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ABSTRACT

A famous portrait of Erasmus by Hans Holbein depicts the scholar with his hands resting on a volume identified as his 'Herculean Labours'. Erasmus associated this adage with the effort expended and ingratitude encountered by the philologist, and made it central to his self-presentation. In this article, its origins are traced to Erasmus's encounter with Aldus Manutius, the Venetian printer-humanist who published his *Adagia* in 1508. The impact of Aldus on Erasmus is shown to be significant, affecting his entire ideology of humanism, including its relationship to print and its religious purpose. This article challenges distinctions between the Italian and the Northern Renaissance that are unhelpful for understanding Erasmus's development. In light of its findings, it also proposes a new interpretation of Holbein's painting.

Hercules in Venice: Aldus Manutius and the Making of Erasmian Humanism*

INTRODUCTION

The portrait of Erasmus of Rotterdam by Hans Holbein the Younger (c. 1497-1543) currently on display at the National Gallery in London – the so-called portrait 'with a Renaissance pilaster' – is probably the most famous image of the Dutch humanist (fig. 1). Painted in Basel in 1523, it was a gift from Erasmus to the archbishop of Canterbury, William Warham (c. 1450-1532), his long-term patron and Maecenas, dedicatee in the very next year of the second edition of the letters of St Jerome: the painting was described by the sitter in a letter to Warham as 'some piece' of Erasmus.[1] In the picture, Erasmus (1466-1536) is depicted in three-quarter view, standing in an ambiguous space neither obviously indoors nor outdoors, behind a stone parapet and in front of a green curtain that hangs from a railing running from behind the ornate pilaster and seemingly above another pilaster hidden in the shadows. The

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* Most references for prefaces and other texts written by Aldus Manutius are to the following editions: Aldus Manutius, *The Greek Classics*, ed. and tr. N. G. Wilson, Cambridge, MA 2016 (= *AMGC*); id., *Humanism and the Latin Classics*, ed. and tr. J. N. Grant, Cambridge, MA 2017 (= *AMHLC*). I provide their translations. All references for Erasmus's letters are to Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum …*, ed. P. S. Allen, et al., 12 vols, Oxford 1906-58 (= Allen); for most other works, to Erasmus, *Opera omnia …*, Amsterdam and Leiden 1969 – (= *Opera omnia*). Unless specifically noted, translations from Erasmus are from the *Collected Works of Erasmus*, Toronto 1975 – (= *CWE*), and those from other authors are my own. Micha Lazarus, Martin McLaughlin, Natalia Nowakowska, David Rundle and Edward Wouk read and commented on various drafts of this essay: my thanks are due to them, and to the *Journal*'s editors and anonymous readers, for their encouragement, advice, and inspiration. I also thank Alexandra Ormerod at Longford Castle for her assistance at various stages in this research.

[1] Basel, 4 Sept. 1524; in Allen, V, p. 534 (Ep. 1488): 'arbitror tibi redditam imaginem pictam, quam misi ut aliquid haberes Erasmi' (*CWE*, X, tr. R. A. B. Mynors and A. Dalzell, p. 365).

curtain is partly drawn back to reveal a shelf, on which rest three books: two lying flat beneath a clear glass vase, the third propped up against the vase, with the date of the painting's composition indicated on the cover and an epigram identifying and praising the artist Holbein inscribed in capital letters along the fore edge. Dressed soberly but luxuriously in a fur-lined black cloak, his grey hair emerging from under a tight-fitting cap, the scholar rests his hands purposefully on a book placed pointed towards the viewer on the parapet before him. The inscription across the foot and fore edges reads 'HPÁKΛEIOI ΠÓNOI / ERASMI ROTERO.' – that is, 'the Herculean Labours of Erasmus of Rotterdam'.

Holbein's painting is the visual locus for the well-known identification of Erasmus with Hercules, his philological labours 'to bring about a conciliation between *humanae literae* and *literae sacrae*' with the physical ones of the demigod.[2] The Greek words face the viewer as if the picture's title, as well as the book's. Meanwhile, the epigram in praise of the artist reads: 'I am Hans Holbein: not so easily as my critic [*Momus*] will anyone be my imitator [*mimus*]'.[3] The epigram associates Holbein with the ancient artist Zeuxis, who,

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[2] W. S. Heckscher, 'Reflections on Seeing Holbein's Portrait of Erasmus at Longford Castle', in *Essays in the History of Art Presented to Rudolf Wittkower*, ed. D. Fraser, H. Hibbard and M. J. Lewine, London 1967, p. 140; also L. Pergreffi, 'Erasmo come Ercole nell'adagio Herculei labores', Dott. Ric. thesis, Università di Bologna 2013, pp. 20-32, 90. For the importance of the iconographic over the naturalistic in this painting, see J. Nuechterlein, *Translating Nature into Art: Holbein, the Reformation, and Renaissance Rhetoric*, University Park, PA 2011, pp. 178-81.

[3] 'ILLE EGO IOANNES HOLBEIN NON FACILE VLLVS / TAM MICHI MIMVS ERIT QVAM MICHI MOMVS ERIT.' The epigram has been subject to slightly various readings and is strictly speaking anonymous. I am, however, largely persuaded of Erasmus's authorship (or at least his ultimate responsibility for its content), both because its metrical infelicities can be explained in part by Holbein rendering his own name in the recognisable vernacular form, and because of Erasmus's general fastidiousness regarding his visual image. Although Erasmus did not devote a great deal of attention to epigrams, he did compose them, often (apparently)

according to Pliny, had written a similar line beneath his painting of an athlete: 'easier to find fault than to imitate'.[4] And yet the green curtain also evokes Zeuxis, and his contest with Parrhasius. In that contest Zeuxis conceded defeat, for, after the birds had attempted to feed on his painting of grapes, he pompously ordered a curtain to be drawn back that he might look at the painting by Parrhasius; only then did he realize that the curtain was his rival's painting.[5] Far from defeating Holbein, however, this curtain assures his triumph. By drawing it back, the artist reveals the real truth of Erasmus: his books. Holbein thus also meets a challenge posed repeatedly in the Erasmian circle. In an epigram written in the voice of Quentin Metsys's 1517 diptych of Erasmus and the Antwerp humanist Pieter Gillis (figs. 2 and 3), Thomas More noted that, while it represented the body, writing rendered the soul.[6] The Greek inscription on Erasmus's 1519 portrait medal by Metsys, repeated in the 1526

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on the spur of the moment, and wrote a number of them in relation to paintings: see Froben's introduction to Erasmus's *Epigrammata* (1518), in Erasmus, *Poems*, ed. H. Vredeveld and tr. C. H. Miller, *CWE*, LXXXV, pp. 2-4, and examples of poems on pp. 56, 66, 68, 74, 152, 346; see also Heckscher (as in n. 2), p. 138, and H. Vredeveld, '"Lend a Voice": The Humanistic Portrait Epigraph in the Age of Erasmus and Dürer', *Renaissance Quarterly*, LXVI, 2013, pp. 509-67 (550).

[4] Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, XXXV.63: 'pinxisse … et athletam, adeoque in illo sibi placuit ut versum subscriberet celebrem ex eo, invisurum aliquem facilius quam imitaturum'; Heckscher (as in n. 2), pp. 137-40; M. Winner, 'Holbein's Portrait of Erasmus with a Renaissance Pilaster', *Studies in the History of Art*, LX, 2001, pp. 154-73 (162); O. Bätschmann and P. Griener, *Hans Holbein*, Princeton 1997, pp. 29-30.

[5] Pliny, *Natural History*, XXXV.65; Winner (as in n. 4), pp. 164-65.

[6] Thomas More, *Latin Poems*, ed. C. H. Miller, L. Bradner, and C. A. Lynch, in *Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, 15 vols, New Haven and London 1963-97, III.2, p. 298 ('Tabella loquitur', 7 Oct. 1517, addressed to Gillis): 'ut horum / reddat amans animum littera, corpus ego'; see also L. Campbell, M. Mann Phillips, H. Schulte Herbrüggen, and J. B. Trapp, 'Quentin Matsys, Desiderius Erasmus, Pieter Gillis and Thomas More', *The Burlington Magazine*, CXX, 1978, pp. 716-25, and L. Silver, *The Paintings of Quinten Massys, with Catalogue Raisonné*, Oxford 1984, pp. 105-33, 235-37.

engraving by Albrecht Dürer, declared that 'the writings will offer the better [picture]'.[7] A similar interpretation of Holbein's painting is supported by the presence of the vase, a feature that would recur on the desk in Dürer's engraving and a widely used symbol for the body as a container of the soul, as explained by Cicero in the *Tusculan Disputations*.[8] The presence of the vase and its association with the books on which it rests intimates that Erasmus's scholarship is, in fact, his very soul and thus his better picture. The ability of the visual representation alone to be that piece of Erasmus promised to Archbishop Warham is thereby denied. That piece is instead provided by the book on the parapet, breaking suggestively through the picture plane from under the author's hands. It is there, his purposeful and proprietary gesture seems to indicate, that Erasmus can really be found.

The Metsys diptych was a gift for More. It features the titles of Erasmus on the books displayed on the shelves behind both sitters; his works are presented as being at the heart of the three humanists' friendship. Holbein's portrait, in contrast, does not provide any titles.

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[7] ΤΗΝ ΚΡΕΙΤΤΩ ΤΑ ΣΥΓΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΑ ΔΕΙΞΕΙ; L. Jardine, *Erasmus, Man of Letters: The Construction of Charisma in Print*, Princeton 1993, p. 53; J. Müller, 'The Eye of the Artist: Hans Holbein's Theory of Art', *Studies in the History of Art*, LX, 2001, pp. 141-53 (141-42); *The Currency of Fame: Portrait Medals of the Renaissance*, ed. S. K. Scher, New York 1994, pp. 349-50; Vredeveld (as in n. 3), pp. 549, 558; A. Hayum, 'Dürer's Portrait of Erasmus and the *Ars Typographorum*', *Renaissance Quarterly*, XXXVIII, 1985, pp. 650-87 (666-68).

[8] Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, I.52: 'nam corpus quidem quasi vas est aut aliquod animi receptaculum'; Winner (as in n. 4), pp. 164-65; id., 'The Terminus as a Rebus in Holbein's Portraits of Erasmus', in *Hans Holbein the Younger: The Basel Years, 1515-1532*, ed. C. Müller, Munich 2006, pp. 99, 104; L. Schmitt, '*Mentem non potuit pingere docta manus.* Die heikle Allianz von Künstlern und Gelehrten in der frühen Neuzeit', in *Künstler und Literat: Schrift- und Buchkultur in der europäischen Renaissance*, ed. B. Guthmüller, B. Hamm and A. Tönnesmann, Wiesbaden 2006, pp. 204-09, 214. A vessel on the shelf in the Gillis panel of the Metsys diptych may hold a similar significance.

Yet it takes part in an elliptical interpretive game which Shira Brisman has identified as characteristic of the 'epistolary mode of address' current in these humanistic and artistic milieux, where paintings' 'cognitive demands' were rooted in an intimate culture of sharing, withholding and exchanging literate communication.[9] Warham, who likely knew the Metsys diptych through his business with More, is denied an expected and crucial piece of information.[10] But while 'Herculean Labours' is not a title, it is an adage. Indeed, it receives one of the longest essays in Erasmus's *Adagia*, where in its expanded form it first appeared in the 1508 edition published in Venice by the renowned printer-humanist Aldus Manutius (c. 1450-1515).[11] It was this very volume which, according to a 1509 letter to Erasmus from William Blount, Lord Mountjoy (c. 1478-1534), Warham was enjoying to such an extent that Mountjoy, who had loaned it to him, was having trouble getting it back.[12]

The Aldine *Adagia* is also the locus of the present study. In an addition to the *Adagia* made in the 1515 Froben edition, Erasmus would claim that he, like Hercules, must have been born on the fourth day of the new moon, fated by birth to share in the hero's troubled

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[9] S. Brisman, *Albrecht Dürer and the Epistolary Mode of Address*, Chicago and London 2017, esp. pp. 20-25. See also S. J. Campbell, 'On Renaissance Nonmodernity', *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, XX, 2017, pp. 261-94 (280-81), on the 'heuristic challenge' of 'philological painting': 'a dimension of discovery or revelation… that the image is not only visualizing and embodying but also escalating or amplifying the sense of the inscription.'

[10] When Warham was Lord Chancellor, he was said to see More daily: see letter of Andrea Ammonio to Erasmus, London, 18 Nov. 1511, in Allen, I, p. 488 (Ep. 243). In January 1517, More sent Warham a copy of *Utopia*: see Thomas More, *The Correspondence* …, ed. E. F. Rogers, Princeton 1947, pp. 85-87 (Ep. 31).

[11] *Adagia*, III.i.1, in *Opera omnia*, II.5, pp. 23-41.

[12] Allen, I, pp. 449-52 (Ep. 215), p. 451: 'D. Cantuariensis ita probat et admiratur ut ex eius manibus illud extorquere nequeam'; E. Rummel, *Erasmus as a Translator of the Classics*, Toronto 1985, p. 20.

destiny.[13] But this essay will reveal that it was not to his fateful birth that Erasmus owed his Herculean identity and ideology: instead, he owed them to his nine-month rebirth in 1508 in the workshop of Aldus Manutius.

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In the story of Aldus and Erasmus, mythmaking features at an early date.[14] According to the *Vita Erasmi* (1540) of Beatus Rhenanus (1485-1547), Erasmus had completed the work on the *Adagia* in Bologna.[15] Writing to Aldus to see if he was interested in publishing the work and finding him eager to do so, he then moved to Venice. But the Sélestat humanist's account is contradicted by the paper trail and the words of Erasmus himself. On 28 October 1507, Erasmus wrote an unsolicited letter from Bologna, offering Aldus a corrected copy of his Latin translations of Euripides' *Hecuba* and *Iphigenia at Aulis*, published the year before

[13] Passage added to *Adagia*, III.i.1, in *Opera omnia*, II.5, p. 41; see also *Adagia*, I.i.77 ('Quarta luna nati'), ibid., II.1, p. 188; in Greek (ἐν τετράδι γεννηθέντες) already cited among the adages in *The Praise of Folly* (1509/1511), ibid., IV.3, pp. 176-78.

[14] For reference, see P. S. Allen, 'Erasmus' Relations with His Printers', *The Library*, TBS XIII, 1915, pp. 297-322 (305-08); D. J. Geanakoplos, *Greek Scholars in Venice: Studies in the Dissemination of Greek Learning from Byzantium to Western Europe*, Cambridge, MA 1962, pp. 256-78; P. de Nolhac, *Érasme en Italie: étude sur un épisode de la Renaissance*, Paris 1898, pp. 31-52; A. Renaudet, *Érasme et l'Italie*, Geneva 1954, pp. 82-87; A. Vanautgaerden, *Érasme typographe: humanisme et imprimerie au début du XVI^e siècle*, Geneva 2012, pp. 89-169. M. Lowry, *The World of Aldus Manutius: Business and Scholarship in Renaissance Venice*, Oxford 1979, is still the most important study of the Aldine Press; see also C. Dionisotti, *Aldo Manuzio umanista e editore*, Milan 1995, his introduction to *Aldo Manuzio editore: dediche, prefazioni, note ai testi*, ed. G. Orlandi, 2 vols, Milan 1975, I, pp. ix-l, and M. Davies, *Aldus Manutius: Printer and Publisher of Renaissance Venice*, London 1995.

[15] In Allen, I, pp. 56-71 (60); K. Enenkel, 'A Blueprint for the Reception of Erasmus: Beatus Rhenanus's Second *Vita Erasmi*', in *The Reception of Erasmus in the Early Modern Period*, ed. K. Enenkel, Leiden 2013, pp. 23-40.

in Paris by Josse Bade (1462-1535), in an edition Erasmus described as commercially successful but 'chock-full of errors'.[16] Despite identifying himself as a 'theologian' whose primary interest was in an anticipated Aldine edition of the New Testament, he begged Aldus to publish the two tragedies in 'that small fount which is the most elegant of all' – that is, the italic – which would confer on his efforts the desired 'immortality'.[17] The two men had not yet met when the work emerged in December of that year with a preface in which Aldus hailed the younger scholar's faithful and erudite translations and his vast Greek and Latin learning.[18] Undoubtedly delighted to have been launched in this way by the world's leading benefactor of good letters, Erasmus joined Aldus in Venice at the beginning of 1508. In September of the same year, the Venetian printer produced the vastly expanded edition of *Adagiorum chiliades*, or thousands of adages (actually 3260), dwarfing the *Adagiorum collectanea* of 818 proverbs published in Paris in 1500 and again as recently as 1507. Swollen by the author's independent researches, it also grew through contact with the Greek manuscripts and philhellenic atmosphere of the Aldine *Neakademia*.[19] In retrospect, it was to

[16] Allen, I, pp. 438-39 (Ep. 207): 'Badius impressit sibi sat foeliciter … mendis scatent omnia' (*CWE*, II, tr. R. A. B. Mynors and D. F. S. Thomson, p. 132).

[17] Ibid., I, pp. 438: 'opus (ni me fallit coniectura) etiam vulgo placiturum, maxime nostro, id est Theologorum, ordini'; and 439: 'Existimarim lucubrationes meas immortalitate donatas, si tuis excusae formulis in lucem exierint, maxime minutioribus illis omnium nitidissimis.'

[18] *AMGC*, p. 300: 'Erasmus Roterodamus, homo et Graece et Latine doctissimus, Hecubam et Iphigeniam in Aulide, Euripidis tragoedias, carminibus nuper quidem Latinas fecit, sed admodum quam fideliter et erudite.' Also in *Opera omnia*, I.1, p. 215, with full text of the edition, pp. 216-359.

[19] The extent of the work actually done there (as distinct from what is implied in the *Adagia*) is not known. In Venice Erasmus also contributed to the Aldine editions of Plautus and Terence published in 1513 and 1517 respectively: see catalogue of works for Johannes von Botzheim, Basel, 30 Jan. 1523, in Allen, I, p. 13; letter of Andrea d'Asola to Erasmus, Venice, c. 21 June 1517, in Allen, II, pp. 589-91 (Ep. 589); and dedicatory preface

prove the making of its publisher's reputation even more than its author's; for if Erasmus exists in the public mind as the picture of the Renaissance intellectual and the author of *The Praise of Folly*, even to scholars Aldus still exists much as he does in Erasmus's essay on the adage 'Festina lente' ('Make haste slowly'), a largely tendentious but artfully constructed explication of the Aldine motto and dolphin-and-anchor printer's mark: at the hub of an international network of Italian, Greek and other scholars, 'building a library which knows no walls save those of the world itself'.[20]

Erasmus never effaced his debt to Aldus, though the polemical clashes of his late career have gone some way towards obscuring it. In the much different context of the Ciceronian debates and Lutheran controversies in which Erasmus increasingly involved himself from the mid-1520s, the formative experience of his career became contested ground, not least because some of his foremost antagonists had themselves been linked to the since-departed Aldus. As late as 1532, Erasmus was at pains to redirect his critics' attention to 'Festina lente', where he had '[pulled] out all the stops' in Aldus's praise.[21] In response, however, to attacks by Alberto III Pio, prince of Carpi (1475-1531), and Julius Caesar Scaliger (1484-1558), who variously asserted that he had not properly known Greek or even Latin before coming to Venice, that he had been a mere proof-corrector and that he was a drunken ingrate, Erasmus pushed back, claiming that, while he would never speak ill of the

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of 1522 Aldine Plautus from Gian Francesco Torresani to Archbishop Nikolaus von Schönberg, sig. *2^{r-v}. On the probably limited nature of this contribution, see J. A. Dane, 'On Metrical Confusion and Consensus in Early Editions of Terence', *Humanistica Lovaniensia*, XLVIII, 1999, pp. 103-31 (120-23).

[20] *Adagia* II.i.1, in *Opera omnia*, II.3, pp. 7-28, esp. 18: 'Aldus bibliothecam molitur, cuius non alia septa sint, quam ipsius orbis' (*CWE*, XXXIII, tr. R. A. B. Mynors, p. 10).

[21] *In elenchum Alberti Pii brevissima scholia*, in *Opera omnia*, IX.6, p. 668: 'sed dissimulatur, quod illum [Aldum] tot locis, plenis (ut aiunt) tibiis praedico, praesertim in proverbio: *Festina lente*' (*CWE*, LXXXIV, ed. N. H. Minnich and tr. D. Sheerin, p. 364).

other man, Aldus owed a greater debt to him than he owed to Aldus.[22] Yet the much-noted mockery in the colloquy *Opulentia sordida* (1531) of the mean fare offered to him in Venice was really directed against Aldus's father-in-law and business partner Andrea d'Asola, and Aldus himself emerged from these polemics unscathed.[23] It is right, of course, to read these exchanges in light of the national and cultural antagonisms between Italy and the North.[24] But importantly they date from after the *Ciceronianus* (1528), Erasmus's dialogue on the proper form of literary imitation and Christian eloquence, which opened up with the new generation of (especially Roman) humanists a fault line quickly colonised by national chauvinism. These exchanges are evidence of a different moment; they tell us rather less about what happened in 1508 in Aldus's shop.

The present essay returns us to that original moment. The 'Herculei labores' adage will be seen in light of its manifestations in Erasmus's writings to show how its meaning was transformed by the encounter with Aldus. The wider impact of this transformation was in Erasmus's identification of his humanistic vocation with philology. In his essay on the adage 'Festina lente', meanwhile, Erasmus would establish the relationship between humanism and printing in ways that also show Aldus's influence and relate to ideas formulated or expressed in other Aldine publications. First Aldus and then Erasmus promoted what was essentially a

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[22] In Vanautgaerden (as in n. 14), pp. 159, 164-66; *Opera omnia*, IX.6, pp. 340-48 (*Apologia adversus rhapsodias calumniosarum querimoniarum Alberti Pii*, 1531), and 668 (*In elenchum Alberti*): 'Quod attinet ad ingratitudinem, longe plus mihi debuit Aldus quam ego illi.' See above, n. 19.

[23] *Opera omnia*, I.3, pp. 676-85; also see the interpretation of M. Dazzi, *Aldo Manuzio e il dialogo veneziano di Erasmo*, Vicenza 1969, pp. 77-114.

[24] I. Bejczy, 'Erasmus versus Italy', *Medievalia et Humanistica*, n. s., XXIV, 1997, pp. 123-45 (123-33); M. P. Gilmore, 'Italian Reactions to Erasmian Humanism', in *Itinerarium Italicum: The Profile of the Italian Renaissance in the Mirror of its European Transformations*, ed. H. A. Oberman with T. A. Brady, Jr., Leiden 1975, pp. 61-115.

two-tier model, whereby the new figure of the publisher was ennobled through alliance with the traditional humanist editor and the liberal arts, while the artisan printer, lauded by others for his technical mastery, was associated with textual corruption, religious error and manual labour. Holbein's painting reveals the lasting significance of the encounter: at the end of the article, I shall attempt to show that the untitled book on the parapet in Holbein's painting refers back to the origins of these ideas in 1508 in the Aldine *Adagia*.

Sensitive to the development of Erasmian humanism over time and space, this article also responds to a body of scholarship that is already iconoclastic or revisionist. In *Erasmus, Man of Letters* (1993), Lisa Jardine argued that her subject carefully constructed through printed word and printed image a distinguished pedigree and an international reputation both for himself and for the movement that he represented. Despite the humanist's biblical philology and association with St Jerome, this construction was presented as essentially secular: 'Jerome stood for the dissemination of true scripture throughout the Western world; Erasmus would stand for the dissemination of humane learning across Europe.'[25] Erasmian humanism was also presented as essentially Northern. Alexandre Vanautgaerden's 2012 study *Érasme typographe* is more attuned to Erasmus's influences, and less concerned with his construction of himself than with his construction of others. It was from Aldus Manutius that he came to learn a new way of writing 'au milieu des presses', but also of the radical new possibilities of the printed book as an agent of humanism and the central role in the movement the printer was now required to play.[26] In the present study I build on Jardine's

[25] Jardine (as in n. 7), p. 4. Criticising this secular portrayal: M. Vessey, 'Erasmus' Jerome: The Publishing of a Christian Author', *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook*, XIV, 1994, pp. 62-99, esp. 67-68, 73, 97-99; H. M. Pabel, *Herculean Labours: Erasmus and the Editing of St. Jerome's Letters in the Renaissance*, Leiden 2008, pp. 2-6. See also E. F. Rice, Jr., *Saint Jerome in the Renaissance*, Baltimore 1985, pp. 116-36.

[26] Vanautgaerden (as in n. 14), pp. 3, 5-7, 495.

trailblazing work, even as I contest her secular vision of Erasmian humanism. In contrast to scholars who have challenged Jardine on these grounds but not on the fundamental role of the figure and publication of Jerome, I seek the roots of that vision elsewhere: though I would not wish to deny the Hieronymite presence, especially as the textual persona of Erasmus developed, it can be overplayed, and one reason it has been overplayed is because the constructions of Erasmus's early career remain relatively understudied and poorly understood.[27] Correcting this imbalance requires rethinking some geographical assumptions. I reject that interpretation – the product of Reformation-era squabbles and their many echoes – of a Renaissance divided between Italy and the North, between a 'centripetal' culture and a 'centrifugal' one, between form and content, between paganism (or at least religious indifference) and religion, between the emptiness of oratory and the seriousness of biblical scholarship.[28] Following Vanautgaerden, I view the fertile encounter in Venice as fundamental to the new humanism determined by the printing press. But the encounter will be seen as an opportunity for mutual fashioning, with Aldus contributing to Erasmus's ideology of humanism – the ideas that shaped his practice and characterised the movement he promulgated – just as Erasmus contributed to Aldus's reputation as a printer. The determinative influence of Aldus on Erasmus, his humanism and his understanding of print is what I aim to prove in what follows.

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[27] Cf. Vessey (as in n. 25), pp. 86-87, still apt: 'there is clearly something missing from an account of Erasmus' construction of authorial presence that does not explain either how he came to be in a position to publish the *Novum Instrumentum* or even why he should wish to do so, particularly when the account in question lays heavy emphasis on the precedent of Jerome… Jardine's arguments for the later production of the humanist author pose the question whether similar analyses could not be offered for his earlier career, considered henceforth in terms of authorial "construction" as well as of intellectual "formation".'

[28] On 'centripetal' and 'centrifugal' applied to Renaissance humanism, see E. Panofsky, 'Erasmus and the Visual Arts', this *Journal*, XXXII, 1969, pp. 200-27 (218).

THE CHOICE OF HERCULES

The adage ‘Ἡράκλειοι πόνοι’ or ‘Herculei labores’ offers a notably idiosyncratic take on what might seem a familiar expression:

> Ἡράκλειοι πόνοι, The labours of Hercules, can be taken in two ways. Sometimes it means continuous and very great exertions, and such as demand Herculean strength, and it was so used by Catullus: ‘But to seek you’ he says ‘would be already a task for Hercules’. […] Sometimes ‘the labours of Hercules’ means tasks of the kind that bring very great blessings to other people, but almost no return to the man who undertakes them, except a little in reputation and a great deal of ill-will [*invidia*].[29]

In the essay which follows, it is the second definition which receives the most attention. ‘If any human toils deserve to be awarded the epithet “Herculean”’, writes Erasmus, ‘it seems to belong in the highest degree to those at least who devote their efforts to restoring the monuments of ancient and true literature.’[30] Erasmus and his peers endanger their health and their reputations, constantly at risk from half-educated critics condemning what they do not know and pedants looking only for mistakes: ‘Who would not be deterred by this from

[29] *Opera omnia*, II.5, pp. 23-24: ‘Ἡράκλειοι πόνοι, id est *Herculei labores*, bifariam accipiuntur: Partim plurimi atque ingentes quique vires desiderent Herculanas, quemadmodum usurpavit Catullus [55]: *Sed te*, inquit, *quaerere iam Herculis labos sit*. … Partim Herculei labores dicuntur, qui sunt eiusmodi, ut aliis quidem maximas adferant commoditates, caeterum autori suo nihil ferme fructus adducant praeter aliquantulum famae, plurimum invidiae’ (*CWE*, XXXIV, tr. R. A. B. Mynors, pp. 167-68).

[30] Ibid., II.5, p. 27: ‘Quodsi ullis hominum laboribus hoc cognominis debetur, ut Herculani dicantur, eorum certe vel maxime deberi videtur, qui in restituendis antiquae veraeque literaturae monimentis elaborant’ (*CWE*, XXXIV, pp. 170-71).

undertaking labour of the kind I speak of, unless he had the spirit of a true Hercules, and in his zeal to help others could "do and suffer anything"?'[31]

Along with its emphasis on *invidia* (envy), the most significant aspect of Erasmus's treatment of the adage is its fixation on philology. The *Adagia* are presented as a vast salvage operation, rescuing the good literature of antiquity from corrupt manuscripts and epitomes.[32] The labours are philological ones. This same sense is found in the letter from Bologna with which Erasmus first solicited Aldus Manutius:

> Your memory in after-time, like your reputation at present, will inspire not merely honour but also affection and love, because, as I hear [*ut audio*], you devote yourself to reviving and disseminating good writers, taking infinite pains indeed but failing to receive an adequate reward; and you strive at enormous tasks [*laboribus*] in the manner of Hercules, splendid tasks it is true – tasks that will one day bring you undying renown – but which for the time being profit others rather than yourself.[33]

Georges Marlier suggested that Erasmus ultimately applied to himself and his labours the same praises he had earlier afforded Aldus.[34] According to Jardine, however, between the 1507 letter and the 1508 *Adagia*, 'Erasmus had reconsidered where exactly the "Herculean Labours" lay in connection with the recovery of ancient learning, and had reallocated that

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[31] Ibid., II.5, p. 27: 'Quem quaeso haec non deterreant a capessendis huiusmodi laboribus, nisi si quis sit animo plane Herculeo, qui possit alios iuvandi studio *quiduis et facere et pati* [Horace, *Odes*, III.24.43]?'

[32] Ibid., II.5, pp. 28-30.

[33] Allen, I, p. 437: 'Erit autem memoria tua, quemadmodum nunc est fama, non illustris modo sed favorabilis quoque et amanda, propterea quod (ut audio) restituendis propagandisque bonis authoribus das operam, summa quidem cura, at non pari lucro, planeque Herculis exemplo laboribus excerceris, pulcherrimis quidem illis et immortalem gloriam allaturis aliquando, verum aliis interim frugiferis magis quam tibi' (*CWE*, II, p. 131).

[34] G. Marlier, *Érasme et la peinture flamande de son temps*, Damme 1954, p. 106n.

effort and exertion to the *editor* rather than the *printer*.'[35] Yet Aldus's publishing programme is also likened to the labours of Hercules in 'Festina lente'.[36]

In fact, and in contrast to Jardine's attempted distinction between editing and printing (a distinction to which I shall return), it is the association between the Herculean labours and philology, already made in the 1507 letter, which represents the departure. An emphasis on philology might seem obvious in the context of Erasmus's scholarly preoccupations, while envy was already identified as the labours' characteristic fruit in the one-sentence treatment he gave the adage in the *Adagiorum collectanea* of 1500: 'by this proverb is meant those things which are useful to others, but bring nothing but envy upon their creator'.[37] Angelo Poliziano (1454-94) had associated his philological labours with those of Hercules in the *Miscellanea*, first published in 1489 and republished along with many of his works and his correspondence by Aldus in 1498.[38] Erasmus knew the Aldine edition by 1500 but would draw from the Florentine humanist in this respect as late as 1515, when he added his lament about having been born on the fourth day of the new moon to the end of the 'Herculei labores' essay.[39] Where Erasmus actually used the adage before 1507, however, he did so with a rather different significance. In a letter of February 1497 from Paris to Jan Mombaer

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[35] Jardine (as in n. 7), p. 42; cf. Pergreffi (as in n. 2), p. 39.

[36] *Opera omnia,* II.3, p. 18; cf. K. Eden, *Friends Hold All Things in Common: Tradition, Intellectual Property, and the* Adages *of Erasmus*, New Haven 2001, pp. 157-58, seeing a distinction between the two adages.

[37] *Opera omnia*, II.9, p. 52: 'Proverbio dicuntur qui aliis quidem utiles, auctori praeter invidiam nihil adferunt' (my translation).

[38] Angelo Poliziano, *Miscellanea*, Florence 1489, sig. m1^{r} (80): 'ne quarta omnino luna (sicuti proverbium fertur) nati credamur, ut aliis tantummodo ad Herculis exemplum laboremus'; id., *Opera omnia*, Venice 1498, sig. H3^{r}.

[39] *Opera omnia*, II.5, p. 41n. For Erasmus's use of the Aldine edition in the *Adagiorum collectanea*, see *Opera omnia*, II.9, p. 43n.

of Brussels (1460-1501), an Augustinian of the Windesheim congregation who had been called to lead the reform of an abbey in Château-Landon, nearly sixty miles south of the French capital, Erasmus wrote:

> I am not surprised that you find your exile somewhat uncongenial, but in a matter of such a sacred character and of such importance I desire and urge you to be stout-hearted; and I recommend it too. From the beginning I have guessed, as I do now, that this charge of yours will lead to countless blessings in the future. Of course it would have been pleasanter to live in lettered ease, but you have chosen the path of Hercules, the path of virtue, and must put on a Herculean spirit. The poets remark, both frequently and learnedly, that, as Seneca says, the way of virtue is steep and hard, and winds not through the places where we bathe and sleep and feast but through sweat and battle and toil… . This is the meaning of the celebrated Labours of Hercules and Labours of Theseus.[40]

Here Erasmus has mingled two different Hercules myths: his choice between virtue and vice – and hence the equation with Theseus, whose labours were indeed brought about by rejecting the easy sea route to Athens and taking the hard land route instead; and his labours, performed as penance on the order of the Delphic Oracle after being driven mad by Hera and killing his children. Neither envy nor philology features here, and the labours promise

[40] Allen, I, pp. 167-68 (Ep. 52): 'Exilii tui te nonnihil pigere nihil miror, verum in re tam divina, tam egregia maximo te esse animo et cupio et hortor. Equidem ita iam inde ab initio auguratus sum, et nunc item auguror, rem istam infiniti boni seminarium futuram. Dulcius quidem erat in otio litterario vivere; sed tibi Herculis viam, hoc est virtutis ingresso Herculeus sumendus est animus. Cum saepe tum erudite poete significant, id quod Seneca dicit, arduum asperumque esse virtutis iter; eam non in balneis, non in cubiculis, non in conviviis versari, sed in sudoribus, in bellis, in negociis… . Hoc nobiles illi Herculis ac Thesei labores significant' (*CWE*, I, tr. R. A. B. Mynors and D. F. S. Thomson, p. 109).

personal rewards to come – again, like Theseus's, but quite unlike Erasmus's insistence elsewhere on the essential thanklessness (in this world) of the humanist's allotted task.

More significant invocations of the labours of Hercules occur in *Antibarbari*, Erasmus's dialogue in defence of classical learning, written substantially by 1495.[41] Towards the beginning of the dialogue, the interlocutor Jacob Batt, secretary of the city of Bergen op Zoom, claims that ignorant teachers are to blame for the impoverishment of the liberal arts. When he is challenged by Willem Conrad, mayor of Bergen, who teases him for his inaction, Batt responds by describing with emotion his battles against those forces in the clergy and the laity which attempted to stifle his reforms of the city's school:

> Are you talking to me about warnings, when I undertook the labours of Hercules for this – even beating him at it? […] These men, confident in their vast resources, were everywhere flinging harsh and terrible accusations against me… repeating that some nonentity of an outsider was spreading a new heresy, that those first-rate authors through whom their grandfathers and great-grandfathers had become immensely learned, Alexander [and] Ebrardus Graecista, were being shamefully pushed out for the introduction of some unheard of and abominable monsters of paganism – Horace, Virgil, and Ovid […] You were a witness of that fight; you saw for yourself how I acted Hercules, how many lions and boars and bulls and Stymphalian birds I slew, how many versions of Antaeus or Geryon or Diomedes or Nessus, how I dragged Cerberus out of his den where he was terrifying the pallid shades, and held him up to the sky; you saw how my Greek fire only just managed to wipe out the Lernaean

[41] For the complicated history of this work, not printed until 1520, see the introduction by K. Kumaniecki in *Opera omnia*, I.1, pp. 7-15, 21-25. Following the critical edition, I have cited the text (where correct) of the Gouda manuscript of the original version.

> Hydra, fertile with its own deaths, and I rather think that worst of all plagues is still alive and breathing.[42]

In the *Adagia*, Erasmus would claim on Horace's authority a special connection between the Hydra and envy, which this passage and the Hydra's survival might be seen to indicate.[43] Unlike Mombaer's labours of Hercules in the roughly contemporaneous letter, Batt's are evidently humanistic in nature. But the focus here is on the foundations of eloquence, the labours are the struggles faced in overhauling education on humanist lines, and the wider purpose of the dialogue is to denounce as barbarous those who oppose classical eloquence and deem it anti-Christian. Eloquence and how Christians should pursue it would obviously continue to be major themes for Erasmus. But the Herculean labours of the *Adagia* are distinct from eloquence; in fact, in that very adage Erasmus defends himself against the charge that he ought to be eloquent in this kind of work.[44] Despite their earlier appearances in the Erasmian oeuvre, the labours of Hercules only take on their characteristic aspect in the correspondence with Aldus Manutius. And notably, in that initial letter – and quite unlike in

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[42] *Opera omnia*, I.1, pp. 59, 61-62: 'De referendo michi narras impudens, respondit Battus, quasi ista in re non omnes Herculis labores susceperim, imo prope vicerim? … Hi vero tantis copiis freti passim me diras atque atroces voces iactabant… dictitantes externum hominem nescio quem novam quondam haeresim serere; optimos illos autores, Alexandrum [of Villedieu] Graecistam Ebrardum [of Béthune], quibus et avi sui et proavi doctissimi evasissent, nunc indigne extrude; inaudita quaedam atque horrenda ethnicorum induci portent, Flaccum, Maronem, Nasonem … . Vidisti ipse testis in eo tumultu, quantum me Herculem praestiterim, quot leones, quot sues, quot Stymphalidas aves, quot tauros, quot Antheos, quot Geriones, quot Dyomedes, quot Nessos confecerim, ut Cerberum e latebris illis, ubi exangues umbras territabat, extractum coelo ostenderim, quanta virtute Lernaeam hydram fecundam suis mortibus igne Graeco vix tandem extinxerim, et haud scio an adhuc spiret pestis illa omnium perniciosissima' (CWE, XXIII, tr. M. Mann Phillips, pp. 35-36).

[43] *Opera omnia*, II.5, p. 24, citing *Epistles*, II.1.10-12; on the Hydra, see Pergreffi (as in n. 2), pp. 48-49.

[44] E.g. *Opera omnia*, II.5, pp. 30-32, 34-36.

his missive to Mombaer – Erasmus does not claim to identify on his own initiative what makes Aldus's efforts Herculean. Instead he explicitly claims to have heard it: 'ut audio'.

Indeed, by this point – and overlooked in all previous discussions of the self-fashioning of Erasmus – the labours of Hercules had already been employed by Aldus himself for his own humanist enterprise. He had done so, moreover, in a text available to the entire *res publica literaria*.[45] The fourth volume of the *editio princeps* of Aristotle was published in 1497 and dedicated, like all the others in the five-volume series, to Alberto Pio, prince of Carpi. In the dedicatory preface, Aldus defended himself from possible criticism by invoking the heroism of his effort:

> Like other scholars you may be quite sure that the whole of this difficult and expensive enterprise is managed with the highest standards of accuracy. If at any point this appears not to be the case, because something could have been better presented, try not to be ungrateful, because I labour for you night and day to the limit of my strength and beyond. But I do it very willingly, and having begun I shall not give up until I have made good my promise. I will definitely spare no expense, however substantial; I shall make light of all the effort, even if I could live a life of pleasure and permanent relaxation. You are the best witness to judge whether I prefer the labors of Hercules and his demanding tasks to erotic pleasure, the banquets and the featherbeds of Sardanapalus.[46]

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[45] A term used by Aldus in his prefaces as early as 1502 (Statius): *AMHLC*, p. 36; see also M. Fumaroli, 'Venise et la République des Lettres au XVI^{e} siècle', in *Crisi e rinnovamenti nell'autunno del Rinascimento a Venezia,* ed. V. Branca and C. Ossola, Florence 1991, pp. 343-57.

[46] *AMGC*, p. 52: 'Illud certo scias cum caeteris studiosis: omnia a nobis in dura hac et sumptuosa provincia fieri accuratissime. Quod sicubi non factum videbitur, quod quaedam dari meliora potuerint, videte ne sitis ingrati, cum nocte dieque vel supra vires vobis laborem. Quod tamen facio perlibenter; nec ab incoepto unquam

Aldus's invocation of Hercules owes something to the myth of the hero's choice between virtue and vice; and indeed, he goes on in that preface to instruct Alberto Pio in which path to 'follow the example of Hercules'.[47] But that his Herculean tasks were philological ones, too – or, put another way, that he conceived of philology in the service of the printing press (and vice versa) as the true humanist labour, which brought with it much struggle and little reward to the benefactor of mankind who practised it – is confirmed by a steady patter on these very themes in many such dedicatory prefaces from Aldus and others in his circle.[48]

Before ever having met him, these prefaces would have been one of Erasmus's key sources for learning about Aldus and his ideology. He certainly would have seen the preface to the 1503 *editio princeps* of Euripides, dedicated to the Athenian émigré scholar Demetrius

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desistam, nisi effecero quod sum pollicitus. Nullis profecto parcam sumpibus quamvis magnis; parvifaciam labores omnis, etiamsi in voluptate vivere et in ocio esse semper possim. Es enim tu mihi optimus testis, an potiores Herculis erumnas credam saevosque labores et Venere et coenis et plumis Sardanapalli.' [*A*]*erumna* and *labor* are synonyms which may be used interchangeably for the labours of Hercules: see Cicero, *De finibus*, II.24.118, which passage Aldus is following in terms of content. Legendary Assyrian king Sardanapalus as a symbol of debauchery and effeminacy appears extensively in Erasmus's work, including in *Antibarbari* (*Opera omnia*, I.1, pp. 81, 107, 108, 123, 126) and *Ciceronianus* (I.2, pp. 634, 639), and as a proverb in the *Adagia*, III.viii.25 (II.6, pp. 439-40).

[47] *AMGC*, p. 52: 'Optime tu igitur, princeps, Herculem Iovis satu editum imitaris.' The classic study on this topos is E. Panofsky, *Hercules am Scheidewege und andere antike Bildstoffe in der neueren Kunst*, Leipzig and Berlin 1930, pp. 37-196.

[48] E.g., *AMGC*, pp. 6, 10, 12, 24, 26, 34, 36-38, 46, 78, and here p. 64 (to Alberto Pio, on vol. V of Aristotle, June 1498): 'Videant igitur quidam vel ingrati vel invidi vel malevoli, quam sit difficile qualescunque, nedum emendatos, imprimendos curare Aristotelis libros caeterorumque illustrium perraros inventu. Sed semper mundus fuit malus, semper ingratus benefactoribus.' See also Fra Giovanni Giocondo's letter to Giuliano de' Medici (1479-1516), accompanying his edition of Caesar's *Commentaries* published by Aldus in 1513, in *AMHLC*, pp. 252-62.

Chalcondyles (1423-1511), in which Aldus presented 'the invention of printing and our labours' as the remedy to the catastrophic loss of good books since the fall of Rome and 'Greece' (Constantinople), because that was the edition on which Erasmus based his *Hecuba* and *Iphigenia* translations, and to which he referred in their correspondence.[49] Another, related source would have been his English friends. In the initial letter to Aldus, Erasmus appealed to the positive judgment on his translations expressed by Thomas Linacre, William Grocyn, William Latimer and Cuthbert Tunstall, 'who are your friends as well as mine'.[50] No doubt he meant their very names to serve as a form of introduction. Linacre (c. 1460-1524) had been a member of Aldus's original *Neakademia* and a contributing editor for the Aristotle project. Aldus also published his translation of Pseudo-Proclus's *De sphaera* in 1499.[51] A letter of that same year from Grocyn (c. 1449-1519) in praise of Aldus and his Aristotle was included in the edition of Linacre's translation, where Aldus's preface marked the first instance in which he presented the dolphin and anchor as symbol of his scholarly mission.[52] Both Grocyn and Linacre had studied under Chalcondyles at Florence, a fact

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[49] *AMGC*, pp. 112-14: 'excudendi librorum invento et laboribus nostris'; Erasmus gives references to pages in the Aldine edition when he offers his suggested corrections to Aldus: see letter of Nov. 1507 in Allen, I, p. 441 (Ep. 209), and introduction by J. H. Waszink to the Euripides translations, in *Opera omnia*, I.1, pp. 195-99.

[50] Allen, I, p. 438: 'Tomas Linacer, Gulielmus Grocinus, Gulielmus Latimerus, Cutbertus Donstallus, tui quoque amici, non tantum mei, magnopere probarunt' (*CWE*, II, p. 132). On Aldus's English friends more broadly, see Lowry (as in n. 14), pp. 259-63.

[51] Published together with Firmicus Maternus, Manilius and Aratus: *AMGC*, pp. 78-80 and *AMHLC*, pp. 2-6; P. S. Allen, 'Linacre and Latimer in Italy', *English Historical Review*, XVIII, 1903, pp. 514-17, and C. B. Schmitt, 'Thomas Linacre and Italy', in *Linacre Studies: Essays on the Life and Work of Thomas Linacre,* c. *1460-1524*, ed. F. Maddison, M. Pelling and C. Webster, Oxford 1977, pp. 36-75.

[52] *AMGC*, pp. 284-86, 78-80; the preface and letter are printed consecutively in the compilation of *Scriptores astronomici veteres*, sigs $T1^{v}$-$T2^{r}$.

Aldus included in a prefatory letter to the Cretan scholar Marcus Musurus (1470-1517) to a short tract on Greek loan words in Statius (1502) which accompanied the edition.[53] Linacre, according to Aldus's *De sphaera* preface, had close relations with its addressee Alberto Pio; while he, Tunstall (1474-1559) and Latimer (c. 1467-1545) – who had also worked as an editor for Aldus – had all studied at Padua.[54] At some point Erasmus certainly came to know Grocyn's letter, mentioned as the single example of his eloquence in *Ciceronianus*.[55] Linacre and Grocyn are likely sources of Erasmus's knowledge that Aldus was working on an edition of the New Testament, as Grocyn wrote that Linacre had told him of Aldus's plans for a polyglot Bible.[56] Alternatively, Erasmus could himself have read any of the prefaces where Aldus alluded to this anticipated project.[57] Linacre owned a copy – printed entirely on vellum – of the complete Aristotle, where in the preface to the fourth volume Aldus invoked the labours of Hercules.[58]

Erasmus thus had ample opportunity to learn of, but also learn from, Aldus's ideology of humanism before he ever made contact with him or came to Venice. And indeed, if we are looking for pragmatic reasons why the Aldine vision of the Herculean labours would appeal to him, then the existence of the network of English humanists into which Erasmus insinuated himself seems to fit the bill. The significance of this network is visible in the choice of

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[53] *AMHLC*, pp. 36-38.

[54] *AMGC*, p. 80: 'Quod eo etiam libentius leges, quod sit a Thoma Linacro summa tibi familiaritate coniuncto interpretatum.' Alberto Pio also recalled Linacre nearly thirty years later in his *Responsio paraenetica* (1529) to Erasmus: Vanautgaerden (as in n. 14), p. 158. More broadly, see J. Woolfson, *Padua and the Tudors: English Students in Italy, 1485-1603*, Cambridge 1998.

[55] *Opera omnia*, I.2, p. 676.

[56] Allen, I, pp. 437-38.

[57] E.g., *AMGC*, pp. 88, 98, 162.

[58] Oxford, New College Library, BT1.3.4 – BT1.3.9.

dedicatees of the two works Aldus published for Erasmus: the Euripides translations, with a poem and dedicatory letter to William Warham, as well as the ode *De laudibus Britanniae*; and the *Adagia*, with a letter from Erasmus to his former student Lord Mountjoy. Aldus valued the contributions of the 'Britons', whom he regarded as examples of how the liberal arts now penetrated even the land which was, in Virgil's memorable and useful locution, 'entirely cut off from the world'.[59] But, at least after the death in 1494 of Angelo Poliziano, under whom Linacre and Grocyn had also studied, there was also no more prestigious link for these English scholars to the world of Italian humanism than Aldus. The 'ut audio' of Erasmus's 1507 letter to Aldus starts to appear much more concrete.

For his part, Aldus would again deploy Hercules explicitly on at least three further occasions. Introducing his text and translation of the treatise on Greek dialects by Gregory Pardos in 1512, Aldus described the work as 'a Herculean labour and so tedious that I often found these translations painful', but one that 'would be useful for students of Greek literature, on whose behalf I shall never shun any task (*labor*) however great'.[60] In his preface to Cicero's rhetorical works (1514), addressed to the Venetian patrician humanist Andrea Navagero (1483-1529), Aldus called Hercules those who relieved him of his burdens

[59] E.g., in preface to Stephanus Byzantinus, Περὶ πόλεων [*Ethnica*] (1502), *AMGC*, p. 90: 'Nam non in Italia solum, sed etiam in Germania, Gallia, Pannonia, Britannia, Hispania, et ubique fere, ubi Romana lingua legitur… summa aviditate studetur literis Graecis'; and in preface to Statius, *AMHLC*, p. 36: 'Quamquam plurimos [benefactores] speramus futuros non in Italia solum, sed et in Germania et Galliis atque apud "toto orbe divisos Britannos"'; cf. Virgil, *Eclogues*, 1.66: 'penitus toto divisos orbe Britannos', and Grocyn's letter, in *AMGC*, p. 286: 'nos inquam divisos toto orbe Britannos'.

[60] *AMGC*, pp. 212-14: 'Traducere autem in Latinum has Graecarum linguarum proprietates fuit certe labor Herculeus atqui ita taedii plenum, ut persaepe his traducendis doluerim… utilissimum fore existimabam Graecarum literarum studiosis, quorum causa nullum unquam quamvis magnum laborem evitaturus sum.'

by editing texts for the press.[61] In this version, Aldus is Atlas, while Navagero is Hercules. But it is Aldus's usage in the preface to the complete works of Plato, dedicated to Pope Leo X (r. 1513-21) in 1513, which provides the most revealing example. It falls in a remarkable passage, where Aldus presents himself in a succession of benefactors of literature, among whom the only other named individuals are Pope Nicholas V (r. 1447-55) and Leo's father Lorenzo de' Medici (1449-92):

> But I have been rolling this boulder for a long time. In this matter I feel like a second Sisyphus, because I have not yet pushed it up to the top of the mountain; yet to others – and they are educated – I look like Hercules because I do not give way in the face of any troubles or succumb in the face of any toil, and by my single-handed efforts have done more to help the world of letters than everyone else put together, however numerous they were over the course of many centuries. On account of such great labours they now deafen me with their praise, either on meeting me or in elegant letters [*literis*, also 'writings' more broadly]. But I do not believe them, because I have never yet produced a book with which I felt satisfied.[62]

Erasmus of course had written just such an elegant letter; and, by the time of the Plato edition, the celebration of Aldus's publishing programme as Herculean had reached readers through his writings in the *Adagia*. This preface may therefore be our first piece of solid

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[61] *AMHLC*, p. 116: 'Sunt tamen multi et Graece et Latine docti, qui frequentando aedes nostras Herculem, mihi suppetias veniendo, sedulo agunt. Ex quibus tu, Naugeri excellentissime… recognoscendis, vel Atlas requiescente me factus es.'

[62] *AMGC*, p. 240: 'Ego autem iandiu hoc saxum volvo. Qua in re mihi quidem videor esse alter Sisyphus, quod nondum illud volvendo perduxerim in apicem montis, aliis autem, iisque eruditis, Hercules, quod, nullis cedens malis, nullis succumbens laboribus, iam plus unus ipse iuverim rem literariam, quam simul omnes quotquot fuere multis seculis. Ita me amant de tantis laboribus, ut nunc coram nunc accuratis literis laudando obtundant. Sed non ego credulus illis: nullum enim adhuc dedi librum, in quo mihi satisfecerim.'

evidence for the impact of the *Adagia* on Aldus's reputation. The success of Erasmus may have enabled Aldus to disavow the Herculean accolades for himself, while still claiming them from the educated public. Given Aldus's understandable complicity in this, it is little wonder that his role in the origins of Erasmus's characteristic usage has been so obscured.

None of this is to say that Aldus was the 're-inventor' of the Herculean labours, either as a Renaissance adage or as a metaphor for philology. It may have no fixed parentage; the usages of Aldus and Poliziano are by no means identical, while that of Erasmus before 1507 resembles neither. For a separate Herculean adage, the incurable and god-given *Herculanus morbus* (epilepsy), Erasmus draws on a different tradition, found in Euripides' *Herakles* and Seneca's *Hercules furens*, in which the hero is driven mad *after* his labours.[63] The Herculean labours appear in the treatise *De conscribendis epistolis* (1522) amid a demonstration of the literary figures that may be used to incite military bravery in the reader or listener of an *epistola cohortatoria*.[64] But that is evidently a very different context. The chronology of adoption and usage of 'Herculei labores' and the laconic reference to the source ('ut audio') allow the adage to stand as evidence of the influence of Aldus on Erasmus's scholarly identity and mission. The affinity with the hero and the association with philology emerged from Erasmus's encounter with the Venetian printer and his works. This realisation must encourage us to look deeper into the ways in which Aldus was implicated in the Erasmian project. Ultimately it was in shaping Erasmus's understanding of the new technology of printing, the new figure of the publisher and the brand of humanism these innovations made

[63] *Adagia*, II.iv.25, in *Opera omnia*, II.3, p. 340: 'In hunc aiunt Herculem incidisse vel propter immensos labores, vel immittente Iunone … Herculem item liberos suos interimentem inducunt tragici poetae.' Erasmus questioned whether this was really an adage at all.

[64] *Opera omnia*, I.2, p. 350: 'Hercules ille, totius Graeciae facile princeps, quot laboribus sibi iter in coelum aperuit…?'

necessary that Aldus's influence was most consequential. It is to some of these considerations that in the following section I shall turn.

HUMANISTS VERSUS PRINTERS

At the end of *De copia*, his influential 1512 treatise on the abundant style, Erasmus provided some examples of overwhelming *copia* – superabundant abundance – strictly unmerited by the topic to hand but appropriate in the context of showing off the writer's ingenuity: 'Thus Favorinus eulogized fever, Synesius baldness, myself folly (in my *Moriae encomium*), and I also extolled Aldus' anchor in the *Adagia*.'[65] As implied by its placement alongside *The Praise of Folly*, the inclusion in this list of the treatment in 'Festina lente' of the Aldine dolphin-and-anchor device was really meant to emphasise rather than diminish its significance. Erasmus would return repeatedly over the course of his career to this adage, which would inspire the longest entry in the entire collection.

Erasmus's essay on 'Festina lente' (Σπεῦδε βραδέως) famously attributes the adage 'make haste slowly' to the emperor Augustus, and associates it with the dolphin-and-anchor symbol found on coins of Vespasian (actually Titus) and adopted by Aldus Manutius as his printer's mark. Aldus in fact appears to have adopted the motto, the symbol, and the mark independently of each other, and for reasons removed from the coin, which was likely only given to him by Pietro Bembo (1470-1547) in 1502.[66] By this point, the dolphin and anchor

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[65] *Opera omnia*, I.6, p. 280: 'quemadmodum Favorinus febrim, Synesius calvitium, nos stulticiam Encomio, et ancoram Aldinam laudavimus in Proverbiis' (*CWE*, XXIV, ed. C. R. Thompson, p. 659); borrowing examples already used in *The Praise of Folly*, preface to Thomas More, in *Opera omnia*, IV.3, p. 68: 'laudarit… quartanum febrim Favorinus, calvicium Synesius'.

[66] O. Margolis, 'The Coin of Titus and the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*', in *Aldo Manuzio. La costruzione del mito*, ed. M. Infelise, Venice 2017, pp. 58-68, esp. 62-65.

were already appearing in Aldine books and, in his 1503 warning against the counterfeit printers of Lyon pirating his publications, Aldus offered the mark to readers as a guarantee of quality and authenticity.[67] Yet the purported approval of Augustus and Vespasian assisted Erasmus's contention that 'Festina lente' was 'βασιλικόν' – a royal proverb – and suited especially to princes.[68] Claiming that the dolphin and anchor originated in 'the secret heart of ancient philosophy' as a hieroglyph, its princely meaning encoded by wise Egyptian priests, Erasmus presented Aldus as heir to the two emperors who had employed it.[69] But with Aldus it garnered still greater prestige – for now it was no longer handled merely by merchants in commercial transactions but 'by all who are devoted to the cult of liberal studies'; by those 'who despise the barbarous and uncouth learning of our own day and aspire to that true knowledge stemming from Antiquity, for the restoration of which this man was surely born'.[70] Describing Aldus's publishing programme and advertising works – like the *editio princeps* of the complete letters of Pliny the Younger – shortly to be published brings Erasmus to the essay's rhetorical high point. 'By Hercules!', he exclaims,

> A labour indeed worthy of Hercules, fit for the spirit of a king, to give back to the world something so heavenly, when it was in a state of almost complete collapse; to trace out what lies hid, to dig up what is buried, to call back the dead, to repair what is

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[67] *AMHLC*, p. 246: 'Item nulla in illis visuntur insignia; in nostris est delphinus anchora involutus'.

[68] *Opera omnia*, II.3, p. 8: 'proverbium hoc, si quod aliud, optimo iuri βασιλικόν, id est *regium* appellari debere'.

[69] Ibid., II.3, p. 16: 'dictum hoc… ex ipsis usque priscae philosophiae mysteriis profectum apparet' (*CWE*, XXXIII, pp. 9-10).

[70] Ibid.: 'Neque vero symbolum hoc tum illustrius fuisse crediderim, cum inscalptum imperatorio nomismati negociatorum manibus terendum circumferretur, quam nunc, cum ubique gentium… propagatur, agnoscitur, tenetur, celebratur ab omnibus, qui liberalium studiorum colunt sacra, praesertim iis, qui fastidita barbara ista pinguique doctrina ad veram atque antiquam aspirant eruditionem, ad quam restituendam vir is quasi natus'.

> mutilated, to correct what is corrupted in so many ways, especially by the fault of those common printers who reckon one pitiful gold coin in the way of profit worth more than the whole realm of letters.[71]

Thus despite inheriting the dolphin and anchor from the emperors, Aldus, suggests Erasmus, surpasses them; for he, unlike princes and kings, is a benefactor of all nations and of all time.

The reference to Hercules in this passage, alongside the condemnation of the 'common printers' (*vulgares excusores*), is what led Lisa Jardine to argue for a new distinction in Erasmus's thought between printers and editors, representing a break from the sense of shared interest evident in his letter to Aldus of 1507. We have already seen how it was instead the 1507 letter which represented the break in Erasmus's thought, especially in relation to the figure of Hercules. The word Erasmus uses here for the printer is therefore revealing. An *excusor* (*excudo*, *excudere* = to hammer, forge) is evidently not a Hercules, a prince, or a universal benefactor. It is a word frequently used by Erasmus and was employed before him by Poliziano in a letter to Bartolomeo Scala, published in the 1498 Aldine *opera omnia* with which Erasmus was familiar since at least 1500.[72] In this well-known letter on a theme – the value of an eclectic style and the absurdity, in light of the differences between great authors and the lacunae in their surviving works, of pursuing any single stylistic model – of obvious interest to Erasmus, Poliziano's usage was quite derogatory in its connotations.

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[71] Ibid., II.3, p. 18: 'Herculanum mehercule facinus ac regio quodam animo dignum, rem tam divinam quasi funditus collapsam orbi restituere, latentia pervestigare, eruere retrusa, revocare extincta, sarcire mutila, emendare tot modis depravata, praecipue vulgarium istorum excusorum vitio, quibus unius etiam aureoli lucellum antiquius est quam vel universa res literaria.'

[72] R. Hoven, *Lexique de la prose latine de la Renaissance*, Leiden 2006, p. 202; 25 Dec. 1493 (V.1), in Poliziano 1498 (as in n. 38), sigs $f3^{v}$-$f4^{v}$. On Erasmus's familiarity with this edition, see n. 39. Erasmus also uses the verb for the (physical) act of putting books into print, e.g., nn. 17, 98; as does Aldus, e.g., nn. 49, 78.

'It has happened often', he wrote of the arch-Ciceronians, 'that they have severely censured those very things in my writings which were found in well emended texts of Cicero; while they themselves used the very worst kind of barbarisms thinking them Ciceronian words which evidently those Teuton *excusores* of new books had at some time perversely fashioned.'[73] Erasmus, who admired Poliziano's epistolary style, knew this letter well: he would cite it as an example of the *disputatoriae genus* in *De conscribendis epistolis*; and would invoke this very passage when addressing almost exactly the same question in *Ciceronianus*, albeit in this case without employing Poliziano's choice of word.[74] The sole classical source to use the word, however, is Quintilian, who in Book II of *Institutio oratoria* uses it for the Greek χαλκευτής, which in its context means a metalworker in bronze. This usage occurs in the middle of a passage where Quintilian treats the question of what the

[73] Poliziano 1498 (as in n. 38), sig. f4^{r-v}: 'Saepe enim hoc usu venit… ut illa ipsa in nostris scriptis potissimum reprehenderent, quae bonis, emendatisque Ciceronis exemplaribus reperirentur, cum tamen ipsi voces omnino barbaras pro Ciceronianis usurparent, quas videlicet excusores isti novorum librorum Teutones perversissime aliquando affinxissent' (translation based on I. Scott, *Controversies over the Imitation of Cicero as a Model for Style and Some Phases of their Influence on the Schools of the Renaissance*, New York 1910, p. 16).

[74] *Opera omnia*, I.2, p. 266 (Poliziano held supreme in the epistolary genre along with Cicero and Pliny the Younger) and pp. 578-79 (Poliziano-Scala letter identified by its incipit, 'Et tu mihi'); *Opera omnia*, I.2, p. 622: 'Quid quod Ciceronem habemus non modo truncum ac lacerum, verumetiam ita depravatum, ut si revivisceret, ipse, opinor, nec agnosceret sua scripta nec restituere posset, quae librariorum ac semidoctorum audacia, incuria, inscitiaque corrupta sunt, quod malum Teutonibus potissimum imputat Politianus.' Erasmus's promotion of Cicero, Pliny and Poliziano as epistolary models may owe something to their pre-eminence in the Aldine circle: see B. Marx, 'Zur Typologie lateinischer Briefsammlungen in Venedig vom 15. zum 16. Jahrhundert', in *Der Brief im Zeitalter der Renaissance*, ed. F. J. Worstbrock, Weinheim 1983, pp. 118-54 (140-45). Already Poliziano, advocating stylistic eclecticism, had cited Sidonius Apollinaris on the epistolary primacy of Pliny: Poliziano 1498 (as in n. 38), sig. a3^{r} (I.1), and id., *Letters*, ed. S. Butler, I, Cambridge, MA 2006, p. 4.

material of oratory is. Maintaining that it is anything that can be the subject of speech, Quintilian dismisses the objections that his definition is limitless and also leaves oratory with no particular material of its own by means of comparison with other, lesser arts (*artes minores*), like architecture, engraving and sculpture: 'for if I ask what is the material of a sculptor, I will be told bronze; if I ask what is the material of the *excusor* (that is, of the craft that the Greeks call metalworking), the answer will similarly be bronze: and yet there is a big difference between statues and vessels'.[75] The art of the *excusor* is thus analogous to that of the *orator*, but obviously and fundamentally distinct: metal in place of words, vases in place of oratory. Translated to the Renaissance and to the art of printing, its implications for the relationship between the humanist and the printer are clear: the humanist works in words on a universal subject matter; the *excusor* is a manual labourer toiling at a lesser art. What makes Erasmus's word choice in this passage so significant, then, is that printing as practised by Aldus is distinguished not simply as more skilled, but as something entirely different in kind.

Aldus promoted a similar distinction: he was, after all, a scholar by training with no technical skills whatsoever. If the press was to bear his name, it could only be because the physical process of printing was of secondary importance to the enterprise. Admittedly the characterisation implied by Erasmus of the relationship between the humanist's work and other arts as strictly analogous – existing in parallel but at different levels of status – was not entirely upheld in the Aldine milieu. Architecture, in particular, while treated by Quintilian as a minor art, had already become a means of conceptualising the intellectual work of the publisher as opposed to the manual labour of the mere printer. Neoplatonic and Albertian in origin, and representing a break from a rhetoric which had often involved emphasis on the

[75] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, II.21.10: 'Nam si quaeram quae sit materia statuarii, dicetur aes: si quaeram quae sit excusoris, id est fabricae eius quam Graeci χαλκευτικήν vocant, similiter aes esse respondeant: atqui plurimum statuis differunt vasa.'

printer's technical aptitude and dexterity, this vision posited a more immediately linked and hierarchical relationship between those with the idea and those who executed it.[76] This might explain why Aldus's usual word for printers is *impressores*. In relation to his own enterprise, the word meant primarily the men working the press, but it was used more broadly when Aldus spoke about his rivals. In his prefaces and other supplements to his publications, he constantly distanced scholars (like himself) from printers, who were always other people. Sometimes the remarks were quite disparaging. 'It was inevitable that the printers in the usual way would make some alterations and mistakes', he offered by way of explanation for the page of errata in his first publication, the *Erotemata* of Constantine Lascaris (1495).[77] 'I thought I would use this letter to ask you to give me your learned and elegant writings in both Latin and Italian', he wrote to the Neapolitan poet Jacopo Sannazaro, dedicatee of Giorgio Interiano's ethnography of the Circassians (1502): 'in that way they will be printed in our type and given into the hands of scholars in as perfect a form as possible and one worthy of Sannazaro … the copies that are available now have been terribly corrupted by the printers'.[78] Dismissing other master printers as *artifices*, 'craftsmen' or 'artisans', who would bring about the ruination of literature, in his preface to Niccolò Perotti's *Cornucopiae* (1499) Aldus

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[76] Margolis (as in n. 66), pp. 61-63; Aldus was likened to an architect by Antonio Urceo Codro, *Sermones (I-IV)*, ed. L. Chines and A. Severi, Rome 2013, p. 176. The only case in which Aldus refers to technical aptitude is in the colophon to the first volume of Aristotle, sig. s6^{r}: 'Impressum Venetiis dexteritate Aldi Manucii Romani.' As an extremely early example from the first full year of the press (1495), this can be seen as an exception which proves the general rule for what later ensued.

[77] *AMGC*, p. 8: 'Non fieri potuit quin impressores quaedam, ut assolent, inverterint depravarintque.'

[78] *AMHLC*, p. 206: 'Ipsum autem libellum… ad te mittimus, simul ut hac ad te epistola peterem ut quae et Latina et vulgari lingua docte et eleganter composuisti ad me… dares, ut excusa typis nostris edantur in manus studiosorum quam emendatissima et digna Sanazaro. Nam quae impressa habentur valde sunt depravata ab impressoribus.'

even advertised his clashes with his own workforce: 'when one's workers (or rather, one's enemies, since one has as many enemies as one has workers) are consumed with haste, or are acting in ignorance or with malice, who can accomplish anything worthy of even moderate praise?'[79] Poor labour relations become an opportunity for Aldus to assert his difference, as in his heroic self-presentation given in the course of his warning against the Lyonnais counterfeiters:

> Apart from these wars [since the French invasion of Italy, 1494-95] I have also been the victim of four conspiracies of my labourers and workmen in my publishing house, led by Avarice, the mother of all evils. With God's help I have so crushed these men that all of them deeply repent of their treachery.[80]

Meanwhile, in an epigram in praise of his punch-cutter, or *grammatoglypta* ('sculptor of letters'), which preceded the revolutionary Virgil of 1501 – the first book printed in italic type throughout and the first instance of classical literature published in octavo – Aldus lauded the 'Daedalean hands' of Francesco Griffo of Bologna, but still claimed Griffo's Greek and Latin letters as his own to give.[81] Taking credit from Griffo, Aldus nevertheless

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[79] Ibid., pp. 188: 'enim in quorum artificum manus pervenerint sacra literarum monumenta videmus"; and 190: "Quis enim in tanta operarum, ac potius inimicorum (nam tot inimici, quot operae) vel festinatione vel ignorantia vel malitia aliquid mediocri etiam dignum laude queat efficere?' The only title Aldus appears to give himself is in the statutes of the *Neakademia* (1502?), *AMGC*, p. 292: 'Ἄλδος Ῥωμαῖος, ὁ τῆς Νεακαδημίας ἀρχηγέτης' (founder, leader).

[80] Ibid., p. 244: 'Nam praeter bella … quarter iam in aedibus nostris ab operis et stipendiariis in me conspiratum est, duce malorum omnium matre Avaritia; quod Deo adiuvante sic fregi ut valde omnes poeniteat suae perfidiae.'

[81] Ibid., p. 16 ('In grammatoglyptae laudem'): 'Qui Graiis dedit Aldus, en Latinis / dat nunc grammata scalpta Daedaleis / Francisci manibus Bononiensis.' For Aldus and Griffo, see G. Mardersteig, 'Aldo Manuzio e i caratteri di Francesco Griffo da Bologna', in *Studi di bibliografia e di storia in onore di Tammaro de Marinis*,

put the blame on another punch-cutter 'who cut the letters in our absence' and rendered some of the place-names in the map of Gaul accompanying Caesar's *Commentaries* (1513) almost illegible.[82] In the dedication to Musurus in the 1502 Statius volume, Aldus, crediting the Cretan for his assistance, insisted that 'it is not in my character to cheat anyone of the praise he deserves', and promised to offer explicit thanks by name to those who helped him so that their efforts would be known to all readers.[83] But, with the exception of Griffo on that one occasion in the Virgil, the efforts Aldus had in mind were in book-hunting, lending manuscripts and editing alone – the preserve of patrons and fellow scholars.

In depending on the opposition between liberal and mechanical arts, the difference established between Aldus on the one hand and the *excusores*, *impressores*, *grammatoglyptae* and *artifices* on the other mines a similar seam to the contemporary *paragone* debates (painting vs sculpture, painting vs poetry).[84] The difference is also presented as a moral one. This went beyond the general but conventional piety that has been ascribed to him, and even beyond a desire to publish Christian texts – biblical, patristic, poetic – as well as pagan ones.[85] The *Erotemata* of Lascaris, Aldus wrote in the preface, 'is a kind of prelude, involving enormous labour and expense on our part and much equipment for the printing of Greek texts of all kinds, and this for two reasons':

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ed. G. Mardersteig, 3 vols, Verona 1964, III, pp. 105-47, esp. 139-40; Dazzi (as in n. 23), pp. 47-8; for Aldus's hand as a model for the Greek and italic type, see N. Barker, *Aldus Manutius and the Development of Greek Script and Type in the Fifteenth Century*, 2nd ed., New York 1992, pp. 59-63, 111-13.

[82] *AMHLC*, p. 110: 'eius culpa qui incidit literas absente nobis'.

[83] Ibid., p. 36: 'Non est enim moris nostris fraudare quenquam sua laude.'

[84] See F. Ames-Lewis, *The Intellectual Life of the Early Renaissance Artist*, New Haven 2002, pp. 141-76.

[85] E.g. Lowry (as in n. 14), p. 125, N. Naquin, '"On the Shoulders of Hercules": Erasmus, the Froben Press and the 1516 Jerome Edition in Context', PhD dissertation, Princeton University 2013, pp. 253-55.

> Firstly the number of people wishing to learn Greek… secondly the current state of affairs, the great wars which now afflict the whole of Italy, since God is angry at our misdeeds, and which look as if they will soon upset or indeed shatter the whole world, on account of the multifarious crimes of humanity, far more numerous and serious than those which were once the reason for an angry God to submerge and destroy in a flood the whole human race.[86]

The eradication of barbarism in language and in texts, achieved in the first instance through the knowledge of Greek, is made tantamount to moral, religious and political recovery. Aldus's prefaces to classical works regularly involves the divine favour that must attend upon his publishing efforts.[87] And, perhaps surprisingly, the humanist rhetoric of bringing lost or forgotten texts to light is equally employed in his edition of the letters of St Catherine of Siena (1500), a work presented explicitly with a religiously and politically redemptive purpose.[88] With this background in mind, it is notable that Erasmus returned to 'Festina lente' in 1526, when the circumstances of the Reformation and the German Peasants' War and the role he attributed to the press in exciting them led him to lash out in an excursus against 'the innumerable crowd of printers that now throws all into confusion, especially in

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[86] *AMGC*, p. 2: 'quoddam quasi praeludium esse summis nostris laboribus et impendiis tantoque apparatui ad imprimenda Graeca volumina omnis generis, fecit cum multitudo eorum qui Graecis erudiri litteris concupiscent – nullae enim extabant impressae venales et petebantur a nobis frequenter – tum status et conditio horum temporum et bella ingentia, quae nunc totam Italiam infestant, irato Deo vitiis nostris, et mox totum orbem commotura ac potius concussura videntur, propter omnifariam hominum scelera multo plura maioraque iis, quae causa olim fuere ut totum humanum genus summergeret aquisque perderet iratus Deus.'

[87] Ibid., e.g., pp. 4, 28, 74, 88, 90; *AMHLC*, p. 26.

[88] In Orlandi (as in n. 14), I, pp. 31-33; see J. Tylus, *Reclaiming Catherine of Siena: Literacy, Literature, and the Signs of Others*, Chicago 2009, pp. 271-85.

Germany'.[89] 'Sordid printers' in Venice also traded off of Aldus's reputation to sell corrupt editions of classical and religious texts.[90] The model of scholarly printer provided by Aldus and lauded in 'Festina lente' was all the more essential, a bulwark against the political, social and religious breakdown which could now result. These themes were less prominent in the 1508 version of the adage, which may lead one to assume that the elaboration of Aldus in the 1526 *Adagia* is an Erasmian construction alone. Listening to Aldus's own insistence on the link between his project and the repair and reform of Christian society is therefore important. We can understand why Grocyn, and then Erasmus, wrote so excitedly about the projected Aldine polyglot Bible, why Erasmus, pushing his Euripides translations, had nevertheless first identified himself to Aldus as a theologian, and why he again invoked the Bible project in the *Adagia*: it would have been the culmination of Aldus's publishing efforts.[91] Erasmus's consistent engagement with this project may explain why, even after his own New Testament edition had appeared with Froben in 1516, he still wanted to have a second edition printed in Venice by the heirs of Aldus.[92] In the event, the New Testament in the Aldine Greek Bible which finally appeared in 1518 was dedicated to Erasmus.[93] Praise of the dolphin and anchor in 'Festina lente' thus offered Erasmus something more profound than an opportunity to

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[89] *Opera omnia*, II.3, p. 19: 'iam typographorum innumerabilis turba confundit omnia, praesertim apud Germanos' (*CWE*, II, p. 11).

[90] Ibid., II.3, p. 18: 'sordidi quidam typographi'; on his worries more broadly, see K. Crousaz, *Érasme et le pouvoir de l'imprimerie*, Lausanne 2005, pp. 115-22.

[91] *Opera omnia*, II.3, pp. 16-17; Allen, I, pp. 437-38; J. H. Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ: New Testament Scholarship in the Renaissance*, Princeton 1983, pp. 117-19.

[92] Letter to John Colet, 5 March 1518, in Allen, III, p. 240 (Ep. 786).

[93] Francesco Torresani's dedication to Erasmus, in *Sacrae scripturae veteris, novaeque omnia* (Feb. 1518), sig. xx.φφ^{r}; also in Allen, III, pp. 212-14 (Ep. 770). This was not the same as the prospective polyglot Bible: it comprised the text of the Septuagint and an edition of the New Testament based on Erasmus's.

show off his ingenuity, as he claimed with remarkable understatement at the end of *De copia*. Instead, it allowed him to associate himself with a moral vision of humanist publishing and, then, under the new pressures of the 1520s, hold it up as a universal ideal.

Erasmus and Italy

Asking what Erasmus's three years in Italy added up to, Roland H. Bainton settled on 'the expansion of the *Adagia* from a slight collection of Latin proverbs largely into a panorama of the ancient world, the employment of some of the proverbs as texts for essays, a vastly increased command of Greek, and a host of new friends'.[94] These three years certainly provided all of those things; but, from the discussion to this point, we have also seen the extent to which Erasmus's stay in Venice and his involvement with Aldus Manutius contributed to what is generally accepted as most characteristic of his humanist ideology and agenda: his heroic association with Hercules, his philological focus, his understanding of the power of print, and his combination of all these into a Christian vision of reform. The evidence has come primarily from the two most significant essays in the 1508 Aldine edition of the *Adagia*, 'Herculei labores' and 'Festina lente' ('Sileni Alcibiadis' was expanded in 1515), but has been corroborated by the words of Aldus himself in his dedicatory prefaces. In Aldus's invocation of those who had identified his efforts as Herculean in his dedication of his Plato edition to Leo X, we have also found evidence of the early impact of Erasmus's essays, and the significance of his references to Aldus therein. The 1508 *Adagia* should be appreciated not just as a monument of printed scholarship, but as a vital artefact of careers and mythologies in the making.

[94] R. H. Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom*, New York 1969, p. 90.

On these grounds alone, it should certainly be possible – despite not having been previously been considered in the copious scholarship on the subject – for the book on the parapet in Holbein's portrait to represent the Aldine *Adagia*.[95] To make this case, however, will require some further evidence. Given the importance of the Herculean labours to Erasmus's self-presentation, the book inscribed with this adage and his name can simply function as a generic marker of his mission and achievements. Simultaneously (and subtly) it may represent the painting itself, asserting through Holbein's placement of his own name on the fore edge of the book on the shelf an equality of authorship between painter and scholar.[96] Nothing I say below is intended to contradict these readings. Many recent scholars, however, have been less circumspect, and have readily accepted an identification of the volume with the second edition of the letters of St Jerome, published in 1524 in Basel by Johannes Froben and dedicated to William Warham. This identification has been encouraged by the importance of Jerome to Erasmus's scholarly self-fashioning, the coincidence of the painting's recipient with the edition's dedicatee, and the apparently significant fact that Erasmus compares his editorial efforts to the labours of Hercules in the dedicatory preface.[97] To the extent that the book on the parapet represents Erasmus's scholarly output broadly speaking, Jerome is by no means excluded. But the factors on which a precise Hieronymite

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[95] A representative survey: Heckscher (as in n. 2), p. 133: probably the 1523 edition of the *Adagia*; A. Bodar, 'Erasmus en het geleerdenportret', *Leids Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, VIII, 1989, pp. 55-60: 1524 second edition of the letters of St Jerome; Jardine (as in n. 7), pp. 35-36, 45: 1524 Jerome; J. Müller, 'Von der Odyssee eines christlichen Gelehrten: Eine neue Interpretation von Hans Holbeins Erasmusbildnis in Longford Castle', *Zeitschrift des deutschen Vereins für Kunstwissenschaft*, XLIX/L, 1995-6, pp. 179-211 (186-88): no particular book indicated, Erasmus's entire philological enterprise intended; Pergreffi (as in n. 2), pp. 82-83: classical and Christian philology in their entirety intended, but probably the 1524 Jerome.

[96] Bätschmann and Griener (as in n. 4), p. 30.

[97] In preface to Warham, Allen, II, p. 218 (Ep. 396); Pabel (as in n. 25), p. 61.

identification has been based are less decisive than they might initially appear. In the version of 'Herculei labores' from 1523, Erasmus explained that he had surpassed Hercules by tackling two monsters at once: not just Jerome's letters, first published in 1516, but also the *Adagia*, which '[he] completed in Venice in the house of Aldus Manutius' and then expanded with no less effort.[98] The fact that Warham was the dedicatee of the Jerome, in 1516 as well as 1524, appears less important when we consider that he was a frequent dedicatee of Erasmian works, including the Euripides translations published by Bade and Aldus. In 1524 Jerome's letters appeared in three volumes and Erasmus sent the work to Warham unbound, as the ink (he said) was not yet dry.[99] In contrast – but like the *Adagia* – the book on the parapet is a single folio volume; it is also elegantly bound (on which more below). In no way, therefore, does it visually refer to the actual book presumably transmitted to Warham around that time. Holbein's painting was in any case sent before the 1524 Jerome edition had even been published.[100] The 1516 edition of Jerome's letters contained the same dedicatory preface to Warham, and comprised the first four volumes (three plus *spuria*, bound in two) of the Basel *opera omnia*, but to my knowledge its identification with the volume in the Holbein painting has not been advocated, probably because the case for Jerome depends much less on

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[98] *Opera omnia*, II.5, p. 40, with section in square brackets added in 1523 (otherwise first 1515): 'addidero… me labores omneis Herculeos superasse… . Nam [Basileae] simul typis excudebantur Adagiorum Chiliades, sic emendatae locupletaeque, ut non minoris mihi constiterit instauratio quam prior aeditio, [quam Venetiae apud Aldum Manutium peregimus,] et universae divi Hieronymi lucubrationes' (*CWE*, XXXIV, p. 181); noted in Pabel (as in n. 25), p. 8.

[99] Allen, V, p. 535: 'Hieronymum ad te mitto; nondum poterat compingi ob recens atramentum.'

[100] See above, n. 1, and letter of Erasmus to Willibald Pirckheimer, Basel, 3 June 1524, in Allen, V, p. 470 (Ep. 1452): 'Et rursus nuper misi in Angliam Erasmum bis pictum ab artifice satis eleganti.' One of these is likely the portrait by Holbein now in Paris (Louvre, inv. 1345); the other is the one sent to Warham.

the visual and textual evidence present than it does on assuming Jerome's importance and seeing the portrait and the second edition as contemporary.

Moreover, and although the image of the scholar at work in his study was a model for (and model of) the Renaissance depiction of Jerome, Holbein's complex portrait neither shows Erasmus at work nor even obviously in a study.[101] Other portraits of Erasmus do, but, despite often revealing precisely the text on which his is working, none of them – the Metsys diptych, the Dürer engraving, the more naturalistic portraits by Holbein now in Paris and Basel – show him working on Jerome.[102] Dürer's engraving, the latest in date, depicts Erasmus in the act of writing a letter, but the inscription cautions that Erasmus's better picture is found in his συγγράμματα, his writings or works (fig. 4). Before repurposing the passage in Greek for Metsys's medal and then Dürer's engraving, Erasmus had claimed that his better picture – even 'the whole Erasmus' – was in his *libri*, of which συγγράμματα serves as a translation.[103] Thus although earlier I discussed the inscription as a warning against seeking the true Erasmus in his image, it actually indicates that letters (*epistulae*, ἐπιστολαί) such as the one he is writing are insufficient too.[104] This makes the presence of the open book in the foreground of the engraving extremely significant. The exact text itself

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[101] *Pace* Jardine (as in n. 7), p. 45: 'It is entirely appropriate… that the painting Erasmus offers [Warham] should depict the author as the saint/scholar in his study'; also pp. 73-82.

[102] *Paraphrase on Romans* in the Metsys diptych (with Jerome on the shelf alongside other works); identical passage from *Paraphrase on Mark* in the Paris and Basel (Kunstmuseum, 1662, inv. 319) portraits: see É. Foucault-Walter, *Les peintures de Hans Holbein le Jeune au Louvre*, Paris 1985, pp. 9-26.

[103] Letter to Johann Werter, 19 Aug. 1518, in Allen, III, p. 413 (Ep. 875): 'Iampridem in libris meliorem Erasmi videras imaginem, si qua tamen bona est, imo iuxta Platonem totum videras Erasmum' (my translation); subsequently in letter to Card. Albrecht of Brandenburg, 15 May 1520, sent with a copy of Metsys's medal, ibid., IV, p. 260 (Ep. 1101).

[104] Cf. Bätschmann and Griener (as in n. 4), p. 30, improperly conflating letters and 'writings'.

illegible, the distinctive layout of short titles and brief paragraphs nevertheless encourages the informed viewer to identify this embodiment of Erasmus's writings with the *Adagia*.[105]

There are positive indications that the volume in Holbein's painting is also the *Adagia*. The Momus inscription on the book on the shelf behind the sitter alludes to Erasmus's treatment of the adage 'Momo satisfacere', and seems to offer its own comment on it: unlike Hephaestus (Vulcan), who, in the story told in Lucian's *Hermotimus* and cited in the *Adagia* by Erasmus, crafted the body of a man only to have it criticised by Momus for not providing a window to his heart, Holbein could indeed satisfy the critic by depicting his sitter's heart among his books.[106] There remains the unavoidable fact that the 'Herculean labours' adage inscribed on the book in the foreground comes from the *Adagia*; and that, in the treatment of the adage there, the *Adagia* itself is said to embody those labours. There is also the place of the image within the artist's own oeuvre to consider: in Holbein's first depiction of Erasmus, a marginal drawing in the copy of the 1515 Froben edition of *The Praise of Folly* he illustrated for Oswald Myconius, the book in front of the scholar is labelled on the fore edge (possibly a protective flap) as '*Adagia Eras.*' (fig. 5). Although the label is not in Holbein's hand and was probably added by Myconius, the identification with the *Adagia* is already strongly implied by the drawing's position alongside a passage in the

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[105] A visual affinity recognized by Jardine (as in n. 7), p. 223n. While I think the book can be 'read' to the extent of being identifiable, I do not discount the argument in Brisman (as in n. 9), pp. 150-55, that sees the text's illegibility contributing to Dürer's insistence on 'the pictorial insufficiency of the portrait': indeed, here as elsewhere, my interpretation requires the viewer to bring to the image independent knowledge of Erasmus's works.

[106] *Adagia*, I.v.74, in *Opera omnia*, II.1, pp. 546-48; Lucian, *Hermotimus*, 20; also see Winner (as in n. 4), p. 164, and D. Cast, 'Marten van Heemskerck's *Momus Criticizing the Works of the Gods*: A Problem of Erasmian Iconography', *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art*, VII, 1974, pp. 22-34 (27-29).

text where Folly explicitly cites the adages of her friend Erasmus.[107] This relationship with the text almost certainly confirms both Holbein's intentions for the image and how it would have been viewed. A marginal note by Myconius informs us that Erasmus saw the image, and records his reaction.[108]

Taken together, these factors suggest that, in Holbein's painting, it is the *Adagia* which serves as the primary visual signifier of the scholar and his project as a whole. As a bearer of friendship, embodying an intimate textual relationship between scholar and patron, the *Adagia*, which begins with the adage 'Amicorum communia omnia' (between friends all is common), is also an ideal choice.[109] Earlier we saw that Warham was familiar with the 1508 Aldine edition, and that Erasmus knew of this familiarity. The *Adagia* appear to have retained some lasting association with the Aldine Press as well. It is evident from correspondence that Aldus's heirs were dismayed that the work had been subsequently republished elsewhere, and that Erasmus to an extent accepted their propriety claims to the work, offering them his expanded versions in 1523 and 1525, though in the event the Press was otherwise occupied and declined.[110] It is perhaps worth noting that these exchanges date from the period of the Holbein and Dürer portraits.

Is there any indication, then, of what edition of the *Adagia* is represented in Holbein's painting? Surely the closed book resists absolute legibility. Yet the fact that the book is not a

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[107] *Opera omnia*, IV.3, pp. 176-78: 'Sed desino παροιμιάζεσθαι, ne videar Erasmi mei commentaria suppilasse.'

[108] Basel, Kupferstichkabinett, Inv. 1662.166, no. 64 (sig. S3^{r}): 'Dum ad hunc locum perveniebat Erasmus, se pictum sic videns exclamavit, Ohe Ohe, Si Erasmus adhuc talis esset, duceret profecto uxorem'; Müller (as in n. 8), pp. 154-55.

[109] *Adagia*, I.i.1, in *Opera omnia*, II.1, pp. 84-86; see Eden (as in n. 36), pp. 3-5, 148-51.

[110] Erasmus to Francesco Torresani, 18 March 1523, in Allen, V, p. 253 (Ep. 1349), allowing him to pirate the latest Froben edition, with further additions; to Francesco Torresani, 5 Aug. 1525, in Allen, VI, pp. 133-34 (Ep. 1592), offering a new edition.

depiction of a particular contemporary volume paradoxically encourages us to pursue the question to this next level: without a strictly mimetic function, its potential as a sign is limited only by the viewer's ability to read it. The greater the ability, the more intimate the friendship; and vice versa. So, while in this last section I do not suggest that Holbein presents an accurate, unambiguous depiction of the 1508 Aldine *Adagia*, I am claiming that he refers to it, thus encouraging the viewer to consider its relationship to the wider scholarly project that the book in the painting represents.

The first of these references is textual. Uniquely among authorized editions, the Aldine *Adagia* was prefaced by three poems in praise of Erasmus – one in Latin hendecasyllables and two short epigrams in Greek – by Germain de Brie of Auxerre (c. 1490-1538), a young scholar then also in Venice.[111] Two of these poems engage directly with the Momus topos central to the full interpretation of the painting. In the Latin poem, the gods celebrate Erasmus's achievement of attaining mastery of the Attic and Latin tongues as displayed in the *Adagia*.[112] Mercury claims that even Momus had agreed with Apollo and the Muses when they subjected all distant lands to unrelenting barbarism.[113] Now, however, the

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[111] In Erasmus, *Adagiorum chiliades*, Venice 1508, sig. B8^{v}: 'Germani Brixii Antissiodoranensis ad Desyderium Erasmum Roterodamum', 'Γερμανοῦ Βρηξίου τοῦ Κέλτου', 'Τοῦ αὐτοῦ'; also in Vanautgaerden (as in n. 14), pp. 130-34. See M.-M. de la Garanderie, 'Germain de Brie', in *Contemporaries of Erasmus: A Biographical Register of the Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. P. G. Bietenholz and T. B. Deutscher, 3 vols, Toronto 2003, I, pp. 200-02. Though Germain's poems would appear in the unauthorized edition published by Froben in 1513 on the basis of the Aldine edition, and also in a 1514 copy of the Aldine published in Tübingen, they are not found in the authorized Froben edition of 1515 or in any of those subsequent.

[112] Germain de Brie, in Erasmus (as in n. 111), sig. B8^{v}: 'En quae scripsit Erasmus ediditque, / Quae plenam faciant fidem Latina / Quam praestet simul Atticaque lingua.'

[113] Ibid., sig. B8^{v}: 'Scitis, ut Latio Atticove caelo, / Olim qui genitus procul fuisset, / Phoebo meque sororibus, novemque / Musis iudicibus, tacente Momo, / Dictus barbarus est et invenustus.'

gods come together to applaud Erasmus; he has, in effect, satisfied Momus. In the first Greek epigram Germain addresses Momus directly: 'If any book ought to escape your criticism, Momus, then of them all it is this one by Erasmus.'[114] Reading the Momus inscription in light of these poems amplifies its range of Zeuxian connotations, accentuating the comparison between Holbein's ability to satisfy Momus (by depicting the true Erasmus in his books) and his fellow *auctor*'s success in doing so (by writing the *Adagia*). Germain's final epigram meanwhile finds Athena spying the *Adagia* in the hands of the Muses and declaring, 'What things can the labour (πόνος) of mortal men achieve!'[115] Momus goes unmentioned; but the association of the present volume with πόνος still identifies the *Adagia* with the Herculean labours (Ἡράκλειοι πόνοι) defined therein and inscribed by Holbein on the book in the foreground.

The second reference is visual. Arguing that the book on the parapet stood for Northern humanism and represented the 1524 Jerome, Lisa Jardine claimed that its binding was 'recognisably northern European'.[116] But this is far the case. The book is conspicuous for its fine red-leather binding, tooled in gold leaf. This means that it is a tanned skin, but in this period a red-tanned skin almost certainly meant a goatskin imported from the Arab world. Binding prestigious books in imported goatskin was a common practice in Italy (as well as Spain), but not yet in Northern Europe. The alternating rows of gold tooling, while

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[114] Ibid., sig. B8^{v}: 'Εἴ ποτέ τις πασῶν, αὕτη δὴ βίβλος Ἐράσμου / Μῶμέ κεν ἐκφεύγοι τὴς σεῦ ἐπεσβολίην.'

[115] Ibid., sig. B8^{v}: 'μερόπων οἷα πόνος δύναται.'

[116] Jardine (as in n. 7), p. 79. For what follows I depend on personal communication with Nicholas Pickwoad, for whose generosity in sharing his expertise in Renaissance bindings I am most grateful. For reference and terminology: http://www.ligatus.org.uk/lob/. See also C. Federici and M. Zanetti, 'Le legature dei libri di Aldo', in Infelise (as in n. 66), pp. 198-225, N. Pickwoad, 'Books Bound after what Matter You Please', ibid., pp. 226-55, and E. P. Goldschmidt, *Gothic and Renaissance Bookbindings*, 2 vols., London and Boston 1928, p. 109.

unusual in their arrangement, nevertheless resemble knotwork and foliate designs in use in Italy. Ribbon ties – here in green, probably silk – at the head (implied but obscured) and foot as well as the fore edge are characteristic of Italian and fashionably Italianate binding. The distance between this and something recognisably northern European can be grasped by comparison with the books behind Erasmus on the shelf, which, in brown, blind-tooled calfskin or with visible extended centre bevels, are distinctively Germanic books. Only the rounded spine of the book on the parapet suggests a northern provenance. What, then, are we to make of this? The unlikelihood of these binding features coinciding at all puts paid to any sense that we may still be looking at an accurate representation of a real book transmitted from Basel to Warham. Rather, the visual and material evidence suggest nothing so much as a northern artist's rendering of an Italian book, based on some knowledge but no immediate act of observation of Italian design – which is exactly what I am arguing for Holbein. The Aldine *Adagia* was the only edition of the work – or any of Erasmus's major works – that could be reasonably associated with Italy. Perhaps, as Erasmus's correspondence with Aldus's heirs suggests, the *Adagia* were always associated with the Aldine Press and the 1508 edition. In this way, painting and poems together invited Warham to consider the relationship between the Aldine project in Venice and the Erasmian one that emerged.

What does it mean for our understanding of Erasmus, and of Erasmian humanism, to find that, fifteen years and multiple editions after its publication, the Aldine *Adagia* could still be his better picture? Certainly it supports the findings in this essay about the importance of the experience with Aldus Manutius for shaping the most fundamental elements of the humanist ideology to which he held. Just as significant – and standing in contrast to what, towards the end of his career, even Erasmus himself would claim – is what it suggests about the peninsula's enduring cultural influence and his open association with it. Here, it seems, is an Italian book, published by an Italian scholar, representing the truth of

Erasmus to his English Maecenas. Given the impact of Aldus on Erasmus, this should not really surprise. The extent that it does is also the extent to which the work of dismantling those lasting divisions between Italian and Northern humanism remains to be completed. A better picture of the European Renaissance will be the prize.

OREN MARGOLIS

Figures

Figure 1. Hans Holbein the Younger. *Erasmus* (1523). On loan to the National Gallery © Longford Castle Collection.

Figure 2. Quentin Metsys. *Erasmus* (1517). Royal Collection Trust / © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2018.

Figure 3. Quentin Metsys. *Pieter Gillis* (1517). © Longford Castle Collection.

Figure 4. Albrecht Dürer. *Erasmus* (1526). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Fletcher Fund, 1919.

Figure 5. Hans Holbein the Younger. Erasmus at his desk. Kunstmuseum Basel, Kupferstichkabinett, Inv. 1662.166, no. 64: *Moriae encomium* (Basel: Johannes Froben, 1515), sig. S3[r].