ignorance, we might also consider Camerarius's use of "peccata […] commissa" which draw "poenas […] extremas." This language, particularly the pluralization of *peccatum*, was also present in Castelvetro's commentary, as were the moralizing tendencies of Camerarius's colleague, Philipp Melanchton, whose theological work Castelvetro had previously translated.[70] Moreover, as Saarinen notes, Melancthon's interpretation of *akrasia* in the third edition of the *Loci communes* (1544–59) was strongly theological, positing a mental conflict whereby an individual may have had the light of reason, but felt their will torn between the powers of God and those of

69. Lurje, *Die Suche nach der Schuld*, 94–95; Joachim Camerarius, *Commentarii interpretationum argumenti thebaidos fabularum sophoclis* (Haguenau: Officina Seceriana, 1534), 11r. Emphasis mine.

70. See Claudia Rossignoli, "'L'ufficio dello 'nterprete': Castelvetro Translator of Melanchton," *Italian Studies* 3 (2013): 317–39; and Lorenzo Geri, "Castelvetro traduttore di Melantone," in *Lodovico Castelvetro: filologia e ascesi*, ed. Roberto Gigliucci (Rome: Bulzoni, 2007), 241–59.

demons.[71] Both Camerarius's and Melancthon's complete works were placed on the index in 1559 and again in 1564, and thus were unavailable—at least through official channels—in the Italian peninsula.[72] If Castelvetro did not have access to these texts through reformist circles in Italy, he would easily have been able to access them while developing his commentary in Geneva, Lyon, and Vienna between 1564 and 1570.

Moreover, as several recent studies have shown, Castelvetro was fascinated with biblical exegesis; his library contained two Hebrew grammars, Latin and Greek lexicons of the Christian Bible, along with Luther's translation of and Erasmus's annotations to the New Testament.[73] Castelvetro also appears to have authored his own Italian translation of the New Testament, though this was lost when he had to flee Lyon due to religious upheaval in 1567.[74] Ultimately, his interest in biblical exegesis and his own practice of biblical translation demonstrate that Castelvetro would have been aware of the religious implications of translating *hamartia* as *peccato* in his commentary on the *Poetics*. It appears that the case in which Aristotelian *hamartia* was subjected to the most explicit adaptation for a Christian audience was not due to the influence of the Counter-Reformation, but rather may have been shaped by the Protestant reception of Sophocles in Northern Europe and Castelvetro's own exegetical activity. This suggestion cannot be adequately developed here, yet merits further exploration in a future study.

71. Saarinen, *Weakness of the Will in Renaissance and Reformation Thought*, 140. Camerarius also comments on *akrasia*, positing that the mind may evaluate various courses of action quite thoroughly before turning to the wrong decision due to the uncertain nature of moral deliberation (Saarinen, *Weakness of the Will in Renaissance and Reformation Thought*, 150–51). However, it is doubtful that Castelvetro had access to his commentary on Aristotle's *Ethics* as it first appeared in Frankfurt in 1570, the same year that Castelvetro published the *Poetica d'Aristotele vulgarizzata e sposta* in Vienna.

72. *Index librorum prohibitorum* (Rome: Antonius Bladius, 1559); *Index librorum prohibitorum* (Rome: Paulus Manutius, 1564).

73. Rossignoli, 318–26; Andrea Barbieri, "Castelvetro, i suoi libri, e l'ambiente culturale modenese del suo tempo," in *Lodovico Castelvetro*, ed. Gigliucci, 57–72; Geri, 245; and Valentina Grohovaz, "Lodovico Castelvetro traduttore della *Poetica* di Aristotele," in *Lodovico Castelvetro*, ed. Firpo and Mongini, 47–63.

74. Valentina Grohovaz, "Per la storia del testo della *Poetica d'Aristotele vulgarizzata et sposta*," in *Lodovico Castelvetro,* ed. Gigliucci, 13–33.

Conclusion

Castelvetro's explicit Christianization of *hamartia* was roundly criticized by the Sienese Alessandro Piccolomini in his 1575 commentary on the *Poetics*.[75] As Alessio Cotugno has recently demonstrated, Piccolomini's commentary takes frequent aim at Castelvetro's departures from Aristotle's text. Though he never refers to him by name, he consistently uses the formulation "alcuni spositori in lingua nostra" to denote and criticize Castelvetro's interpretation of the *Poetics*.[76] Indeed, Piccolomini uses this same formula to criticize and ultimately reject Castelvetro's religious interpretation of *hamartia* in particle 66 and translates *hamartia* as an action committed "per imprudentia, et per qualche sconsiderato errore" (on account of imprudence and some indiscreet error) in particle 68.[77] Much like Robortello, Maggi, and Vettori, Piccolomini cites the discussion of voluntary actions from the third book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, mentions ignorance of particular circumstances, and refers to *hamartia* as *peccato*.[78] Yet, Piccolomini dismisses the distinction between imprudence and ignorance, noting that such distinctions belong to the realm of moral philosophy rather than that of poetics.

> A noi basta di sapere in questo luogo, che l'ignorantia, che s'ha da trovare nelle persone convenienti alla tragedia, fa di bisogno, che sia di circonstantia, che venga a far il *peccato* minore, et per conseguente a recargli qualche scusa et perdono.[79]
>
> (For us, it is enough to know that ignorance of circumstances—found in persons suitable for tragedy—is necessary insofar as it makes the *sin* less severe, and consequently permits it to be *excused* and *pardoned*.)

75. Alessandro Piccolomini, *Annotationi di M. Alesandro Piccolomini nel libro della Poetica d'Aristotele* (Venice: Giovanni Guarisco, 1575). Concerning Piccolomini's translation program and his view of translation as textual exegesis, see Refini, *Per via d'annotationi,* 33–41.

76. Cotugno, 172.

77. Piccolomini, 190–91.

78. Indeed, in one paragraph, Piccolomini uses *peccato* four times to translate *hamartia* (195–96).

79. Piccolomini, 197.

While Piccolomini explicitly rejects Castelvetro's Christianizing interpretation, his commentary retains the lexical traces of a religious interpretation in its use of terms such as *peccato*, *scusa*, *perdono*.

Few Latin or vernacular commentators, with the marked exception of Castelvetro, appear to have read the Aristotelian concept through a strongly religious lens, despite their use of the term *peccato/peccatum*. Instead, *hamartia* was primarily interpreted through the lens of moral philosophy, while poetic efficacy remained paramount. From Robortello's initial reference to the discussion on voluntary actions and *akrasia* in the *Nicomachean Ethics* to Vettori's reinterpretation of how such an error could be committed imprudently, making the protagonist morally responsible, to Castelvetro's Christian interpretation and its rebuttal by Piccolomini, Aristotelian moral philosophy played a key role in how the concept of *hamartia* was interpreted by sixteenth-century commentators.[80] Moreover, the lexical choices of translators who were initially adapting Aristotle's concept for a Christian audience formed the groundwork upon which Castelvetro was able to build his religious interpretation of the *Poetics*. Ultimately, religious and moralizing interpretations do not seem to have been at odds with the goal of poetic efficacy, as tacitly assumed by Weinberg, Hathaway, Lurje, and others. The use of *peccatum/peccato* to translate *hamartia*, then, does not simply reflect a broader phenomenon of distorting Aristotle for religious ends. Rather, it appears to have been part of a broader cultural strategy to domesticate the *Poetics* for a sixteenth-century Christian audience simultaneously conversant with Aristotelian philosophy and Counter-Reformation religious culture.

80. For the role of moral philosophy and how the *Ethics* was interpreted in sixteenth-century Italy, see Lines, *Aristotle's Ethics in the Italian Renaissance*.