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TIRADE DU NEZ, OR NASOLOGICAL REMARKS ON THE HISTORY OF A FRIENDSHIP

"Tirade du nez", the famous nose tirade in Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* staged in 1879 is one of the widest-known monologues in world-literature. Despite—or because of—this popularity, the tradition in which it is rooted and which is traced back to Antiquity is hardly researched. This is so at least if we try to map the route from the nose-mocking Greek epigram to Rostand or if we wish to investigate the effect of two prominent figures of 16th-century humanism, Erasmus and Thomas More on literary tradition. Hopefully we will show below that they cooperated closely. We have to observe sadly that—as far as this can be assessed in a Hungarian environment—comparatistics had nothing new to present in this field since the article of Otto Weinreich from 1941.[1] However—staying in style—the solution has been right before our noses all along.

The late professor of classical philology in Tübingen investigated in his afore-mentioned piece the afterlife of Emperor Trajan's two-line poem in the *Greek Anthology*[2] (AP XI, 418, and APl II, 13, 17) in the 16th century and later. The epigram goes as follows:

Ἀντίον ἠελίου στήσας ῥίνα καὶ στόμα χάσχων
δείξεις τάς ὥρας πᾶσι παρεσχόμενας.

Thomas More translated it to Latin the following way based on Planudea printed in Florence in 1494 or on hand-written excerpts from it:[3]

Si tuus ad solem statuatur nasus hiante
ore, bene ostendas dentibus, hora quota est.

Its popularity in the 16th century is proven by the fact that others produced new Latin translations[4] and from the 1560s to the second half of the 17th century it provided the

[1] Otto WEINREICH, *Ein Epigramm des Kaisers Trajan und sein literarisches Nachleben*, Die Antike, 17(1941), 229–248; *Ausgewählte Schriften*, III, *1937–1970*, Tübingen, 1979, 105–122.

[2] Most recent monograph on *Anthologia Graeca:* Gideon NISBET, *Greek Epigram in the Roman Empire (Martial's Forgotten Rivals)*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003. On Trajan's epigram, see p. 196.

[3] *The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, vol. III, part 2, *The Latin Poems of Thomas More*, ed. C. MILLER, L. BRADNER, C. A. LYNCH, Yale University, 1984, no. 228, p. 250; on the sources and composition see pp. 12–17 and WEINREICH 1941, 232 (1979, 108).

[4] It appears in a volume of 200 epigrams from 1524 by Alsatian Ottomar Nachtigall (Othmar Luscinius) dedicated to Anton Fugger. Also translated by Melanchthon's student Johannes Lauterbach (*Epigrammaton libri VI*, 1562, IV, 132). WEINREICH 1941, 233 (1979, 109).

basis for various national-language adaptations as well.[5] It is not surprising then that this epigram by Trajan/Morus was included—in a slightly transformed version—in *Voyage dans la lune*, a satirical novel by Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac. The author produced his work—which inspired Rostand's play—in the mid-17th century. He—according to contemporary reports and portraits—was equipped with a nose of extraordinary shape and size, and we cannot exclude the possibility that he had some "nasological" knowledge since he was affected.[6] Popularity of this serious discipline at the time is indicated by the prologue that praises the nose published by actor Jean Gracieux—stage name Bruscambille—, an elder contemporary of Cyrano de Bergerac, in 1610.[7] He told it in front of the audience of Hôtel de Bourgogne, where Cyrano tells his monologue in Rostand's play.

Back to the real Cyrano: the motif in *Voyage to the Moon* is the same as in the original epigram. Moon-dwellers use their noses as sundials and "when they would tell anybody the hour of the day they do no more but open their lips, and the shadow of that nose, falling upon their teeth like the gnomon of a sun-dial, makes the precise time."[8] It is clear from this passage that Cyrano used not the original Greek (which does not mention the row of teeth used as a dial plate) but the Latin or some national-language version. The part that follows praises those with big noses justifying the lunar practice of making eunuchs of those with Flat Noses.

Rostand might have known this passage from *Voyage to the Moon*. The spirit of the nose monologue is very close to it. Why didn't he adopt the image with the sun-dial in his work? Weinreich gives a probable answer: the joke simply wouldn't have worked in an era characterised by optimism and unconditional faith in the advance of technology, in an era when only mechanical clocks were used.[9] Thus the original epigram became literary commonplace for some time, partly due to More's translation, but this didn't last long: sun-dials as well as the poem were used less and less, and by the late 19th century it became anachronistic. So the idea for Rostand's nose monologue might have come from the real Cyrano himself (see more explanation below) and the fact that a prologue that praised the nose was actually performed in a contemporary French theatre. Regarding the content, however, we find important aspects in the immediate surroundings of Thomas More: at his friend Erasmus.

[5] The order of publication is: George TURBERVILLE's *Epitaphs, Epigramms, Songs and Sonetts* from 1567; then by Pole Jan KOCHANOWSKI (*Fraszki*, 1584), who probably translated it from the original Greek, since he has known translations of Arathos and by this time the original epigram appeared in several popular anthologies; these are followed by several German versions. WEINREICH 1941, 234–236 (1979, 110–111).

[6] Cf. CYRANO DE BERGERAC, *The Comical History of the States and Empires of the Moon and Sun*, trans. A. LOVELL, London, Henry Rhodes, 1687, in: CYRANO DE BERGERAC, *A Voyage to the Moon*, Bibliobazaar, LLC, 2009.

[7] *Prologues tant sérieux que facétieux*, Paris, 1610. Cf. Alain MERCIER, *La Littérature facétieuse sous Louis XIII : Une bibliographie critique*, Geneva, Droz, 1991.

[8] CYRANO DE BERGERAC, *A Voyage to the Moon*, 202.

[9] WEINREICH 1941, 246 (1979, 121).

Their friendship is almost legendary.[10] Erasmus was a frequent guest at More's home in London during his stays in England. Later they maintained continual correspondence.[11] Erasmus' influence on More, especially regarding *Utopia*, is also a fact known in the literature.[12] On the other hand, More's influence on Erasmus, especially on Erasmus' oeuvre is less documented.[13]

Publication of their joint work, a volume of translations of Lucian in 1506 marks the beginning of their collaboration.[14] Later Erasmus, who by that time had earned Europe-wide fame, helped in publishing More's works including editions of *Utopia* in 1516 in Leuven and in 1518 in Basle. The latter is again a joint effort essentially. It does not contain *Utopia* only but poetical works of Erasmus and a collection of More's epigrams too. Among the latter we find numerous pieces translated from Greek, mostly from scoptic poems of *Anthologia Graeca*.

The translation of Trajan's epigram appears in the 1518 edition with the title *In vehementer nasutum, e Graeco*. Another edition in 1520, also from Basle, includes another nose-mocking poem, too, with the same title. It has four lines and also comes from *Greek Anthology* (AP. XI, 268; APl. II, 13, 11).[15] More also translated many woman- and wife-mocking poems as well as epigrams that caricatured drinkers, ignorant philosophers and physicians from the same book of Planudea. He might have liked such amusing poems. Erasmus notes More's *mira festivitas* several times referring to the friendly teasing atmosphere of unceasing joking that might have characterised their conversations during Erasmus' early years in England. More always found an understanding partner in Erasmus.[16] They both improved what they had learnt from Lucian and from Greek and Ro-

[10] Cf. Ernest Edwin REYNOLDS, *Thomas More and Erasmus*, London, 1965.

[11] See extant letters in P. S. ALLEN, *Opus epistolarum Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami*, I–XII, Oxford, 1906–1958. A summary of the Erasmus–More correspondence: Margaret MANN-PHILIPS, *The Correspondence of Erasmus and More*, in: *Thomas More 1477–1977 : Colloque international tenu en novembre 1977*, Ed. de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1980, 27–37.

[12] Cf. David WOOTTON, *Introduction*, in: Thomas MORE, *Utopia* with ERASMUS's *Sileni of Alcibiades*, ed., trans., intr. David WOOTTON, Indianapolis, 1999, 1–35.

[13] It is true, as emphasised by literature on *Utopia*, that this work is essentially an attempt to transfer common values of Erasmus and Morus into an imaginary society. The idealist Erasmus tried to introduce in his contemporary society through the power of his words the Reformist ideals that Morus, who was much more practical minded, believed to be possible in an imagined, "ideal" society. See J. C. DAVIS, *Utopianism*, in: *Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450–1700*, ed. J. H. BURNS, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, 329–344; G. M. LOGAN, *The Meaning of More's Utopia*, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1983, 218, 243–244. Both quoted by Bruce MANSFIELD, *Erasmus in the Twentieth Century (Interpretations c. 1920–2000)*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2003, 37–38.

[14] *Luciani opuscula ab Erasmo Roterodamo et Thoma Moro in Latinorum linguam traducta*, Paris, J. Badius, 1506. Cf. Craig R. THOMPSON, *The Translations of Lucian by Erasmus and St. Thomas More*, New York, 1940.

[15] MILLER–BRADNER–LYNCH 1984, no. 102, p. 158.

[16] Erasmus says this about More in an early letter to Richard Whitford. It is also the introduction for his own *declamatio*, which he wrote in response to *Tyrannicida* of Lucian. (Both appeared in the above-mentioned volume of translations of Lucian from 1506.) Published by ALLEN, I, 191, pp. 422–423: *Accedit lingua ingenio par, tum morum mira festivitas, salis plurimum, sed candidi duntaxat, ut nihil in eo desyderes quod*

man satire in general: More took a more abstract, theoretical direction in *Utopia* and created a new genre on the way, while Erasmus took a more rhetorical path which went to the extremes in exploiting the potentials of language in *The Praise of Folly* and the *Colloquies*.

What have all these got to do with the nose monologue and the nose-mocking epigram? An early piece of the *Colloquies*, the dialogue *De captandis sacerdotiis* (In pursuit of benefices) is a good example for the above statement, i.e. the linguistic ingenuity with which Erasmus gave a new form to Greek-Roman satirical tradition and enriched it considerably. It is also the missing link between the nose-caricatures of Trajan–More–Cyrano and Rostand's nose monologue.

In the dialogue between two persons,[17] Pamphagus, who has just returned from his unsuccessful hunt for fortune from Rome, has a conversation with Cocles. Pamphagus is happy that he avoided the fate of Ulysses who, upon returning home, was recognised by his old dog and former nurse. Cocles assures him that he had no difficulties in recognising so remarkable a nose. Pamphagus protests with resentment saying that he is not ashamed of his nose.

"You've no reason to be ashamed" replies Cocles "when the organ could be useful to you in so many ways."[18]

"Which ways?"

"First of all, as a lamp extinguisher, in place of a horn."

"Go on."

"Then if anything needs to be pulled out of a deep hole, it will do instead of an elephant's trunk."

"Wonderful!"

"If your hands are busy, you can use it as a peg."

"Anything else?"

"If there are no bellows handy, you can use it to blow up the fire."

"Well said, what else?"

"If light annoys you when you are writing, it will provide a shade."

"Ha ha! Anything more to add?"

"In a naval battle it will serve as a grappling iron."

"What about in a land battle?"

"As a shield."

"What's next?"

"As a wedge for splitting wood."

ad absolutum pertineat patronum. Cf. the offering of *The Praise of Folly* addressed to More: *suspicabar hunc ingenii nostri lusum tibi praecipue probatum iri, propterea quod soleas huius generis iocis, hoc est, nec indoctis, ni fallor, nec usquequaque insulsis impendio delectari*. ALLEN I, 222, pp. 459–462.

[17] A critical edition of the Latin text: *Opera omnia* Desiderii ERASMI ROTERODAMI, I-3, ed. L. E. HALKIN, F. BIERLAIRE, R. HOVEN, Amsterdam, North-Holland Publishing Company, 1972, 150–154.

[18] *Colloquies,* ed., trans. Craig Ringwalt THOMPSON, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1997 (Collected Works of Erasmus, 39–40), 44–52.

"Right!"

"If you act as herald, it will be your trumpet; if you sound the call to battle, a bugle; if you dig, a spade; if you reap, a scythe; if you go to sea, an anchor; in the kitchen, a fork; when you are fishing, a fish-hook."

"Lucky me!" declares Pamphagus. "I never realised I carried such a useful piece of equipment."

At first sight our suspicion seems well-founded that the Erasmian "multi-functional" nose might be a close kin of Rostand's description of the nose in alternating keys. Rostand's father, in spite of being a wealthy man, was an educated Latinist who was the first to translate the complete works of Catullus into French and made sure his son received proper rhetorical education: first in a Marseille school for the élite, then at Collège Stanislas in Paris, where he was a student of René Doumic, whose primary field of interest was exactly 17th-century French literature, and he might have been aware of both Cyrano and Bruscambille.[19] Taken all this into account we might have a stronger suspicion that he might have been better versed in nasology than the hero of his play. Anyway, the topic might have been much better publicised than it is today. In *Tristram Shandy* of Laurence Sterne, who produced his work one and a half centuries prior to Rostand, Bruscambille and Erasmus appear together as experts of "noseology". Sterne cites *De captandis sacerdotiis* verbatim.[20]

Back to the dialogue: at the end of the conversation Cocles traps Pamphagus again when the latter complains about his disastrous financial situation: "I'll show you where you can get a hundred thousand."

"Then why don't you make me happy?" asks the other. "Don't torture me any longer. Tell me, how."

"From the *Coin* of Budé.[21] There you may find countless myriads, gold or silver, whichever you prefer."

"Away with you and your joke! I'll pay the money I owe you from that source."

"You'll pay back—what I pay out to you from the same source."

Age, novi nasum tuum, says Pamphagus. Cocles: *At mihi prae te nasus est nullus*. Pamphagus: *Imo nihil te nasutius. Nihil es nisi nasus*. This play of words is beyond translation, since *nasus* here means nose as well as humour, while *nasutus* means both big nosed and jester. Is it possible that two characters who jest so amusingly hide real persons? P. Smith, the great Erasmus-monographer of the 1920s, who basically presumed real persons behind all characters of the *Colloquies*,[22] saw two servants of Erasmus in Pamphagus and Cocles. This is based on a letter from 1529,[23] in which Erasmus reas-

[19] Edmond ROSTAND, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, texte intégral ed. par Pierre LAUXEROIS, Paris, Bordas, 1988, 214–251; Sue LLOYD, *The Man Who Was Cyrano*, Bloomington, 2002, 1–59.

[20] Laurence STERNE, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman,* Bibliobazaar, LLC, 2008, ch. 35 and 38, pp. 180–181, 183–184.

[21] Guillaume BUDÉ, *De asse,* Paris, 1515.

[22] Preserved SMITH, *A Key to the Colloquies of Erasmus*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1927, 6.

[23] ALLEN VIII, 2147, pp. 134–136.

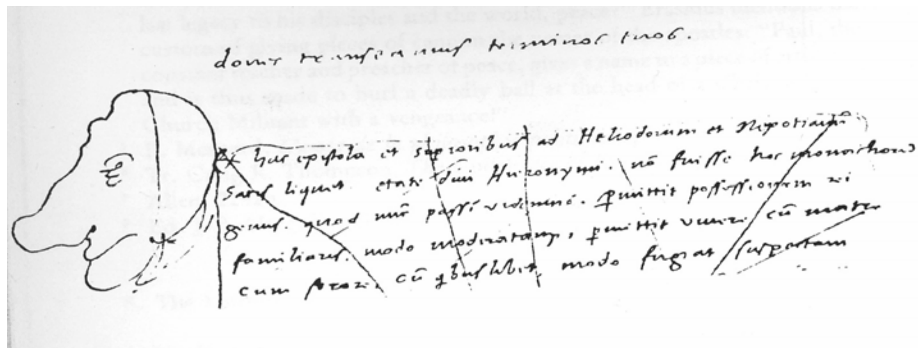
sures Oecolampadius that the latter is not the person mentioned in the dialogue *Cyclops* included in the expanded *Colloquies* printed that year. About the character in question it is said that if only Christian mercy in him was as big as his nose. Erasmus defends himself in the letter saying that it is a matter of common knowledge that this refers to his servant Cannius, who wanted to appear in the *Colloquies*. This argument, however, is false. One of the persons in the conversation is Cannius indeed, but the remark about a long nose refers to a third person behind whom we perhaps should not try to find a real person. But even contemporaries read the *Colloquies* as a roman à clef, as a device for Erasmus to mock his current opponents. This is expressed in the reaction of Oecolampadius. Thus, seeing it as a roman à clef may be valid in the sense of whom contemporaries presumed to recognise in the characters of the book, and also regarding the author's intentions, with time-limits. As controversy over Erasmus intensified—especially from the late 1520s—, the ever expanding *Colloquies* became more personal and directly satirical, and moved away from the initial, more general and pedagogical tone. So it is not necessarily fruitful to try to find out who Pamphagus and Cocles might be in as early a dialogue as *De captandis sacerdotiis*.[24] Yet, in view of all of the above, it is inevitable to think of Erasmus and Morus themselves seeing two such *nasutus* characters who banter so artistically and playfully. The two friends took delight in such *iocis, nec indoctis, ni fallor, nec usquequaque insulsis*.[25] This does not mean, of course, that Erasmus recorded a conversation that had really taken place, but the idea of seasoning his book of language drills with this kind of humour might have come while reading the nose-mocking epigrams of Morus.

As for the literal meaning of *nasutus:* Erasmus clearly had a nose of remarkable size—one only needs to recall Holbein's well-known painting. Erasmus, who returned from Italy in 1509 where he had visited Rome too, constantly strived, in the 1510s, to find a patron who would improve his shaky financial situation by providing permanent income. So, if it is really him who hides behind Pamphagus, then he—just like Cyrano in Rostand's play—mocks himself in *De captandis sacerdotiis*. This proposition is supported by drawings found in his bequest kept in the University Library in Basle. He decorated his notes for the commentaries for St. Jerome's letters with caricatures of himself, and these are witnesses to his satirical *ingenium* that includes self-mockery (see the image below).[26]

[24] It appears first in the edition from March 1522 untitled. The title becomes standard from the March 1524 edition. On the publication history of *Colloquia* see L. E. HALKIN, *Introduction*, in: *Opera omnia* Desiderii ERASMI ROTERODAMI, I-3, Amsterdam, 1972, 3–23.

[25] See note 16.

[26] Cf. E. HIS, *Selbstkarikaturen des Erasmus*, Basler Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Altertumskunde, 45(1946), 211–212. Source of the image: Margaret MANN-PHILIPS, *Erasmus and the Northern Renaissance*, Suffolk, Boydell Press, 1981 (orig. 1949), 159. For the drawings see also *Colloquies*, ed., trans. Craig R. THOMPSON, 46. Originally found in Universitätsbibliothek Basel, Handschriften-Abteilung, Erasmuslade, A. IX. 56, Bl. 226 recto, 243 recto, C. VIA. 68, S. 146, 143.



Amicorum communia sunt omnia, that is, friends have all things in common—we could cite the saying from Antiquity, which is "just as famous as it is beneficial", and which Erasmus placed in the beginning part of his *Adagia* thus indicating how important he thought it was.[27] So it is not only *Utopia* that we can consider a joint effort of Erasmus and Morus in the sense that it outlines a society in which principles of Erasmian Christian Humanism can be realised but the nose-satire too. They revived it together from its ashes and laid the foundations for its modern career that goes as far as Rostand.[28]

[27] See in the critical edition of *Adagia: Opera omnia* Desiderii ERASMI ROTERODAMI, II-1, ed. M. L. VAN POLL, M. MANN-PHILIPS, Chr. ROBINSON, North-Holland, Elsevier, 1993, 84–86.

[28] A final note: I've been unable to find out, how deeply, if at all, the Rostand-literature discusses the issue. I couldn't find one item in large Hungarian libraries that would have been helpful, although it would have been useful to see critical edition of Cyrano de Bergerac (CYRANO DE BERGERAC, édition critique Jacques TRUCHET, Paris, Imprimerie nationale, 1983) as well as the following volume of conference proceedings: *Edmond Rostand : Renaissance d'une œuvre, actes du colloque international des 1 et 2 juin 2006*, ed. Guy LAVOREL, Philippe BULINGE, Université Jean Moulin, Centre d'études des interactions culturelles, Centre Jean Prévost, 2007.