

Leonardo's Literary Writings: History, Genre, Philosophy

by

Filomena Calabrese

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ABSTRACT:

This dissertation examines Leonardo da Vinci's literary writings, namely those known as the *Bestiario*, *Favole*, *Facezie*, and *Profezia*, as compelling expressions of how Leonardo envisioned the role and influence of morality in human life. Through an analysis of these four literary collections from the perspective of their genre history, literariness, and philosophical dimension, it aims to bring to light the depth with which Leonardo reflected upon the human condition.

The *Bestiario*, *Favole*, *Facezie*, and *Profezia* are writings that have considerable literary value in their own right but can also be examined in a wider historical, literary, and philosophical context so as to reveal the ethical ideas that they convey. By studying them from a historical perspective, it is possible to contextualize Leonardo's four collections within the tradition of their respective genres (the bestiary, fable, facetia, and riddle) and thus recognize their adherence as well as contribution to these traditions. The literary context brings to light Leonardo's intentionality and ingenuity as a writer who uses generic conventions in order to voice his ethical views. Assessed from a philosophical standpoint, these four literary collections prove to be meaningful reflections on the moral state of humanity, thereby justifying the characterization of Leonardo as a moral philosopher.

Current scholarship on the *Bestiario*, *Favole*, *Facezie*, and *Profezia* generally views these writings as minor Leonardo works and treats them as ancillary parts of his production.

This dissertation, conceiving Leonardo as a moral philosopher, provides interpretations that lead to the conclusion that his thought pervades both his major and minor works and that these literary writings must be viewed as an extension (and result) of Leonardo's greater notions of the world and of how all parts relate to one another. The *Bestiario*, *Favole*, *Facezie*, and *Profezia* are works that deserve greater attention reflecting as they do the thought of this Renaissance man.

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, who taught me what it means to be a good human being.

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INTRODUCTION

Proemio. So bene che, per non essere io litterato, che alcuno prosuntuoso gli parrà ragionevolmente potermi biasimare coll'allegare io essere omo senza lettere. Gente stolta, [...]. (Leonardo, *Scritti* ed. Vecce 191)¹

Thus Leonardo da Vinci begins his celebrated apologia, a brief introductory text with a clear polemical tone, that appears in his codex *Atlanticus*.² Leonardo wrote the apologia around 1489, while at Duke Ludovico Sforza's court in Milan,³ in response to the criticism he had received from some humanists and men of letters of the court (Vecce, *Scritti* 206) when he decided to organize some of his notes into a book on painting.⁴ Leonardo's self-deprecating description of himself as an "omo senza lettere" ["a man without education"] is in reference to his lack of a formal literary education, a fact which some thought made Leonardo ill-prepared to approach elevated subjects or to articulate his findings regarding them in written form. Indeed, Leonardo's intention to compose a treatise would have necessitated both a solid knowledge of Latin works on scientific matters, since his book was to include some treatment of human anatomy and optics, and also proficient writing skills in order to be able to explain his theories and discoveries effectively. Clearly, Leonardo did not view his critics

¹ The English translation reads as follows: "I am fully conscious that, not being a literary man, certain presumptuous persons will think that they may reasonably blame me; alleging that I am not a man of letters. Foolish folks!" (trans. Richter, *The Literary Works* 116: 1).

² This manuscript is the largest collection of Leonardo's notes and contains material dating from about 1478 to 1518.

³ Leonardo worked primarily as an engineer at the duke's court in Milan from 1482 to 1499.

⁴ Although Leonardo's book project was never completed, a treatise on painting based on the artist's fragmented notes on painting techniques and rules was published posthumously in Paris in 1651 under the title *Trattato della pittura di Leonardo da Vinci nuovamente dato in luce*. The history of the *Trattato* is complex. It begins with the assumption that Francesco Melzi (c. 1490-1570), Leonardo's beloved pupil and inheritor of the artist's manuscripts, was the first to compile the artist's notes on the subject of painting turning them into a more coherent composition. The oldest extant compilation is from the sixteenth century. Part of the codex *Urbino* 1270, at the Vatican Library, contains transcriptions of 944 segments scattered through eighteen original Leonardo manuscripts. Because these transcriptions were based on Leonardo's manuscripts that were more or less intact, it is believed that Melzi might have been responsible for this compilation. The codex *Urbino* became the main source for subsequent copyists. The *Trattato della pittura* published in 1651 is an abbreviated version based on this codex.

or their opinions favourably, as his disapproving words “prosuntuoso” [“presumptuous”] and “gente stolta” [“foolish folks”] indicate. Moreover, in the remainder of the apologia, he defends himself by asserting that experience and nature, not authoritative texts, will serve as his chief source and teacher (“maestra”) in the search for truth: “Diranno che, per non avere io lettere, non potere ben dire quello di che voglio trattare. Or non sanno questi che le mie cose son più da esser tratte dalla sperienza, che d’altrui parola; la quale fu maestra di chi bene scrisse, e così per maestra la piglio e quella in tutt’ i casi allegherò” (ed. Vecce, *Scritti* 191) [“They will say that I, having no literary skill, cannot properly express that which I desire to treat of; but they do not know that my subjects are to be dealt with by experience rather than by words; and (experience) has been of those who wrote well. And so, as mistress, I will cite her in all cases” (trans. Richter, *The Literary Works* 116: 1)].⁵ Not even Leonardo, however, could deny his evident lack of humanistic training and the limits this would pose on his intention to compile a book which, in fact, when published posthumously, proved to be quite revolutionary. In the years following 1489 Leonardo embarked on a sort of program of self-education and self-improvement that saw him delve into a vast corpus of learning that he hoped would enable him to propose his own theories and impart his discoveries to others (Ponte 48). The long Latin vocabulary lists and verb conjugations in the

⁵ The complete apologia reads as follows: “Proemio. So bene che, per non essere io litterato, che alcuno prosuntuoso gli parrà ragionevolmente potermi biasimare coll’allegare io essere omo senza lettere. Gente stolta, non sanno questi tali ch’io potrei, sì come Mario rispose contro a’ patrizi romani, io sì rispondere, dicendo: ‘Quelli che dall’altrui fatiche se medesimi fanno ornati, le mie a me medesimo non vogliano concedere’. Diranno che, per non avere io lettere, non potere ben dire quello di che voglio trattare. Or non sanno questi che le mie cose son più da esser tratte dalla sperienza, che d’altrui parola; la quale fu maestra di chi bene scrisse, e così per maestra la piglio e quella in tutt’ i casi allegherò” (ed. Vecce 191) [“I am fully conscious that, not being a literary man, certain presumptuous persons will think that they may reasonably blame me; alleging that I am not a man of letters. Foolish folks! do they not know that I might retort as Marius did to the Roman Patricians by saying: That they, who deck themselves out in the labours of others will not allow me my own. They will say that I, having no literary skill, cannot properly express that which I desire to treat of; but they do not know that my subjects are to be dealt with by experience rather than by words; and (experience) has been the mistress of those who wrote well. And so, as mistress, I will cite her in all cases” (trans. Richter, *The Literary Works* 116: 1)].

codex *Trivulzianus*, the transcriptions and rewritings of others' and his own texts, and his attempts to compose more elaborate and rhetorically-nuanced works are all evidence that Leonardo was challenging the notion that he was an "omo senza lettere."

It is around the same time in 1489-90 that Leonardo began to write brief literary works known today as the *Bestiario* (also called *Allegorie*), *Favole*, *Facezie*, and *Profezia*,⁶ a classification into four collections established by Jean Paul Richter in 1883 and the designations to which the present study will adhere.⁷ Most of these writings are scattered throughout Leonardo's original notebooks and often found alongside unrelated notes, drawings and other miscellanea. The suggestion by almost all scholars that Leonardo originally composed the texts for courtly entertainment or for other occasions at court is the most plausible,⁸ since these genres – allegories, riddles, fables, jests – were in vogue in Renaissance Italian courtly culture.⁹ The present study is based on the belief that, while the literary writings might have originally been written for use at court, the writing of them became a significant literary process for Leonardo. Leonardo's literary writings were more

⁶ Giovanni Ponte, in fact, identifies the decade 1490 to 1499 as corresponding to the period during which the artist was most committed to composing literary texts: "e allora compone anche testi in cui l'impegno letterario è più evidente" (48).

⁷ To clarify, these are not the titles Richter assigns to the four literary collections. Richter is responsible for gathering them into the four collections. In his compilation, the *Bestiario* is titled *Studies on the Life and Habits of Animals* while the *Facezie* are *Jests and Tales*. Only the *Favole* and *Profezia* are literally translated from Leonardo's titles as *Fables* and *Prophecies*.

⁸ In her anthology of Leonardo's writings, Anna Maria Brizio states that Leonardo's interest in literary genres such as the ones studied here was connected to his role as court entertainer for Ludovico: "Ma con la fine del periodo sforzesco finiscono per Leonardo – o almeno molto si attenuano – certi interessi letterari, certi speciali atteggiamenti della sua fantasia, probabilmente stimolati dall'ambiente" (15).

⁹ In his *Il libro del cortegiano*, Baldassar Castiglione refers to the "giochi ingenuosi" ["clever games"] such as riddles that were commonly recited as after-dinner entertainment: "Ma lassando questo, dico che consuetudine di tutti i gentiluomini della casa era ridursi subito dopo cena alla signora Duchessa; dove, tra l'altre piacevoli feste e musiche e danze che continuamente si usavano, talor si proponeano belle questioni, talor si faceano alcuni giochi ingenuosi ad arbitrio or d'uno or d'un altro, ne' quali sotto varii velami spesso scoprivano i circonstanti allegoricamente i pensier sui a chi più loro piaceva. Qualche volta nasceano altre disputazioni di diverse materie, o vero si mordea con pronti detti; spesso si faceano imprese, come oggidì chiamiamo; dove di tali ragionamenti maraviglioso piacere si pigliava per esser, come ho detto, piena la casa di nobilissimi ingegni" (1.5.23-24).

than simple recitations for entertainment; in fact, they became for him honest endeavours meant to convey truths about the human condition.

All together, Leonardo composed nearly 350 individual literary texts, almost all of which, in their own right, are compelling expressions on the subject of human behaviour. This dissertation examines these writings in their historical, literary, and philosophical contexts, and analyzes them as unique expressions of Leonardo's views on ethics. That the drafting of many of these writings coincided with Leonardo's declaration that he intended to compile a book points to his commitment to creativity and literary expression. Indeed, the attempts Leonardo made to compensate for his lack of a literary education enabled him nonetheless to express morality in strikingly poignant, imaginative, and personal ways. This dissertation will reveal the fruits of this expression through textual analyses that aim to highlight the ideas conveyed in the writings. While Leonardo may not fit the description of a typical Renaissance *learned man*, he no doubt showed that as a *human being* – a uniquely talented one in his case – he possessed the ability to redefine fixed notions and reelaborate traditional images as he recorded and shared his vision of humankind and the world.

For over three centuries after his death in 1519, the greater part of Leonardo's literary writings remained unpublished and neglected in the folios of his notebooks. It was not until the latter part of the nineteenth century that Jean Paul Richter, a pioneer scholar of Leonardo's writings, undertook the monumental task of gathering the fragmented writings in the artist's surviving manuscripts, organizing them according to subject matter, logical sequence and ideas, since he observed that Leonardo's texts were distinct and defined enough "to construct a well-planned whole out of the scattered materials of [his] scientific system" (xv). Richter also translated these writings into English for the first time and

published them alongside the Italian texts in his seminal two-volume work, *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci Compiled and Edited from the Original Manuscripts* (1883).¹⁰

The title of Richter's publication is somewhat of a misnomer, since his anthology, in addition to the more traditional literary writings such as the four collections studied here, along with his personal letters, proems, and aphorisms, also includes the artist's *Trattato della pittura*, which comprises the entire first volume, as well as the scientific writings on astronomy, zoology, geography, and topography.

As far as the literary writings treated in the present study are concerned, it was Richter who originally divided them into the four collections known as the *Bestiario*, *Favole*, *Facezie*, and *Profezia*. Richter's classic edition is an indispensable tool – and obvious choice – for those wishing to study Leonardo's literary production. The editor has clarified many obscure points. Indeed, consultation of the anthology readily reveals the demanding work carried out by Richter in his effort to decipher the artist's handwriting, linguistic and stylistic peculiarities, and the implications of the material contained in the manuscripts. Richter's original work marked a turning point in the history of Leonardo studies because, for the first time, it systematized the many writings by the artist and brought to light his more original, but lesser-known works, underscoring the extent of the writings that he produced in his lifetime. It thus offered further insight into the mind of an influential Renaissance personality, and made Leonardo known “not merely as a Painter, but as an Author, a

¹⁰ In 1939, two years after Richter's death, a definitive second edition was edited with the assistance of Richter's daughter Irma A. Richter. It added excerpts to the original selections as well as the well-known *Paragone*, a written comparison of the arts. In 1970, a third edition was published, while in 1977, the supplementary *Commentary* by Carlo Pedretti was printed and includes detailed annotations with updated information on the chronology of Leonardo's writings and the findings of recent studies. For an excellent account of the editions of Leonardo's writings, see Pedretti's “The Editions of Leonardo's Writings.” Pedretti also discusses unsuccessful attempts made before Richter to publish all the artist's writings.

Philosopher, and a Naturalist” (Richter xviii: 1). This inspired later scholars to address the subject of Leonardo as a writer.

For the present dissertation, the Italian originals of the texts analyzed here are cited from Carlo Vecce’s *Scritti* (1992).¹¹ Richter’s 1970 third edition¹² has been used for the English translations because it presents nearly all the texts comprising the collections studied here, whereas other translations, even if more recent, are only partial.¹³ For the sake of consistency, other Leonardo writings, which are occasionally cited in the course of the study, are also taken from Richter. English versions by other translators will be referred to only for texts not found in Richter. For example, the translations by Charles Speroni, the author of *Wit and Wisdom of the Italian Renaissance* (1964), have been used for the racier facetiae, which were not included in Richter’s anthology. All translations will be acknowledged with the name of the translator in parentheses. In cases in which Richter’s translations are deemed inaccurate, corrections are suggested in the footnotes.

Thanks to Richter’s classic edition, scholarship on Leonardo’s literary writings was set in motion and greatly helped to spawn today’s body of largely anthological studies that still adhere to Richter’s four-part categorization into the *Bestiario*, *Favole*, *Facezie*, and *Profezia*. Although many general studies on Leonardo and his works refer to the literary writings, there are no separate monographs or long articles on them, the anthology seeming to be the preferred format for analyzing and documenting them while reproducing them in their entirety. This may be due to their status as minor works. Indeed, the literary writings

¹¹ Because other works by Vecce are cited in the present study, the title of the work will be indicated in parentheses. If the title of a work by Vecce does not appear in parentheses, it should be assumed that the reference is to *Scritti*, which includes almost all the writings by Leonardo studied here.

¹² The translations are taken from volume two of Richter’s edition, which contains the literary works. Citations from volume one will be indicated in parentheses following the page number.

¹³ English citations will follow the Italian text.

have been eclipsed by Leonardo's artistic masterpieces, scientific contributions, and his treatise on painting. They are, therefore, not generally allocated much space in critical studies. As a consequence, a chronological review of the anthologies in both Italian and English is necessary, although it will be restricted to those containing a representative selection of the literary writings and/or those whose editors have anthologized the writings, including works not treated in the present dissertation, within a definite critical framework. These anthologies also include other writings by Leonardo. From now onward, this dissertation will focus on the literary writings.

Among the early works, mention must be made of Edmondo Solmi's pocket-size edition, *Frammenti letterari e filosofici di Leonardo da Vinci* (1899);¹⁴ Edward McCurdy's two-volume work, *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci* (1906); Luca Beltrami's *Leonardo: Scritti* (1913); and Giuseppina Fumagalli's anthology, *Leonardo prosatore* (1915), and its expanded edition, *Leonardo 'omo senza lettere'* (1939). Fumagalli appears to have been the first among these early scholars to approach the literary writings as prose that was lyrical and expounded philosophical ideas and psychological insights. Both her studies, based on close readings of Leonardo's texts, are insightful and offer a good understanding of Leonardo as a writer.¹⁵ Fumagalli's observations on the literary writings have been particularly useful in orienting the research for this dissertation, in some cases acting as catalysts for the emphasis on moral ideas being pursued here.

¹⁴ Solmi's contributions to the field of Leonardo studies go beyond this compilation. He conducted research to identify the sources for the artist's ideas and writings and published his findings in the well-known *Scritti vinciani: le fonti dei manoscritti di Leonardo da Vinci e altri studi* (1908).

¹⁵ This methodology contrasts with that of her predecessors Solmi and Beltrami, both of whom she criticized for having arranged the fragments arbitrarily. Later scholars such as Jacopo Recupero would, in turn, criticize Fumagalli for organizing the literary writings in groups that seemed too contrived.

The second half of the twentieth century continued to see the publication of more anthologies of Leonardo's literary writings, in particular to commemorate the fifth centennial of the artist's birth in 1452. The compilers of these works differ from the preceding generation of scholars, for they ushered in an era of more modern critical standards for the anthology format. Especially with the appearance of Anna Maria Brizio's anthology in 1952 and later the one by Vecce in 1992, there is an emphasis on reproducing the literary writings in chronological order as they appear in the manuscripts. The most reliable of these editions in the earlier part of the second half of the twentieth century are those by Brizio, who published *Scritti scelti di Leonardo da Vinci* (1952), and Augusto Marinoni, the editor of *Tutti gli scritti* (1952).¹⁶ Both works are valuable: Brizio's compilation respects the chronological order of the writings while still maintaining an assemblage of themes, while Marinoni's is praised for its textual accuracy based on the excellent editorial and philological work provided by his transcriptions of the original manuscripts.¹⁷ Brizio's study introduces an unprecedented method for presenting Leonardo's writings following the development of his thought, while Marinoni's careful "philological approach represents an important contribution for the *questione letteraria* of Leonardo" (Pedretti, "The Editions" 6).

Around this time, other anthologies appeared: Mario De Micheli's *Leonardo l'uomo e la natura* (1952); Nicola De Blasi's *Antologia di scritti letterari, meditazioni sulle arti, prose scientifiche* (1962); Jacopo Recupero's *Leonardo: scritti* (1966); Clara Ciapetti Angelini's

¹⁶ Subsequent editions of Marinoni's anthology were published by Rizzoli under the title *Scritti letterari* in 1974, 1987, 1993 and 2002. Marinoni is a highly respected Leonardo scholar who has conducted extensive research on Leonardo's style, syntax, orthography, and linguistic idiosyncracies. He critically transcribed two of Leonardo's principal manuscripts, the codices *Atlanticus* and *Trivulzianus*; and authored many other works on various topics concerning Leonardo.

¹⁷ Marinoni's meticulous editing bore the fruits presented in the introduction and appendix of his anthology: a description and examples of Leonardo's linguistic idiosyncracies, a short essay on the artist's grammar and lexical notes, a glossary, and reference tables with information on the manuscripts and on the distribution of the literary passages in the manuscripts. When the two *Madrid* codices were later discovered, Marinoni appended the well-known inventory of books compiled by Leonardo in an enlarged edition published in 1974.

Pensieri filosofici e scientifici (1970); and Santino Caramella's *Scritti scelti* (1972). In the last twenty-five years, there has been a continued interest in Leonardo's literary production in the form of compilations including Vecce's *Scritti* (1992), Massimo Baldini's *Aforismi, novelle e profezie* (1993), Marco Vitale's *Favole Pensieri Bestiario* (1999), and J.G. Nichols's *Prophecies and Other Literary Writings* (2002).

Of the latter studies, Vecce's *Scritti* is undoubtedly the most thorough and reliable. Applying high scholarly standards, Vecce has conducted thorough examinations of Leonardo. He demonstrates an exhaustive consideration of the existing body of scholarship on Leonardo and always assesses the findings of his predecessors as he formulates his own analyses and presents his original conclusions. For the present dissertation, Vecce's edition of the literary writings has been adopted; in cases where it is not followed, the appropriate editor's or translator's name is indicated. In the footnotes to the four literary collections, Vecce provides up-to-date information and much additional and accurate detail regarding their status. The scholar is committed to studying and representing Leonardo in a context that is reflective of Leonardo's methodology and production. In fact, his critical approach has been followed in this dissertation too in the attempt to avoid romanticizing the artist, as many tend to do, and to tread carefully along the fine line separating reality from fantasy.¹⁸

The above review of anthologies is by no means a complete list of works on or including Leonardo's literary writings. It does, however, offer insight into the main body of scholarship on these works on the basis of the compilations consisting of selections from the artist's vast corpus of literary fragments that aim to present Leonardo as a writer through his

¹⁸ In the introduction to Vecce's *Leonardo*, Pedretti identifies Vecce as a scholar who does not submit to the Leonardo myth: "fa del tutto per non cedere al mito" (10). Not only did I gather this independently in my readings of Vecce's published works, but I was personally reminded of this when I had the occasion to meet with the scholar at the 2009 meeting of the Renaissance Society of America in Los Angeles. He attended my panel and kindly offered advice for my future studies on Leonardo. Thanks go to him for his assistance.

lesser-known and less highly regarded written works.¹⁹ Typically, the anthologies contain an introduction, a biography of Leonardo, and a brief bibliography of related studies. Some works also incorporate illustrations,²⁰ which are usually reproductions from the artist's manuscripts, a glossary to highlight Leonardo's linguistic idiosyncracies,²¹ and detailed annotations to the texts.²²

The introductions included in the anthologies tend to provide an overview of Leonardo's life, works and thought, with the writings constituting the main focus. Regarding the literary fragments, the editors and translators show how these, too, are intimately connected to the greater context of Leonardo's thought and overall production. These introductory studies no doubt raise awareness of the intersection of almost all Leonardo's activities. The association between literature and context is of particular interest in the present dissertation. However, the observations made by these scholars on the literary writings inevitably remain general and incomplete, if only because they generally consist of no more than a few paragraphs or pages and are embedded within a larger introductory discourse on Leonardo as a writer and thinker. The methodology adopted in these anthologies has many merits, for it has made Leonardo's literature accessible to a wider audience and established a foundation of preliminary knowledge from which to expand research on the writings. The anthologies have informed us of Leonardo's sources²³ and of the purposes for which he drafted the literary fragments, his pessimism regarding the current condition of humanity, his style and language, his moral views, and the connections between

¹⁹ Some of them appear to have been designed as practical handbooks of the artist's thought (e.g., Nichols's *Prophecies*).

²⁰ For example, the anthologies of Richter, Fumagalli, and Marinoni.

²¹ For example, the anthologies of Fumagalli, Marinoni, and Caramella.

²² For example, the anthologies of Fumagalli, Marinoni, Caramella, and Vecce.

²³ Thanks in part to Solmi, who wrote the above-mentioned *Scritti vinciani*. When appropriate, later compilers incorporated this information into their own anthologies.

these writings and some of their author's main convictions. However, the framework within which these studies are conducted has not allowed for a deep and thorough analysis of the individual literary texts or of any of the other writings presented in the anthologies either, for that matter. The anthologies on Leonardo's literary writings normally allot equal space to all its components; they are, thus, limited to presenting only the most salient facts connected to the texts comprising the collection.

To date, no one has published a comprehensive critical study or even a monograph on the *Bestiario*, *Favole*, *Facezie*, and *Profezia*. Nor has any scholar adequately examined the four literary collections for meanings that can be construed from contexts beyond Leonardo's manuscripts or his personal and professional endeavours. While there is some overlap between the critical observations made in the present study and those presented in the anthologies listed above,²⁴ this dissertation has widened the scope for investigating each of the four collections on the premise that they can assume greater meaning and importance in Leonardo's vast corpus of works if studied from defined historical, literary, and philosophical perspectives.

The decision to examine the literary writings from these three perspectives was inspired by a close reading of Leonardo's four collections, which led me to realize that they were historical because they belonged to recognizable and centuries-old genre traditions; literary because they used recognizable generic and rhetorical strategies to express personal conviction; and philosophical because they revealed a profound personal moral outlook on life as well as a more universal reflection on the state of the human condition. Indeed, a study of the *Bestiario*, *Favole*, *Facezie*, and *Profezia* from these three perspectives underscores the

²⁴ Some of the conclusions on Leonardo's views on humanity echo those drawn by Fumagalli, Caramella, and Vecce. As appropriate, their contributions have been acknowledged.

moral issue in each collection. While at a superficial level, the moral dimension in Leonardo's literary writings is tied to their immediate use at court, at a deeper level, it speaks more profoundly about the ways in which Leonardo envisioned morality in human life. For him, morality, the awareness of what is right and wrong for the common good, existed in order to provide direction for human beings and was essential in determining the course of events in humanity. The moral issue in these four literary collections reveals much about the kind of human being Leonardo was as well as about the kind of humanity in which he believed and to which he wished to contribute. The present study will show that his use of the bestiary, fable, facetia, and riddle genres specifically to express his moral views is reflective of both his humanity and the intensity of his belief in the central role of morality in human life.

This dissertation is organized around an historical, literary, and philosophical perspective and is divided into four chapters so as to deal with one genre or literary collection per chapter. A description of Leonardo's literary writings in the genre begins each chapter in which sources, characteristics of the collection, and current scholarship on it are examined. Following this, each collection is investigated according to the place it occupies in the history of its respective literary genre. The account given of the genre traditions not only provides the historical background against which to examine the specific literary writings by Leonardo, but also facilitates the transition to the textual analysis of the writings; and the textual analysis itself entails studying the narrative structure of the writings and underscoring the presence and application of certain literary and genre-specific devices, principles, and themes. It shows how a genre can act as a medium through which Leonardo is able to address moral issues and, in doing so, leads logically to the concluding remarks of each chapter.

Indeed, the discussion of form and content in the literary writings evolves into a philosophical discourse that relates the views on morality conveyed in the writings to Leonardo's thought and principles as well as to the social and cultural environment of the Italian Renaissance.

Chapter One thus introduces Leonardo's notion of *Necessità*, which describes laws that are inherent to nature, and relates this principle to the moral dimension in the *Bestiario*. Leonardo's reduction of allegory in the *Bestiario*, which belongs to a genre characterized by its use of allegory in order to articulate religious and moral truths, suggests that human beings can acquire moral truth by way of reason and direct contact with nature over accepted doctrine. Chapter Two expands upon this idea and shows that, more so than in the *Bestiario*, human conduct in the *Favole* is governed not by human law, but by a higher natural law. Moral and immoral behaviour in the *Favole* fits into a greater system with moral codes pre-established by nature for the greater and common good of humanity. Chapter Three examines the *Facezie* and the way in which this collection reflects the concrete reality of a human society with confused morals. Unlike the *Bestiario* and the *Favole*, the *Facezie* confront morality with humour in order to demonstrate the existence of the more frivolous and flawed side of human beings. The humour in this collection, however, also expresses a serious message, for it suggests that those who laugh at corrupt human behaviour disapprove of human corruption and express a sense of moral superiority. In Chapter Four, the human behaviour in the *Facezie* is now placed within the less-forgiving context of the *Profezia*. Adopting the riddle form, Leonardo creates prophecies that portray the paradoxes of human society. He merges literary devices and the rhetoric of irony with the late-Quattrocento

context to infuse his condemnation of immoral human conduct with more realism and a stronger impact.

It could be argued that this methodology applied to the study of Leonardo's literary writings in distinct contexts disregards the original scattered condition in which the writings are found and, thus, systematizes them artificially. As many Leonardo scholars warn, the literary writings are fragmented texts whose disorderly arrangement in the manuscripts does not allow for an approach that examines them as unified collections functioning within any prescribed genre or philosophical system.²⁵ The present study does not wish to misrepresent Leonardo's literary writings. Thus, it has been mindful of their unique physicality. There is no intention of arguing that the well-defined parameters of this study reflect the manner in which Leonardo operated. Any attempt to correlate the literary writings to a known system is made in the name of investigative scholarship and with the intention of yielding new findings on the four literary collections. Leonardo was curious about many things and explored ideas from the vantage points of many disciplines. Keeping this in mind, the present study has been limited to studying the literary writings in contexts with which Leonardo must have been familiar and to examining factors that might have influenced the thought and structure of these works. The methodology utilized, therefore, is motivated and determined by plausible realities and attempts to interpret the literary writings within possible and probable limits.

Moreover, a study of the literary writings from a combined contextual and conceptual perspective envisions Leonardo in his social and cultural environment. While examining the literary writings in their genre traditions and as texts using (or manipulating) certain genre

²⁵ In that regard, I am also reminded of Vecce's sound advice about remaining true to Leonardo's character and method, which, in truth, corresponds to no formal method at all.

conventions, it is important to consider Leonardo's formative years in Florence (from 1467 to 1482), which included consultation of (or, at the very least, ownership or knowledge of) influential Florentine literary works such as Luigi Pulci's *Morgante*, Poggio Bracciolini's *Liber facetiarum*, and Masuccio Salernitano's *Novellino*.²⁶ As the present analysis will show, Leonardo must have used some of these works of literature as inspiration for his own compositions, although it must be recalled that he stated that his observation and experience of the world, rather than literary models, informed his writing. The probable influence of the sources named above is evidence not only that Leonardo had knowledge of literature and its underlying mechanisms, but also that he was aware of the specific forms that he was employing when compiling his writings. His sources – the *Fiore di virtù*, editions of Aesop's *Fables*,²⁷ and Poggio's *Liber facetiarum* – suggest that he even wrote his literary texts with specific knowledge of the form and content defining the genres he was considering. The fact that Leonardo wrote “favola,” “facezia,” and “profezia” as headings or titles for some of his literary writings only reinforces this suggestion. It could be said that even in those instances in which multiple texts from the same collection were written on a single page, Leonardo had reached a considerable momentum that reflects his efforts to attain a high level of writerly creativity and intention.²⁸

²⁶ This statement is based on the two book inventories in the codices *Atlanticus* and *Madrid II*, listing forty and 116 items, respectively. It is believed that Leonardo compiled the shorter book list during his final years in Milan, while he wrote the longer one c. 1503, when in Florence. On the first book list, Leonardo includes Luigi Pulci's *Morgante* (“Morgante”), Poggio Bracciolini's book of facetiae (“Facetie di Poggio”), Manganello (“Manganello”), the sonnets of Burchiello (“Burchiello”), Petrarch (“Petrarca”). The second book inventory lists Masuccio Salernitano's *Novellino* (“Novellino di Masuccio”), Manganello (“Manganello”), and more sonnets by Burchiello (“Sonetti del Burchiello”).

²⁷ Leonardo, in fact, listed Aesop's fables three separate times in his book lists. In another instance, thus totaling four entries for the fabulist, Leonardo lists Aesop's work in verse (“Isopo in versi”). This is believed to refer to a vernacular edition of *Aesopus moralizatus*, including Latin and Italian verses. More details regarding these list entries are provided in Chapter Three.

²⁸ Indeed, the *Bestiario* was written entirely on thirty-nine consecutive folios in manuscript *H* and the remaining three collections all contain passages that were originally written in large sections on single pages in a

The condition in which the literary writings are found in the notebooks and the overall quality of the writings are two concrete facts indicating that Leonardo did not take great measures to create artistically refined or sophisticated literary texts conforming to strict traditional genre criteria. Then again, it is also irrelevant to speak of intentions or finality in the literary writings since it shall never be known if they were provisional drafts or definitive texts. However, it is difficult to imagine that Leonardo resisted the restrictions of generic forms altogether given that he owned (and probably read) a number of works subscribing to the four genres represented by the collections studied here. Clearly, Leonardo was aware of the literary forms with which he was dealing. Thus, he inevitably situated himself in a context in which it is reasonable to conclude that he was capable of drawing from literature and exploiting genre devices for his own purposes and in order to verbalize his personal thoughts on many subjects.

The focus on the history of each genre in relation to Leonardo's literary writings has made it possible to highlight the cultural and social environment of the Italian Renaissance in which Leonardo found himself. Leonardo's adherence to and adaptation of genre forms have revealed his affinity with, as well as his opposition to certain Renaissance cultural ideals and practices; at times, they have even explained and reflected the social and political circumstances of the time. The textual analysis of the literary writings against the backdrop of literary genre has generated further conclusions regarding Leonardo's audience (i.e., humanity) and his contributions to his culture and society.

The review of genre history and the close reading of the literary writings presented here against this historical background have made it possible to show not only *what*

notebook. For example, seventy-eight prophecies headed by the title *Pronostico* appear on a single folio (1023v) in the codex *Atlanticus*, while ten fables also appear on a single folio (188v) in the codex *Atlanticus*.

Leonardo is saying in his writings but also *how* he is saying it. While many scholars have interpreted the writings as expressions of Leonardo's moral character, in particular of his moral severity in assessing human behaviour,²⁹ very little has been said about how his relationship with these genres may have facilitated the formal aspects of his writings. Seen in this light, the bestiary, fable, facetia, and riddle genres may be seen as the main vehicles through which Leonardo was able to communicate his ethical perspective and reveal his high moral standards. The present study aims to marry genre to message. In doing so, it attempts to answer questions considering genre and moral expression as equal and intertwined components of the literary writings: How does narrative structure create a space within which Leonardo can situate his ideas and also propose new ones? How does Leonardo manipulate allegory in the bestiary to reflect Renaissance ideals encouraging human potential and betterment? How does the action-consequence sequence of the fable enable him to connect human moral conduct to universal moral laws? How does the use of laughter in the facetia enable him to suggest his moral superiority and high moral standards for human conduct? How does the rhetorical device of irony in the riddle facilitate criticism of human behaviour without being controversial? In essence, how do the literary genres Leonardo used enable him to formulate thoughts on morality? These questions arise in any attempt to bring form and meaning together, and the answers to them, found after detailed examinations of the traditions and texts, suggest that genre plays a noteworthy role in the moral expression that is found in the single texts.

Indeed, the concluding remarks in each chapter of this dissertation both propose and stress the need to consolidate the presence and validity of form and moral philosophy in

²⁹ Because of the obvious moral stance Leonardo assumes in them, these writings are sometimes referred to as the moral writings.

Leonardo's *Bestiario*, *Favole*, *Facezie*, and *Profezia*. Additionally, they suggest revisiting the debate on Leonardo as a philosopher, though within more limited and well-defined terms: that is, Leonardo as a moral philosopher vis-à-vis the literary forms used in the four literary collections studied here. Is the interplay between literary genre and moral philosophical thought significant enough to allow for a designation of Leonardo as a moral philosopher? Or is the artist simply a strong moralist?

The suggestion of a debate on Leonardo as a philosopher is not original. In fact, such a discussion occurred just over a century ago when Benedetto Croce gave a lecture titled "Leonardo filosofo,"³⁰ which was a response to what Croce perceived as a growing trend toward aggrandizing the image of Leonardo as a thinker. In his presentation, Croce recognized the artist's contributions to multiple disciplines and his indirect influence on modern philosophy and science. His goal, however, was to demystify the notion of Leonardo as a philosopher because he did not believe there was enough evidence to show that the artist was interested in real philosophical problems. Croce even calls Leonardo "afilosofo" ["aphilosophical"] and "antifilosofo" ["antiphilosophical"]. Croce's observations sparked further debate on the question. For the most part, the subsequent spate of scholarly studies spoke in favour of the notion of Leonardo as philosopher, not accepting the idea that everything can be judged according to schemata and thus challenging Croce's assessment of Leonardo. Some of these published studies include Giovanni Gentile's *Giordano Bruno e il pensiero del Rinascimento* (1920), in which there is a section titled "Leonardo filosofo," Fausto M. Bongioanni's *Leonardo pensatore* (1935), and Francesco Orestano's *Leonardo*

³⁰ His lecture was delivered at a conference held in Florence in April 1906 by the Circolo Leonardo, a series of lectures addressing various aspects of Leonardo's works. It was later published in *Leonardo: conferenze fiorentine* (1910).

Galilei Tasso (1943). The authors of these studies agree that Leonardo did not write any philosophical works nor did he subscribe to any particular philosophical school of thought; however, they do believe that he was interested in philosophical problems and even expressed elevated truths in his works and in his scientific method that have clear philosophical implications. Ernst Cassirer's *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy* (1927), Giuseppe Saitta's "Leonardo" (1949-50), and Cesare Luporini's *La mente di Leonardo* (1953) examine philosophy in Leonardo as it relates primarily to his scientific principles (which are also at the foundation of his art). Two additional, and more recent, studies may be added to this list for their investigations of Leonardo's work – primarily his paintings – and thought within a philosophical context: Karl Jasper's *Leonardo filosofo*, a 2001 Italian translation of *Lionardo als Philosoph* (1953), and Adrian Parr's *Exploring the Work of Leonardo da Vinci within the Context of Contemporary Philosophical Thought and Art: from Bergson to Deleuze* (2003).

Despite the existence of the works listed above, the debate on Leonardo as philosopher has not carried into many modern critical works on the artist. Today's scholarship on Leonardo is largely directed to his art and perhaps rightly so, given that it is the only facet of Leonardo – that of the artist – that has never been challenged. In these critical works the philosophical dimension of Leonardo's artistic production is linked to his metaphysical conception of nature and his epistemological views grounded in experience and reason, all of which, again, are abstract notions reflected in his art. The *Bestiario*, *Favole*, *Facezie*, and *Profezia* are not discussed in these works. If they are mentioned at all, it is merely in order to demonstrate Leonardo's universality. Thus, they are not properly probed for meaning and certainly not examined for evidence of their philosophical implications. By

no means does the present study claim to provide all the necessary groundwork from which to relaunch a discussion about Leonardo as a philosopher. It does, however, conduct an investigation into the philosophy in Leonardo's *Bestiario*, *Favole*, *Facezie*, and *Profezia* with some working notion of philosophy. Indeed, it is based upon a preliminary understanding of philosophy in relation to Leonardo's work and thought and even advances an idea of Leonardo as a philosopher.

According to Luporini, it is necessary to seek philosophical relevance in Leonardo, not adherence to a specific philosophy: “Non *la* filosofia, o *una* filosofia, dobbiamo cercare in Leonardo, come qualcosa di separato [...] bensì la rilevanza filosofica, rispetto alla sua epoca e al futuro, dei problemi, delle nozioni, delle ricerche effettive in cui egli si travaglia (6).³¹ Luporini's statement echoes the opinion of scholars (e.g., Gentile, Bongioanni, and Orestano) who believe that rather than attempt to find *one* particular philosophy in Leonardo,³² it is necessary to examine his overall production (thus, his paintings, sketches, fragmented writings, etc.) as a total expression motivated by philosophical intentions and having philosophical implications. Luporini's description of Leonardo as one who has philosophical relevance (“la rilevanza filosofica”) suggests that in the process of almost all he endeavoured to do and understand, Leonardo approached his subject with the aim of determining its true nature and of understanding what his relation as a human being was to the reality of the subject matter at hand. As well as recommending that Leonardo not be studied according to and within the parameters of a sole discipline (“*la* filosofia”), nor that he be recognized as belonging to a single school of philosophy (“*una* filosofia”), Luporini is

³¹ Luporini's opening remarks are a reference to Croce's polemical position expressed in the lecture cited above.

³² Leonardo no doubt had knowledge of the main principles of certain philosophical schools (even supporting some of these) that were cultivated in the cultural environment of his time. It could also be said that he provided initial stimuli and groundwork for notions that would develop fully in later generations.

also suggesting that Leonardo's method did not entail measuring new knowledge and experiences against conventions determined by pre-existing systems of thinking and knowing. As implied by Luporini, therefore, Leonardo's approach was reflective of an autonomous spirit who preferred to acquire truth by means of innovation and human ingenuity. Leonardo's independent approach is described by Parr:

The critical strength of Leonardo's work lies in the fact that he worked across disciplines, inventing forms and new vistas along the way. In this respect his work could be characterized as a mode of recombining old ideas and perceptions with new thought and material forms. In this empirical arena of experience (as artist, inventor, scientist, engineer, and so forth) Leonardo formed radically new alignments. He was not a reproductive thinker, adopting a specific direction using the same methods and ideas over and over again working primarily with formal systems of reproducibility. Instead, Leonardo was a productive thinker, whose creative practice was marked by a versatility that came from being open to both conceptual and material stimulation. (5)

In his quest to understand the nature of things, Leonardo used conventions ("old ideas and perceptions") as a starting point from which he could then distance himself in order to reach a higher level of truth that could include either experiences already systematized in a philosophy or not yet encountered in any philosophical system. Leonardo preferred to acquire knowledge by embracing unknown spaces within which he could make new discoveries. Indeed, Leonardo's philosophical maxim "La natura è piena d'infinite ragioni che non furon mai in isperienza" (ed. Vecce 197) ["Nature is full of infinite causes that have never occurred in experience" (trans. Richter 240)] suggests that not all knowledge is accessible to human beings via rationalized existing branches of knowledge; established philosophies, therefore, cannot contain all truths (only speculation). Leonardo's philosophical relevance comes from this methodology which sees him use established notions, which already have philosophical implications, in order to produce new ones that,

though they belong to an unknown and undefined system, are equally valid as philosophically relevant concepts.

While this way of characterizing Leonardo's work and thought may appear too broad or nonspecific or even too abstract, it is certainly the most appropriate for the purposes of the present study for two reasons: first, it takes into consideration the well-known fact that Leonardo was driven by such an insatiable curiosity, leading to many great preliminary discoveries and uncharted territories in the field of knowledge, as to render his method undefinable according to a single and simple categorization; second, from a practical point of view, Luporini's designation of Leonardo as a thinker with philosophical consequences (that is, as one who has philosophical relevance rather than as one who is a philosopher in the traditional and disciplinary sense) is a valid point of departure since no scholar has ever been able to ascribe Leonardo or his thought and works to one consistent and recognizable philosophical system. These reasons may lead one to question why, then, Leonardo's work and thought should even be discussed as having philosophical relevance if it cannot be explained completely by way of a systematized way of knowing and thinking. Luporini's phrase "la rilevanza filosofica" is important, for it recognizes philosophy as something more than a system within defined conceptual limits. Luporini believes that Leonardo's philosophy originates in his attitude and approach to all phenomena: "La sua filosofia, quella che conta, è in quei problemi, in quelle discussioni, che le sue ricerche effettive, e i suoi infiniti tentativi, gli sollevavano, e nell'atteggiamento fondamentale della sua mente che in ciò lo giudicava" (6). Leonardo is philosophical because he was aware of the existence of a layered reality. In any of his pursuits, he actively probed each layer in order to go beyond surface realities; he was a philosopher precisely because he set his critical eye in motion with a view

to identifying and speculating about truths of which many around him were unaware (or, at the very least, to which many, unlike him, were indifferent). This approach can also be perceived in Leonardo's *Bestiario*, *Favole*, *Facezie*, and *Profezia*. Indeed, a thorough investigation of these writings can attest to the fact that they present a pervasive value system that bears unwavering ethical-philosophical relevance in them. Because of this, it is perhaps time for scholars to move away from the practice of anthologizing these four literary collections and embrace their moral-philosophical implications instead.

The discussions presented in the following chapters bring to light a lacuna in the overall body of scholarship on Leonardo. While it is almost inevitable that there should be a disproportionately high number of studies on his art and science with respect to those dealing with his other so-called "minor" productions, this reality should not be a pretext for halting further investigations into Leonardo's literary output. The methodology used and the conclusions reached in this study, in addition to yielding new findings concerning the literary writings, are intended to encourage scholars to consider the fact that Leonardo did not resist genre forms completely, but that he did succeed in adapting them as vehicles expressing his views on morality. In this dissertation, literature is not simply regarded as an expression concerning style, language, derivation, and exposition of ideas, but is also believed to be an extension of life experience. The generic systems within which Leonardo inscribes the texts of the *Bestiario*, *Favole*, *Facezie*, and *Profezia* reveal convictions that are firmly grounded in life. Literature, therefore, is not separated from life experience; Leonardo as a literary writer attempts to clarify life in literature. The aesthetic aspects or literariness of these four collections may not be the main focus of the present study, but they are subsumed in the discussion of the texts as literary vehicles for revealing awareness of life. If we are to resume

the broader discussion on Leonardo as a philosopher (more specifically as a moral philosopher, as this study proposes), then the previously neglected “minor” texts must be given their due recognition. Only by filling this lacuna on Leonardo’s literary production can a foundation be created from which to launch a broader discussion on Leonardo as a serious thinker.

Chapter 1 The *Bestiario*

i. Preliminaries to Leonardo's *Bestiario*

In a small notebook known as manuscript *H*,³³ datable circa 1494-95 and currently housed in the Institute of France in Paris, Leonardo jotted down allegorical descriptions of nearly one hundred real and imaginary animals. Unlike Leonardo's other literary writings, most of which are scattered throughout his notebooks and found among sketches and miscellaneous texts, the *Bestiario* is neatly arranged and was written on thirty-nine consecutive pages with few interruptions and very few corrections (ff.5r to 27v and 48v).³⁴ The *Bestiario*, in fact, constitutes the main part of this portion of the bound manuscript, as it is preceded only by a small number of folios (from 1r to 4v) containing Latin conjugations, blank spaces, and sketches of water and sand.

Thanks to Solmi's seminal study *Scritti vinciani: Le fonti dei manoscritti di Leonardo da Vinci e altri studi*, we know that Leonardo drew from three principal written sources for inspiration when compiling his *Bestiario*. These three texts were part of his personal library collection:³⁵ the *Fiore di virtù*³⁶ (Venice, 1471), believed to have been originally compiled by the Bolognese friar Tommaso Gozzadini; Book 3 of the physician and poet Cecco d'Ascoli's didactic poem, *L'Acerba* (which appeared in print in Milan in 1484); and Book 8 of Pliny the Elder's *Historia naturalis* (Venice, 1476), a vernacular edition of the Roman

³³ Manuscript *H* is comprised of three pocket-size notebooks. The *Bestiario* forms the first portion of the bound volume.

³⁴ Marinoni's description of the *Bestiario* reads as follows: "La difficoltà che il lettore odierno prova di fronte a una materia così favolosa non deve influire sulla valutazione dei pregi formali del *Bestiario*. Esso occupa una serie continua di pagine del *Codice H*, dal f.5r. al 27v., e l'esser redatto con ordinata continuità, in una scrittura accurata interrotta da poche cancellature, ci conferma che si tratta di un testo molto vicino alla forma definitiva. Anzi, fra i testi di Leonardo di una certa estensione, è forse il più vicino all'ultima forma" (*Scritti* 51).

³⁵ The *Bestiario*'s three main sources are found among the items in the earlier book list in the codex *Atlanticus*.

³⁶ The first thirty-five writings in the *Bestiario* do not directly derive from the *Fiore di virtù*, but from Franco Sacchetti's *Delle proprietà degli animali*, a late-fourteenth century abbreviated version of the *Fiore* (Vecce 89).

natural philosopher's *Historia naturalis* translated by Cristoforo Landino (1424-98).³⁷ For other single animal passages, such as those on the caterpillar, spider, tarantula, cowfish and hoot owl, and green lizard, no specific sources have been identified. Vecce calls our attention to other possible influences on the *Bestiario* in general (89): Albertus Magnus's *De animalibus* (written between 1250 and 1280) and the bestiaries in Pulci's epic poem *Morgante* (published in its final form in 1483), which derived from Landino's vernacular translation of Pliny and which Leonardo listed among his first inventory of books.

The first thirty-five passages in Leonardo's *Bestiario* correspond to those in the *Fiore di virtù*,³⁸ following an order in the presentation of the virtues and vices more or less analogous to that adopted in this source.³⁹ The *Fiore* is a moral treatise written in prose. It resembles the Greek *Physiologus*, a fundamental text in the history of the bestiary genre in Western culture and civilization, in two ways: first, in its adoption of animal descriptions from the Greek text; second, in its emphasis on a purpose and application that strip the beasts and birds of their natural qualities in order to subordinate them to an exclusively symbolic purpose (that is, as an allegorical expression) and religious meaning. In the *Fiore*, a definition of a virtue or vice as it is theorized in the Scriptures or in the works of Greek and Roman philosophers and of the early Church Fathers prefaces each chapter describing animal habits; then, the virtue is evoked in the characteristic behaviours of the animals; and finally, an example of the virtue is demonstrated as it is manifested in a Biblical episode.

³⁷ In chronological order, Leonardo's primary sources were originally written in the following years: *Historia naturalis* (c. AD 77); *Fiore di virtù* (compiled in the early thirteenth century); and *L'Acerba* (written in the first decade of the fourteenth century)

³⁸ From here onwards, the *Fiore di virtù* will be called the *Fiore*.

³⁹ According to Solmi, the descriptions deriving from the *Fiore* are: calander (a species of lark), kite, rooster, raven, beaver, bear, hoopoe, basilisk, eagle, toad, mermaid, ant, wild ox, bee, crane, fox, partridge, mole, hare, falcon (both passages), peafowl (or peacock), phoenix, swallow, camel, unicorn, lamb, wild ass, vulture, turtle-dove, bat, and ermine. Later, other critics like Richter, added the pigeon, and additional passages describing the lion and the rooster (*Scritti* 155-69).

At first glance, it is the difference in length between the descriptions in Leonardo's writing and those of his source that is most apparent: those of the *Fiore* are noticeably longer than Leonardo's brief versions. Indeed, while the *Fiore* is composed of forty-eight chapters and is formally narrated, the *Bestiario* resembles a series of annotations that privilege brevity and conciseness, a quality reflecting the fragmentary style pervading all his notebooks.⁴⁰ Despite this structural difference between the two texts, Leonardo still captures the distinguishing habits and peculiarities of each animal described in the *Fiore*. Let us consider some examples from the *Bestiario*.

As in the Greek *Physiologus* and traditional medieval bestiaries, the turtle-dove in both the *Fiore* and *Bestiario* represents chastity. Whereas in the *Fiore* the description of the turtle-dove occupies a number of pages and is embedded between theological citations to explain its moral symbolism, in Leonardo's text, it is depicted in brief and simple prose: "Castità. La tortora non fa mai fallo al suo compagno, e se l'uno more, l'altro osserva perpetua castità, e non si posa mai su ramo verde e non beve mai acqua chiara" (ed. Vecce 77) ["The turtle-dove is never false to its mate; and if one dies the other preserves perpetual chastity, and never sits on a green bough, nor ever again drinks of clear water" (trans. Richter 265)]. Like the turtle-dove, the *Fiore*'s basilisk is flanked by religious explanations whereas Leonardo's passage on the basilisk consists merely of a few lines: "Crudeltà. Il basalischio è di tanta crudeltà che quando colla sua venenosa vista non pò occidere li animali, si volta all'erbe e le piante, e fermando in quelle la sua vista le fa seccare" (ed. Vecce 74) ["The basilisk is so utterly cruel that when it cannot kill animals by its baleful gaze, it turns upon

⁴⁰ The passage on the elephant, the longest of the *Bestiario*, is still comparatively brief and concise with respect to the comparable section of the *Fiore*. Leonardo also abbreviated the titles: "De la invidia," "De la pace," "De la ira," "De la mesericordia" and "De la crudelità," for instance, are shortened to "Invidia," "Pace," "Ira," "Gratitudine," and "Crudeltà."

herbs and plants, and fixing its gaze on them withers them up” (trans. Richter 262)]. In these examples, as in others inspired by the *Fiore*, Leonardo retains the moral lesson embodied in both the turtle-dove and the basilisk as being the virtue of chastity and the vice of cruelty, respectively. Despite this correspondence between the two texts, the animal descriptions in the *Bestiario* reveal motives at variance with their source; this difference is confirmed by Leonardo’s total omission of the parts that are strictly religious. While the beasts and birds in the *Fiore* serve to illustrate the virtue or vice in Christian terms, they assume another role in Leonardo’s text.

The twenty odd animal passages following those influenced by the *Fiore* are copied from Cecco’s *L’Acerba* and also reproduced more faithfully,⁴¹ with respect to those inspired by the former source. This may be due to Cecco’s and Leonardo’s interest in matters relating to science. Not only was Cecco an astrologer, but he was also a professor of medicine and philosophy. In the same way as the *Fiore*, Book 3 of *L’Acerba* employs allegory for didactic purposes, although its application of this method is slightly more moderate and its objectives are more scientific in nature than the *Fiore*. In his interpretation of *L’Acerba*, Leonardo reinforces Renaissance compositional ideals in his preference and taste for clarity of style. This is evident, for example, in the description of the stork, a reduction of over twenty verses from Cecco’s poem: “Cicogna. Questa bevendo la salsa acqua, caccia da sé il male. Se truova la compagn’in fallo l’abbandona, e quando è vecchia i sua figlioli la covano e pascan infin che more” (ed. Vecce 79) [“This bird, by drinking salt water, purges itself of distempers. If the male finds his mate unfaithful, he abandons her; and when it grows old its young ones

⁴¹ These are the descriptions identified by Solmi: eagle, lumerpa, pelican, salamander, chameleon, alep (a type of fish or shellfish), ostrich, swan, stork, cricket, bat, partridge, swallow, oyster, basilisk, asp, dragon, viper, crocodile, scorpion and toad. Gerolamo Calvi, Richter, and Giovanni De Toni added one of the four descriptions on the lion (there is a fifth passage on the lioness).

brood over it, and feed it till it dies” (trans. Richter 267)]. Leonardo, once again privileging succinctness, captures the properties and habits of the animals in question, while omitting superfluous and obscure verses as well as those that are not compatible with the implication of his work, thus producing a *Bestiario* that appears to be the result of logic and concrete observation.

The renewed interest in the works and thought of the classics in Italian Renaissance culture is manifest in Leonardo’s attempt to adapt the zoological writings from the ancient author Pliny, from whom the artist borrowed over thirty animal descriptions. Aptly noted by Gerolamo Calvi in an early study, but still the most immediate observation today, a comparison of the *Bestiario* with Book 8 of Pliny’s *Historia naturalis* highlights two important aspects not present in either of Leonardo’s medieval sources: the stress on literalism and the additional information on the morphology, physiology, and geography of the animals described (“Il manoscritto H” 75).⁴² The passage on the catoblepas, a type of antelope, demonstrates this point: “Catoplea. Questa nasce in Etiopia vicino al fonte Nigricapo. È animale non troppo grande, è pigra in tutte le membra e ha ’l capo di tanta grandezza che malagevolmente lo porta, in modo che sempre sta chinato inverso la terra altrimenti sarebbe di somma peste alli omini, perché qualunque è veduta da sua occhi subito more” (ed. Vecce 85) [“It is found in Ethiopia near to the source of Nigricapo. It is not a very large animal, is sluggish in all its parts, and its head is so large that it carries it with difficulty, in such wise that it always droops towards the ground; otherwise it would be a great pest to man, for any one on whom it fixes its eyes dies immediately” (trans. Richter 273)]. Leonardo’s attention to these details, especially those concerning the physicality of the

⁴² Calvi is well known for his significant contribution to the study of Leonardo’s manuscripts: *I manoscritti di Leonardo da Vinci: dal punto di vista cronologico, storico, e biografico* (1925).

animal, should not come as a surprise given the enormous body of evidence in his manuscripts of observations based on the form and function of the physical world. Leonardo borrowed more beasts and birds, including more imaginary animals, from Pliny's encyclopedic work. Moreover, the *Bestiario* passages influenced by the ancient writer are the longest and display more attention to content with respect to those based on the *Fiore* and *L'Acerba*.⁴³ The absence of association between a virtue or a vice and an animal constitutes the main difference between the classical work by Pliny and Leonardo's two medieval sources. By following Pliny, Leonardo strips the final animal descriptions of the *Bestiario* collection of explicit allegorical and moral allusions, bestowing on them more realism and concreteness.

The question of the function of the *Bestiario* differs somewhat from that of the other three collections to be examined in the present study. In the following three chapters, in fact, it will be noted that the *Favole*, *Facezie*, and *Profezia* were most likely meant to be recited at court as amusement for its members. Leonardo too might have drawn from his *Bestiario* pithy moral sayings to be used during conversations at court. Calvi believes that some of the texts in the *Bestiario* might have even been intended for use as prophecies ("Il manoscritto H" 95). Specifically, he is referring to the note in the margin accompanying a few animal descriptions: for example, "Dell'antivedere" ["Of foresight"] and "Pel vizio che non pò stare dov'è la virtù" ["For Vice, that cannot remain where Virtue appears"].⁴⁴ These marginalia

⁴³ The following passages are transcribed from *Historia naturalis*: elephant, dragon, serpent (both descriptions), boa, elk, bison, lioness, lion, panther (both descriptions), tiger, camel, catoblepas, basilisk, weasel, ceraste (a poisonous snake with small horns), amphisboena (a fictitious snake), iaculus (a snake called coluber), asp, ichneumon (mongoose), crocodile, dolphin, hippopotamus, ibis, stag, lizard, swallow, weasel, wild boar, chameleon, and raven. To this list, Richter adds another description with the title *Lions, Pards, Panthers, Tigers*.

⁴⁴ These are some examples; the italicized words or phrases are those referred to by Calvi: "Dell'antivedere. Il gallo non canta se prima tre volte non batte l'alie. Il pappagallo nel mutarsi per rami non mette i piè dove non ha prima messo il becco" (ed. Vecce 88) ["Of foresight. The cock does not crow till it has thrice flapped its

recall the recurring phrases in the *Profezia* beginning with the prepositions “di” (“Delle lanterna” [“Of Lanterns”]) or “per” (“Cioè per mare” [“That is, across the sea”]) which Leonardo uses to reveal the solution to his riddling prophecies. However, the allegorical dimension in the *Bestiario* has also led scholars to hypothesize that the symbolism attached to the animal descriptions was more likely meant to aid Leonardo in his creation of emblems, allegorical depictions cleverly combining words and images to represent a family name and its attributes. The custom of devising and discussing emblems was quite prevalent in Italian Renaissance culture,⁴⁵ with many powerful families and individuals summoning artists to produce emblems for propaganda and political influence. To do this, artists of the time often drew on animal descriptions from bestiary-like texts, for these were useful repertoires of animal symbolism to inspire figurative representations of various beasts and birds or to embody human vices and virtues in images rather than in words (B. White 27).

Without doubt, Ludovico Sforza requested such emblems from Leonardo for political structures, hall decorations in palaces, or for preparations for festivities. Indeed, a number of folios in manuscript *H* contain animal drawings with accompanying written virtues or moral sayings. One such example on folio 49v is the sketch of a plate (for a shield perhaps?) of a dragon and lion, next to which the words “prudencia” [“prudence”] and “forteza” [“strength”] are written.⁴⁶ In the *Bestiario* the lion is associated with strength. Vecce relates the portrait of Cecilia Gallerani, Ludovico’s mistress, to the *Bestiario* text on the ermine, given their shared

wings; the parrot in moving among boughs never puts its feet excepting where it has first put its beak. Vows are not made till Hope is dead” (trans. Richter 276)]; and “Palpistrello. Pel vizio che non pò stare dov’è la virtù. Questo dov’è più luce più si fa orbo, e come più guarda il sole più s’acceca” (ed. Vecce 79) [“The bat. The more light there is the blinder this creature becomes; as those who gaze most at the sun become most dazzled – For Vice, that cannot remain where Virtue appears” (trans. Richter 267)].

⁴⁵ Emblems had become so popular in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that their use had been systematized in treatises such as Paolo Giovio’s *Ragionamento sopra i motti e i disegni d’arme e d’amore che comunemente chiamano Imprese* (printed posthumously in 1556), a dialogue with Lodovico Domenichi (1515-64) in which Giovio discusses *imprese* (emblems) and prescribes rules for such puzzles.

⁴⁶ The quality associated with the lion (“forteza”) corresponds to that given in the *Bestiario*.

imagery (*Leonardo* 147).⁴⁷ In the portrait, Gallerani is holding and stroking an ermine.

According to Fumagalli, the following imperative note, also in manuscript *H*, clearly refers to an eventual allegorical image (*Omo senza lettere* 221): “Amor, timor e reverenzia: *questo scrivi in tre sassi de’ gru*” (ed. Vecce 90; emphasis mine) [“Love, fear and reverence – *write these upon the three stones of the cranes*” (trans. McCurdy 490: 2; emphasis mine)]. This note is preceded by four lines describing the way in which the crane holds stones in its claw to keep from falling asleep while guarding its king: “Lealtà. Le gru a ciò che lor re non perisca per cattiva guardia la notte li stanno d’intorno con pietre in piè” (ibid.) [“Loyalty. The cranes in order that their king may not perish by their keeping bad guard stand round him at night holding stones in their feet” (ibid.)].⁴⁸ Earlier scholars such as Calvi hypothesize that these texts were being used on the capitals of columns.⁴⁹

The above information no doubt contextualizes the *Bestiario*, enabling us to better understand the role of these writings in Leonardo’s life. Though there is much evidence in manuscript *H* to suggest that the collection was a sort of tool to inspire allegorical

⁴⁷ The ermine symbolizes moderation: “Moderanza. L’ermellino per la sua moderanzia non mangia se n’una sola volta il dì, e prima si lascia pigliare a’ cacciatori che volere fuggire nella infangata tana, per non maculare la sua gentilezza” (ed. Vecce 78) [“Moderation. The ermine out of moderation never eats but once in a day; it will rather let itself be taken by the hunters than take refuge in a dirty lair, in order not to stain its purity” (trans. Richter 266)].

⁴⁸ This description of the crane is a shorter version of the following longer one in the *Bestiario*: “Fedeltà over lialtà. Le gru son tanto fedeli e leali al loro re che la notte, quando lui dorme, alcune vanno dintorno al prato per guardare da lunga, altre ne stanno da presso, e tengano uno sasso ciascuna in piè, a ciò che se ’l sonno le vincessi, essa pietra caderebbe e farebbe tal romore che si ridesterebbono. E altre vi sono che ’nsieme intorno a’ re dormano, e ciò fanno ogni notte, scambiandosi a ciò ch’il loro re non venghi a mancare” (ed. Vecce 75) [“Fidelity, or Loyalty. The cranes are so faithful and loyal to their king that at night, when he is sleeping, some of them go round the field to keep watch at a distance; others remain near, each holding a stone in his foot, so that if sleep should overcome them, this stone would fall and make so much noise that they would wake up again. And there are others which sleep together round the king; and this they do every night, changing in turn so that their king may never find them wanting” (trans. Richter 263)].

⁴⁹ Calvi states the following: “Tra le ipotesi, che possono occorrere alla mente è questa, che Leonardo volesse fare cogli elementi così raccolti (specialmente con quelli desunti dal *Fiore di virtù*) delle imprese, che ornassero targhe simili a quelle che oggi vediamo sui capitelli sforzeschi di quel tempo” (“Il manoscritto H” 91). In his anthology, Richter catalogued the above crane text with this note under the section “Studies and Sketches for Pictures and Decorations” so as to suggest that it was meant for an eventual allegorical depiction. Unlike Calvi, however, he does not explicitly say so.

representations, a definite conclusion cannot be reached about all the texts in the collection as being used for this purpose or that Leonardo needed to document the behaviours of all the animals comprising his *Bestiario*. Perhaps Leonardo's fascination with animals and nature led him to document as many animals as possible in the manner he thought most suitable. In his reelaboration of sources, Leonardo produced an original bestiary in his conflation of parts from three different sources. He did so on thirty-nine consecutive pages, a detail suggesting a concerted effort on his part to create something more than mere functional texts and resulting in the construction of an organized sequence of unique writings on animal habits. If Leonardo were interested in animal symbolism only for allegorical representations, could he not simply have transcribed his sources verbatim? Instead, his writings are deliberate adaptations of his sources. Thus, it is difficult to examine the *Bestiario* as a simple catalogue of animal properties. In fact, if it were so, it would not have a place in the present study, one of whose aims is to study the *Bestiario* as a literary collection belonging to a recognized literary genre tradition. In the present study Leonardo's *Bestiario* will be considered as a collection that was guided by particular principles and meant to convey a particular meaning by its author.

Though considered a minor written work and not studied with the same frequency or depth as Leonardo's well-known *Trattato della pittura* or his artistic masterpieces, the *Bestiario* has nonetheless aroused enough interest in some scholars to have them include the entire text – or at least some passages – in their anthologies of the artist's literary production. The selections of these, in fact, comprise the substance of publications on the *Bestiario*; the editors reproduced the collection in the order in which it was originally compiled in manuscript *H*. Among these anthologies, the two more worth noting are Luigi Malerba's

Bestiario e favole (1986) and Marinoni's *Bestiario e favole* (1988). As the titles indicate, both publications restrict their analyses and reproduction of texts to Leonardo's *Bestiario* and *Favole*. In doing so, Malerba and Marinoni offer more in-depth and specialized studies of the artist's adaptation of his sources with respect to many of the more general anthologies of the artist's literary writings.

Somewhat similar to Malerba and Marinoni, Giovanni Battista De Toni, who published *Le piante e gli animali in Leonardo da Vinci* (1922), adopts the format of anthologies, but limits his scope to plants and animals: "in quanto esse contengano avvertimenti o paragoni con animali e piante" (179). His anthology, therefore, includes only those literary writings of Leonardo that use plants or animals as their subject matters. Though De Toni includes the texts of *Favole*, *Facezie*, and *Profezia*, the *Bestiario* actually plays a larger part in his study because of its primary concentration on animal behaviours. What is more, he titles the section containing the *Bestiario* writings "Le note zoologiche," thus assigning a scientific status to the collection.⁵⁰ By contextualizing the *Bestiario* in the larger spectrum of the artist's production on plants and animals, De Toni underscores Leonardo's impressive familiarity with (and evident interest in) particulars of nature and his ability to draw analogies between components belonging to apparently separate worlds (that is, between the human and natural worlds).

Studies typically approached from an art historical perspective focus on the possible relations between the *Bestiario* and Leonardo's drawings and paintings. Luisa Cogliati Arano's articles – "Fonti del 'Bestiario' di Leonardo" (1982) and "Dal 'Fisiologo' al 'Bestiario' di Leonardo" (1996-97) – demonstrate how the written text corresponds to animal

⁵⁰ Indeed, while De Toni places the *Favole*, *Facezie*, and *Profezia* at the end of his study as peripheric writings, he places the *Bestiario* in the primary sections relating to the sciences: botany, studies on horses, and the anatomy and embryology of animals.

drawings and link the *Bestiario* to many of Leonardo's notebook sketches of both real and fictitious animals. Arano begins her earlier article by stating that "[l]a sicurezza del testo scritto [the *Bestiario*] ha una componente figurativa: la consuetudine di Leonardo a rappresentare animali reali o fantastici" ("Fonti" 151). The *Bestiario*'s figurative allusions enable Arano to argue that the *Bestiario* cannot be studied independently from Leonardo's animal sketches.

Differing in scope from the above publications, Bruno Nardini's *Fables of Leonardo da Vinci* (1973) is a particularly delightful adaptation of selected passages from both the *Bestiario* and *Favole* as a children's book. Along the same lines, we may also include *Gli animali fantastici di Leonardo da Vinci* (2002), a collaborative effort by the Museo Nazionale della Scienza e della Tecnologia and the Associazione Nazionale Umoristi (ANU). Inspired by the animal accounts of Leonardo's *Bestiario*, this is a publication of drawings and short stories composed by young persons who participated in a national artistic-literary competition in Italy. Furthermore, an illustrated transcription of the *Bestiario* is included in *Laboratorio di Leonardo* (1983),⁵¹ a printed exhibit of computer-generated and coloured images edited by IBM Italia; it also appends a sample of a concordance for the *Bestiario*.

In the anthologies, as well as in the Introduction of the present study, the *Bestiario* is introduced and examined by means of a primarily philological approach. This apparently preferred methodology has provided helpful insight into and requisite information about Leonardo's writing skills and linguistic peculiarities, not to mention his level of education.⁵² The method culminated in Marinoni's well-known *Gli appunti grammaticali e lessicali di*

⁵¹ This publication, an initiative of the government of Italy and the city of Milan, was the result of the collaboration of the following individuals: Augusto Marinoni, Angelo Cerizza, Carlo Alberto Segnini, Gian Paolo Ceserani, and Laura Benzi.

⁵² Having been born out of wedlock, Leonardo did not have much opportunity for a formal education. He was, thus, self-taught in many of the disciplines in which he showed interest.

Leonardo da Vinci (1944) in which the scholar collected the data from his extensive research in a two-volume comprehensive and categorical report of Leonardo's linguistic variances as well as his weaknesses and strengths as a writer. Many other studies on the *Bestiario* emphasize external thematic, stylistic, and linguistic inconsistencies within the writing itself and occasionally draw comparisons between Leonardo's text and his immediate influences. These studies, however, seldom consider the *Bestiario* in the broader context of its historical tradition, nor do they highlight the thought process underpinning the text and its relevance to some fundamental ideas of the Italian Renaissance.

ii. The Tradition of the Bestiary

a. Ancient Writers and the Greek *Physiologus*

Although they each belong to separate genre categories, all three of Leonardo's immediate sources – the *Fiore di virtù*, Book 3 of Cecco's *L'Acerba*, and Book 8 of Pliny's *Historia naturalis* – are part of the ancient tradition of the Greek *Physiologus*. While the zoological section of Pliny's encyclopedic work provides stimuli for the compilation of the *Physiologus*, Leonardo's two medieval sources represent direct descendants of the Greek text, for they each incorporate animal imagery that can be traced directly to the descriptions of beasts and birds found in both the *Physiologus* and the writings of the ancients.⁵³

The *Physiologus* is an anonymous work generally believed to have been compiled in Greek by a Graeco-Christian monk in Alexandria some time between the first and fourth centuries AD.⁵⁴ Cast in a strictly allegorical vein, the compilation consists of forty-nine chapters, each beginning with the distinctive phrases "Physiologus says" or "According to

⁵³ In fact, the *Fiore* contains twelve of the thirty-five descriptions found in the *Physiologus*.

⁵⁴ There is still disagreement surrounding the date of composition as well as the identity of the alleged author.

Physiologus,” that not only exhibit virtues and vices as they are displayed in the characterizing habits and peculiarities of real and fictitious animals, but also describe the virtuous qualities of plants and precious stones.⁵⁵

The full history of the *Physiologus* can be traced to animal folk legends in the oral tradition of Eastern cultures (Indian, Hebrew, or Egyptian) and continues into the time of Herodotus (d. 415 BC); however, written evidence of the nature and behaviour of animals is documented before the appearance of the *Physiologus* in the works of ancient writers in Greek and Roman antiquity. Aristotle’s *On the History of Animals* (350 BC), Book 8 of Pliny’s *Historia naturalis*, and, possibly contemporary with the compilation of the Greek text, Aelian’s *On the Characteristics of Animals* (AD 220) were intended as serious zoological studies documenting observed natural phenomena. In fact, the original term *physiologus* (which in Greek means “natural philosopher”) was coined by Aristotle to refer to thinkers who founded their philosophies on observations from nature and displayed knowledge of the natural world. Indeed, the recurring phrases “Physiologus says” and “According to Physiologus” simply mean “The naturalist says” or “According to the natural philosopher.” Thus, the generic title of the *Physiologus* does not shed light on the identity of the author of the text since it does not refer to a specific person.

Though showing interest in the natural world, the author of the *Physiologus* had as his principal aim that of attaching a moralization to animal descriptions from ancient influences by infusing the descriptions with Christian doctrine and inculcating readers with

⁵⁵ Some *Physiologus* scholars believe the text is comprised of forty-eight chapters; however, Francesco Sbordone’s count of forty-nine chapters is more widely accepted. The following is a chronological list of the subject matters of each chapter of the *Physiologus*: Lion, Lizard, Caladrius, Pelican, Owl, Eagle, Phoenix, Hoopoe, Onager, Viper, Snake, Ant, Siren and Onocentaur, Hedgehog, Fox, Panther, Aspidochelone, Partridge, Vulture, Ant-lion, Weasel, Unicorn, Beaver, Hyaena, Hydrus, Ichneumon, Crow, Turtle-dove, Frog, Stag, Salamander, Diamond, Swallow, Peridexion Tree, Doves, Antelope, Fire Stones, Magnet, Sawfish, Ibis, Goat, Diamond, Elephant, Pearl and Agate, Onager and Ape, Indian Stone, Coot, Amos and the Fig Tree, and Ostrich.

moral instruction.⁵⁶ It is quite clear that the author of the Greek text did not wish to compose a scientific treatise, but rather to unveil mysteries and highlight the significance of the Christian faith vis-à-vis the habits and peculiarities of God's creatures on earth. It is precisely this allegorical element and the symbolic references in the *Physiologus* that constitute the text's innovation as well as a turning point in the ancient tradition of documenting the activities of beasts and birds. Composed in a simple and accessible style, the *Physiologus* was successful in encouraging allegorical interpretations of animals and immediately became popular and circulated widely. Many quotations and references to the *Physiologus* in the Greek and the Latin Fathers show that it was one of the most generally known works in Christian antiquity. The text's popularity not only signalled the rise and influence of Christianity during the early Middle Ages, but also expedited the evolution of the *Physiologus* into the bestiary, which continued to expand as it was copied into Latin and into many Romance and Germanic languages.

In the fifth century the *Physiologus* was translated for the first time into Ethiopic and soon after into Armenian, Arabic, and Syriac, while the earliest surviving Latin manuscripts can be dated to the eighth century. Though Latin translations were subsequent to others, it is not until the *Physiologus* is translated into Latin that it becomes widespread and assumes multiple and innovative forms, known as the proper *bestiarum*.⁵⁷ One of the earliest and principal Latin versions, known as *Versio Y*, is generally attributed to Johannes Chrysostomus (c. 347-407), Archbishop of Constantinople (398-404), who, in his *Dicta*

⁵⁶ For a more detailed analysis of the *Physiologus* and its sources, the following texts are recommended: Michael Curley, ed., *Physiologus* (1979); Francis J. Carmody, ed., *Physiologus: The Very Ancient Book of Beasts, Plants and Stones* (1953) and *Physiologus latinus versio y* (1939); and Sbordone, *Ricerche sulle fonti e sulla composizione del Physiologus greco* (1936). B. White notes that the *Physiologus* also borrowed "from a variety of materials, from Talmudic sources, the Old Testament, folklore, and travellers' tales" (21).

⁵⁷ Florence McCulloch provides an excellent account of the bestiary's history and its manuscript tradition in *Mediaeval Latin and French Bestiaries* (1962).

Johannis Chrysostomi de naturis bestiarum,⁵⁸ reordered the animals into quadrupeds, reptiles and birds and omitted chapters on plants and minerals. The innovation and modifications introduced in the *Dicta* were symptomatic of future bestiary compilations and marked a turning point in the tradition of the genre, thereby constituting a major shift from the Greek original.

Imitating the format of the Latin versions, the medieval bestiary, now abundantly and anonymously copied by scribes, developed into a handbook with additional chapters as well as with new categorizations of animal species extracted from other sources, most notably from *De animalibus*, Book 12 of Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* (compiled in the late 610s-20s). Exerting its influence far into the Middle Ages, Isidore's encyclopedic work is divided into subject matters, provides an etymological explanation for each animal name and proceeds with a short description – at times, of a fictitious nature – of the beast. Book 12 was greatly influenced by the eighth volume of Pliny's *Historia naturalis*.

Leonardo's place in the tradition of the *Physiologus* is established through his integration of his three principal sources into his *Bestiario*. While the zoological section of Pliny's encyclopedic work is a source of inspiration for the compiler of the *Physiologus*, Leonardo's two medieval sources – the *Fiore* and Cecco's *L'Acerba* – are indirect descendants of the Greek text. The dichotomy between literature and science in the tradition of the bestiary genre comes from a gradual and intricate fusion of different material. Leonardo contributes to this long-standing tradition, introducing some original aspects, to create his own version of writing about the world of animals.

Although the transmission of the *Physiologus* into the *Bestiario* is a complex weaving of relations between many texts, an isolated reading of Leonardo's writing is sufficient not

⁵⁸ It is thought that the *Dicta Chrysostomi* text actually originated in France around 1000.

only to intuit the presence of the Greek original, but also to recognize common points of reference. The *Bestiario* contains approximately twenty animal passages that can be directly traced to the *Physiologus*, which is comprised of forty-two writings on beasts and birds. In the example of the beaver, the most homogenous aspect of the tradition emerges: the defining characteristic of a particular animal, which, in the beaver's case, is the medicinal benefit of its testicles. In the *Physiologus*, the beaver is described in the following way:

There is an animal called the beaver who is extremely inoffensive and quiet. His genitals are helpful as a medicine and he is found in the king's palace. When the beaver sees the hunter hastening to overtake him in the mountains, he bites off his own genitals and throws them before the hunter. If another hunter happens to pursue him later on, he throws himself on his back and shows himself to the hunter. And the hunter, seeing that the beast has no genitals, departs from him (Trans. Michael J. Curley 52).⁵⁹

Leonardo's version reads as follows: "Pace. Del castoro si legge che, quando è perseguitato, conoscendo essere per la virtù de' sua medicinali testicoli, esso, non potendo più fuggire, si ferma e, per avere pace coi cacciatori, coi sua taglienti denti si spicca i testicoli e li lascia a' sua nemici" (ed. Vecce 73) ["Peace. We read of the beaver that when it is pursued, knowing that it is for the virtue [contained] in its medicinal testicles and not being able to escape, it stops; and to be at peace with its pursuers, it bites off its testicles with its sharp teeth, and leaves them to its enemies" (trans. Richter 261)]. Like many bestiaries that were written before Leonardo's time, the *Bestiario* makes use of oft-recycled animal tales that can be

⁵⁹ Curley's translation is based on the two editions of the Latin *Physiologus* prepared by Carmody (see note above), the y- and b-versions. The author has relied primarily on the y-version since it is generally agreed to be the closer of the two to the Greek original. The remainder of the passage on the beaver reads as follows: "O, and you who behave in a manly way, O citizen of God, if you have given to the hunter the things which are his, he no longer approaches you. If you have had evil inclinations toward sin, greed, adultery, theft, cut them away from you and give them to the devil. The Apostle said, 'Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, honor to whom honor is due,' and so on [Rom. 13:7]. Let us first throw the disgraces of sins which are within us before the devil, for they are his works, and let us give to God the things which are God's, prayers and the fruit of our good works. [Separate yourself from the works of the flesh, which are the tax and tribute of the devil, and acquire the spiritual fruits: charity, joy, peace, patience, goodness, faith, meekness, continence, chastity in good works, that is, in alms, visitations to the sick, the care of the poor, the praise of God, in prayers and the performance of kindnesses and other acts of God.]" (52).

traced to the *Physiologus* tradition vis-à-vis the recognition of textual references in the plot traditionally associated with an animal. Though Leonardo retains the central aspects of the plot in his passage on the beaver, he manipulates the story to suit the meaning and purpose he wishes to give to his written compilation. This practice was not uncommon, as Francesco Sbordone observes, since part of the *Physiologus*'s appeal lies in the flexibility of its animal plots, which could accommodate different themes and objectives: "In taluni capitoli [...] l'animale è inseguito dal cacciatore, e talvolta riesce a salvarsi, tal altra soccombe; cotesto schema doveva riuscir comodo agli allegoristi" (52).

Certainly the greatest difference between the *Physiologus* and *Bestiario* is the total absence in Leonardo's text of the religious-moral aspect. In the *Bestiario*, the authority of animal behaviour does not rest in the word of God, which, in the *Physiologus*, explains and concludes the animal legend. Leonardo's decision is hardly accidental since, in his writing, he clearly distances himself from religious examples in his depiction of animals and emphasizes more naturalistic aspects and concrete facts. Leonardo's stress on literalism and on its implications will be discussed at greater length in the last section of this chapter.

b. The Development of the Bestiary in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance

Despite its ancient tradition, the bestiary is a predominantly medieval genre that flourished between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries because of its exotic animal lore, as well as its accessible subject matter, to which teachers and preachers often referred for the purpose of extracting useful moral precepts and facilitating Christian instruction to their pupils. During this period, the bestiary genre underwent its most radical transformation in both form and content. This is due to the emergence of Latin translations of the *Physiologus* and

encyclopediae works like the well-known *Etymologiae* by Isidore of Seville (c. 560-636). Latin translations of the Greek text contributed to the expanded version of the *Physiologus*, thereby inspiring major changes in the genre and contributing to its accessibility and availability to a variety of readers.⁶⁰ So too did Isidore's Book 12 about animals (in the *Etymologiae*); later compilers quoted Isidore extensively and added the allegory in the beast story where Isidore omitted it. Consequently, the *Physiologus* entered the culture of vernacular languages and exerted its influence on an even wider audience as it was studied in the monasteries, cited by preachers in their sermons, and consulted by teachers in the classroom. In brief, the bestiary was used primarily as a picture handbook that contained contents that were easily assimilated into and applied to the system and mental outlook of the Middle Ages.

The bestiary genre expansion, which, in some cases, saw compilations containing nearly one hundred and fifty different animals, suggests a set of textual influences besides the *Physiologus* (i.e., texts employing animal imagery that could be reinterpreted as expressions of divine authority). In addition to the information reproduced from Isidore's encyclopedic work, the material of other writings, some of which preceded the Greek original, was also frequently borrowed: some examples include Books 5 and 6 of Ambrose's *Hexaemeron* (c. AD 360); Solinus's *Collectanea rerum memorabilium* (c. AD 230-40); Albertus Magnus's *De animalibus* (written between 1250-80); Bartholomew of England's encyclopedic work *De proprietatibus rerum* (c. 1230-60); and Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum naturale* (written between 1220-44). For the first time, the descriptive content of the *Physiologus* underwent inevitable modifications; specifically, the works mentioned above

⁶⁰ Two notable examples of Latin *bestiaria* are the *Dicta Johannis Chrysostomi de naturis bestiarum* and the *Physiologus Theobaldi*, composed in verse and attributed to Theobaldus, probably the Abbot of Monte Cassino from 1022 to 1035.

introduced more sophisticated classifications of species (e.g., reptiles, birds, fish, quadrupeds) and organizational features absent in the Greek original, while some medieval bestiaries included chapters in which moral or spiritual lessons were not at all expounded. Despite these differences, medieval bestiarists still preserved some of their predecessor's fundamental features such as its appeal to the memory through the complementary use of image and word, the evident moralization, the fascination with strange animal lore, and the text's pseudo-science.

The rise of the bestiary's popularity was particularly pronounced in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, in England and France, with both countries boasting many and original contributions to the tradition of this literary genre. In England, for instance, where the bestiary rivalled the Psalter and the Apocalypse, codices of the Latin *Physiologus*, very often compiled as illuminated manuscripts,⁶¹ were widely circulated and exerted a notable influence on medieval decorative arts. This use of bestiary texts recalls the hypotheses regarding the function for Leonardo's *Bestiario*. Among examples of English bestiaries in Latin prose we may include those of Alexander Neckham (*De naturis rerum*, c.1180) and the above-mentioned work by Bartholomew of England. During this time, there were also a host of other commentators on the bestiary and the production of a whole new series of bestiaries. It is, therefore, not surprising that in the first half of the twelfth century the first vernacular verse translation of the Latin *Physiologus* was produced in this part of the world by the poet Philippe de Thaün (fl. early thirteenth century). Written in the Anglo-Norman dialect

⁶¹ "Richly illuminated bestiaries are a peculiarly English phenomenon, and reached their apogee in the first half of the thirteenth century. The Ashmole bestiary, now in the Bodleian Library, with its lavish use of gold grounds, is perhaps the most luxurious and expensively produced copy" (Barber 11).

(probably some time shortly after 1221), de Thaün's *Bestiaire* is comprised of 3194 lines of verse and was dedicated to Queen Aélis of Louvain, second wife of King Henry I.⁶²

Further notable developments were introduced by the so-called French troubadours of courtly love. Richart de Berbezilh (fl. c. 1140-62), for example, played a particularly important role in his reconfiguring of exegetic subject matters within an erotic and secular sphere. In the mid-thirteenth century, however, the secular bestiary text by Richard de Fournival (1201-60) constituted a milestone in the evolution of the genre. De Fournival's *Bestiaire d'amour* (c. 1217), which "transcend[s] generic limitations" (Beer 5), is dedicated to a female reader and introduces a sub-category, referred to as erotic bestiaries or bestiaries of love, which departs from the conventional moralized bestiaries. Imitating those medieval bestiarists who exploited animal qualities and behaviour for the purpose of edifying Christian values in the faithful, de Fournival "[imprinted] the imagery of love upon a menagerie of animal properties [...] to fix it indelibly in the memory of his public" (Beer 11).

Before as well as after the appearance of de Fournival's *Bestiaire d'amour*, however, the creation of bestiaries in vernacular languages adhered to the long-established moralizing structures. In the thirteenth century, the ancient tradition of the Latin *Physiologus* penetrated the region of the French vernacular, where it found an even larger and interested audience. It is here, in fact, that four major bestiaries, being primarily translations of the older Latin versions of the *Physiologus*, were produced: the verse bestiary by de Thaün, a verse *Bestiaire*⁶³ by Gervaise (c. the end of the twelfth century to the beginning of the third) and

⁶² Although there is no definite answer to why King Henry I would be interested in a French translation of the *Physiologus*, Alexander H. Krappe conjectures that the King had a particular interest in animals, and the *Physiologus* was probably the most authoritative zoological text at the time (326).

⁶³ Regarding the generic *Bestiaire* titles given to these works: "The word 'bestiary' is not precisely the correct one to apply to these compositions, since with one exception all were translated not from the large *bestiarius* with its extensive borrowings from Isidore, but rather from the older *Physiologus* of thirty-seven chapters with

another (written around 1210-11) by Guillaume le Clerc (life dates unknown), and the prose *Bestiaire* (composed some time before 1218) by Pierre de Beauvais (life dates unknown).

Among these, de Thaün's *Bestiaire* is the earliest extant bestiary translation in the French vernacular. Though his identity and nationality have not yet been confirmed, Theobaldus, the author of the Latin poem *Physiologus* (eleventh century) has been purported to be of French origin as well.

Certainly not as prominent as in France and England, the production of bestiaries in Italy was most common in the region of Tuscany, where some of the first bestiary-like collections in the vernacular were produced in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Among those works influenced by the tradition of the *Physiologus* or at least containing material derived from the Greek original the following may be included: the *Bestiario moralizzato di Gubbio* (from the early fourteenth century), a collection of sixty-four sonnets; Leonardo's *Bestiario*; the *Fiore di virtù*; Brunetto Latini's *Li Livres dou Tresor* (composed between 1260-70), a compendium of classical material and wisdom that contains a version of the *Physiologus* in one third of the chapters of Book 1; and Cecco's *L'Acerba*, which, as indicated above, includes a portion of the bestiary in Book 3.

Some of the earliest references to animal symbolism commonly associated with bestiaries abound in the lyrics of Italian poets of the Sicilian school (fl. c. 1230-66). Several examples of this can be found in Jacopo da Lentini's sonnets "Sì como 'l parpaglion" and "Lo badalisco" and in his famous canzone "Madonna, dir vo voglio," in which the poet makes a direct reference to the properties of the salamander as he had read ("audivi") in bestiary texts:

fixed Isidorean additions. However, the word *bestiaire* is the only term that has long been used to describe the French works" (McCulloch 45).

La salamandra audivi
 che 'nfra lo foco vivi – stando sana;
 eo sì fo per long'uso:
 vivo 'n foco' amoroso,
 e non saccio ch'eo dica [...] (26-31; qtd. in Gibellini, and Oliva 146)

In these verses, da Lentini (fl. thirteenth century) equates the ardent effects of love to the flames by which the salamander is consumed when it rejuvenates its skin. A similar comparison is drawn in Stefano Protonotaro's poetic work "Pir meu cori alligrari," in which the poet speaks about the sweetness of his love as corresponding to the one experienced by the tiger who sees the reflection of her cubs in a mirror and forgets to chase after the kidnapper of her cubs.⁶⁴ These two brief examples are evidence of the frequency with which animal symbolism was recycled and transmitted from one text to another throughout the history of the bestiary genre. Leonardo's *Bestiario*, in fact, includes both the salamander and tiger and relates the same properties to both animals.⁶⁵

Worthy of mention, too, are the several extant unpublished and anonymous Italian manuscripts discussed in detail in Kenneth McKenzie's early work, "Unpublished

⁶⁴ "e tanta abbondanza di bellezza / che mi pare, / quando la guardo, di sentire la dolcezza / che sente la tigre allo specchio; / che si vede levare / molto crudelmente / i suoi piccoli, che ha allevato; / e così bello le pare / guardarsi dolcemente / dentro uno specchio che le è porto, / che dimentica di inseguire (i rapitori)" (21-31; qtd. in Gibellini, and Oliva 159).

⁶⁵ "Salamandra. La salamandra nel foco raffina la sua scorza. Questa non ha membra passive e non si cura d'altro cibo che di foco e spesso in quello rinnova la sua scorza. Per la virtù" (ed. Vecce 78) ["The salamander. This has no digestive organs, and gets no food but from the fire in which it constantly renews its scaly skin. The salamander, which refines its scaly skin in the fire – for virtue" (trans. Richter 266)]; and "Tigro. Questa nasce in Ircania, la quale è simile alquanto alla pantera per le diverse macchie della sua pelle ed è animale di spaventevole velocità. Il cacciatore, quando truova i sua figli, li rapisce subito ponendo specchi nel loco donde li leva, e subito sopra veloce cavallo si fugge. La tigre tornando truova li specchi fermi in terra, ne' quali vedendose li pare vedere li sua figlioli, e raspando colle zampe scuopre lo 'nganno. Onde mediante l'odore de' figli seguita il cacciatore, e quando esso cacciatore vede la tigre, lascia uno de' figlioli, e questa lo piglia e portalo al nido, e subito rigiugne esso cacciatore e fa <s>imile insino a tanto ch'esso monta in barca" (ed. Vecce 84) ["The Tiger. This beast is a native of Hyrcania, and it is something like the panther from the various spots on its skin. It is an animal of terrible swiftness; the hunter when he finds its young ones carries them off hastily, placing mirrors in the place whence he takes them, and at once escapes on a swift horse. The panther returning finds the mirrors fixed on the ground and looking into them believes it sees its young; then scratching with its paws it discovers the cheat. Forthwith, by means of the scent of its young, it follows the hunter, and when this hunter sees the tigress he drops one of the young ones and she takes it, and having carried it to the den she immediately returns to the hunter and does the same till he gets into his boat" (trans. Richter 272-73)].

Manuscripts of Italian Bestiaries” (1905). McKenzie’s study describes the integration of the bestiary and fable genres. Although the archetype of these manuscripts has not been identified by any of the above scholars, the manuscripts themselves, most of which begin with animal descriptions and conclude with fables, are similar in content and form and appear to derive from the same source.

The bestiary genre began to decline in the Renaissance period. While it is true that the animal imagery deriving from written bestiaries continued to influence works produced in this period (primarily the figurative arts, as discussed earlier), some of the wilder claims and the scientific premises of the genre were beginning to be put into serious doubt in light of the growing knowledge of scientific matters and more rigorous methods of evaluating reality. The weakening of the bestiary’s overall influence can be connected to the shift in the Renaissance period from the accepted idea that the truth was expressed in the written works of the *auctoritas* to the joy of discovery that one’s personal experience and testimony could bring in combining the old with the new.

There are few written works that mention – let alone focus on – Italian bestiaries and their development since, historically, the production of this type of literature is much more limited in Italy than in England and France, where the genre flourished. When researching Italian bestiaries one must rely on studies devoted to the *Bestiario moralizzato di Gubbio* or *Fiore di virtù*, for instance, in order to trace a general account of the history of the genre on the Italian peninsula. Because most printed studies on the history of the bestiary generally close with a mention of Leonardo’s *Bestiario*, it would seem that scholars dealing with the bestiary genre are unanimous about the fact that, overall, literature on beasts and birds diminishes in importance and influence in the Renaissance. As already noted, however, this

change affects the bestiary's role in the next age rather than its influence. That is, while the content of the bestiary is looked upon less as a pedagogical tool, it still does provide a collection of animal behaviours whose symbolism is easily transferred into symbolic representation in the figurative arts. In fact, while the bestiary's production as a literary text is greatly reduced during the Renaissance, the influence of existing animal books still survives and is often visible in the figurative arts. In the same way that the familiar images of beasts and birds in bestiaries exerted their influence on medieval decorative art, so too did they act as an inspiration for some Renaissance artists. This is consistent with the hypotheses advanced by Leonardo scholars who believe that the artist intended to use the hand-written animal texts in manuscript *H* for pictorial allegorical representations.

iii. Philosophical Implications of the Bestiary: From the Middle Ages to Leonardo

a. Ethics in the Medieval Bestiary

In Book 2 of his *Etymologiae*, Isidore defines philosophy in relation to the pursuit of ethics: "Philosophy is the understanding of human and divine things joined with the pursuit of living well" (24.1).⁶⁶ Rather than act as a point of return, the definition of philosophy given by Isidore serves as a point of departure from which to begin the treatment of the ethical dimension in the bestiary constituted by its presence in the structure and role of this literary genre in the Middle Ages. Isidore's understanding of philosophy provides an excellent foundation for a discussion that wishes to demonstrate how the bestiary successfully merged two realities (those of human beings and of God) through the use of animal metaphor and an allegorical process intended to foster morally correct thinking in the human world.

⁶⁶ It was deemed appropriate to provide a definition of philosophy given by Isidore in his *Etymologiae*, given the influence of this encyclopedic work in the tradition of the bestiary genre.

The double aspect of the medieval bestiary was a reflection of the general medieval perception that the visible things in nature and the material world served to unveil the mysteries of God's creations.⁶⁷ Following the *Physiologus* scheme, the medieval bestiary consisted of short chapters organized according to a bi-partite structure: an account of the nature of the animal, followed by a moralization (typically, this was an explanation of the spiritual and scriptural equivalent of the animal behaviour). The connecting link of these two fundamental parts is allegory. In fact, the allegorical dimension of the bestiary perpetuated the belief that the external world was replete with analogies (made between the thing symbolized in nature and the symbolic meaning in Christian terms). This applied even to the metaphors using fantastic animals (e.g., the siren, unicorn, griffin), which abounded in bestiary texts as well as in the *Physiologus*.⁶⁸ In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in particular, the use of imaginary beasts increased,⁶⁹ reinforcing their allegorical association with human beings and signalling a different relationship between animals and human beings: "Animals [became] important as metaphors, as guides to metaphysical truths, as human exemplars" (Salisbury 103). Allegory, it would appear, elevated the status of animals. That is, if animals could be "human exemplars," then their behaviours mirrored those of human beings, with the divide between human and animal being somewhat blurred: "When people can see an animal acting as a human, the metaphor can work both ways, revealing the animal within each human" (Salisbury 105). Could the ethics underlying the bestiary bring

⁶⁷ This medieval perception reflected the Augustinian view that all things on earth are a metaphorical means to achieve an experience of God. Moreover, according to Jan M. Ziolkowski, the allegorical aspect of the bestiary reveals its semiotic nature, for "[i]f nature is a book, then in a sense the animals within nature are words in the language of the text" (8).

⁶⁸ Distinction was rarely made between reality and fantasy, nor was the existence of some beasts and birds questioned or confirmed by medieval bestiarists and their readers. Fictitious animals in these animal books "can to some extent be regarded as satisfying the same human need for fantasy" (B. White 23).

⁶⁹ Paradoxically, this increase in imaginary and exotic animals in bestiaries coincided with the emergent practice of viewing nature from a more rational perspective. This new learning, however, did not affect the medieval bestiary.

about change in human beings in order for them to rise above their beastly nature? Indeed, the bestiary's emphasis on the similarities, rather than on the differences, between humans and animals was meant to enable human beings to better understand their relation to the world. Seen now through a purely allegorical lens, animals assumed a greater significance in human life (as opposed to their more concrete and everyday uses as food or property). If animals could reveal higher truths, as the religious-moral perspective in the bestiary genre proposes, perhaps then they were also put on earth by God for the moral instruction of human beings.

Bestiary animal symbolism was an effective allegorical medium because, as Willene B. Clark remarks, the actions of the animals in bestiaries "begin in the tangible world" (*A Medieval Book* 15). Indeed, the success of the bestiary hinged on a level of familiarity, for without one it would have been more difficult for the audience to raise the animal to another (higher) level of meaning. If the natures of animals were meant to be guides to moral correction for human beings, which would ultimately lead to eternal salvation by God, it was essential for human beings to nurture a sense of marvel for the things that physically surrounded them on earth. Bestiaries begin in the animals themselves, but "are then supported by references to Bible passages, many of which do not mention the animal, but support the moral or ethical lesson in some way" (*ibid.*). Thus, bestiary animal symbolism – and medieval animal symbolism in general – should not lead one to believe that the bestiary's significance in the Middle Ages indicated the medieval disapproval and rejection of factual truths. As Grover Cronin Jr. argues, the fact itself was not held in contempt; rather, it was simply examined under a different light: "the perception of meaning, the perception of the connection of the isolated fact with more cosmic problems, held a higher place in the

hierarchy of values than did the observance of single facts” (193).⁷⁰ The characteristic habit of the pelican, who returns to its real parents after being separated from them at birth, is interpreted in relation not only to events narrated in the Scripture, but also to a greater cosmic concern (in this case, it is the search for truth and meaning in life). From the medieval perspective, then, the single action of the pelican is not separated from its relation to its surroundings; nor does this imply, however, that it assumes significance within a system of concrete parameters. Instead, the properties and habits of the pelican find expression within a system of abstract references that enables the allegorical process to function properly.

Cronin’s “perception of meaning” is useful insofar as it enables one to understand the role and impact of animal lore in the bestiary genre in relation to the ethical standards of a medieval cultural setting. For medieval readers and users of the bestiary text, an established set of ethics (i.e., well-defined virtues and vices according to Christian values) provided, to some degree, a vehicle for a predictable interpretation of single animal accounts.⁷¹ This was no doubt facilitated by the fact that the animal tales in the bestiary also lent themselves to fluid interpretations to suit different contexts. As long as the psyche of the medieval people remained more preoccupied with the afterlife than the earthly life, the properties of bestiary animals would be inferred as lessons leading to an ascetic and more ethically rewarding life. Despite signs of secularism in these animal books,⁷² secularist features were subordinated to the bestiary’s moral implications. In fact, the accepted symbolism of the Middle Ages

⁷⁰ The introduction of hermeneutics, which Cronin sees in the close correspondence between the bestiary’s “symbolism and scriptural interpretation” (192), betrays these very generalizations, for it is evidence of the observation of facts.

⁷¹ For an opposing argument, see Ziolkowski (14-23), where the author discusses the difficulty of neat categorizations for animal symbolism.

⁷² This is, once again, in reference to Cronin who believes that imagination and fantasy in the bestiary were secularist interests, and that secularism is also manifest in the theme of love as it is displayed in de Fournival’s *Bestiaire d’Amour*; medieval art, according to Cronin, is further evidence of secularism in the bestiary (197).

enabled the morality of the bestiary not only to convey but also to emphasize the current belief and value system: “[i]n the Bestiary [...] moral virtues and vices symbolized by the animals reflect not so much the turmoil of a world where passions run rife, as the cloistered life of the monasteries in a world now settled in Christian belief” (B. White 25). In a culture in which the doctrines of Christian faith had already been entrenched in the general mental attitude, the bestiary became a tool that not only solidified religious fervour and faith in God but also reinforced the necessary values for living virtuously.

Because the bestiary lent itself to simple metaphor for unveiling the secrets of the Creator and for encouraging the betterment of one’s moral character, it was a useful (and perhaps obvious) didactic tool for preachers, who, especially in the thirteenth century, referred to the animal lore in these books during their sermons in order to educate the faithful about Christian dogma and to encourage them to live virtuously.⁷³ Moreover, bestiary texts were sometimes found on school book lists for the purpose of teaching children good moral conduct. The genre’s straightforward approach and didactic tone were features favoured by both the preacher and schoolteacher. The explicit moral in the medieval bestiary facilitated preaching from a pulpit or instructing young children, for the vertical and logical relation between the property of the animal described and its symbolic message did not necessitate peeling away layer upon layer of text in order to reveal hidden messages. The bestiary’s bipartite structure enabled the audiences of preachers or readers of bestiaries to easily summon to mind particular lessons associated with an animal. The bestiary, then, acted as a device to reinforce memory and thus it might have owed its popularity in part to the facility with which

⁷³ In the medieval classroom, teachers used animal tales as reference tools to instruct students on ethical human conduct. Although animal fables were more commonly used, by the thirteenth century, bestiaries moved towards a similar moralizing tendency, which was the primary goal of fables.

the animal texts could evoke mental images. This impressed upon the listener or reader the behaviour that was to be practised or condemned (Rowland 20).

The bestiary is a didactic genre because its primary objective was to convey doctrinal and moral teachings of Christianity through animal symbolism.⁷⁴ Although many animal passages in medieval bestiaries have been traced to the works of the very Ancients upon whom some of our fundamental scientific concepts were first founded, it would be incorrect to relegate the moralizations of the bestiary to a secondary role. Such an attempt would negate the genre's strong moral-ethical component and, consequently, its inherent didacticism: "[t]he phrase *bene vivere*, 'to live well,' that is to say, virtuously, was common in medieval didactic literature" (Clark, *A Medieval Book* 29). Medieval bestiaries were not meant to be taken as serious commentaries on zoology or biology, for they maintained a spiritualized view of nature that informed the more popular belief systems of the Middle Ages. Indeed, the bestiary exercised its influence upon the general way of life in the Middle Ages. By no means does this imply that the bestiary itself was an authoritative text; it was, however, regarded as a serious and reliable work, because of its very substance and ethical implications. With regard to the bestiary, medieval society subordinated the scientific observation of nature to the search for analogies between human beings and God's other creatures to satisfy the simple human need to understand one's role in the great universe created by God.

⁷⁴ Medieval animal symbolism originated in ancient and Biblical sources as well as Saint Augustine's view of the role of God's creations on earth (Clark, *A Medieval Book* 14).

b. Leonardo's *Bestiario*: *Necessità*, Experience, and Ethics

Leonardo's *Bestiario* attempts to highlight the supposed nature and habits of animals, which are then moralized or represented as symbols of human vices or virtues. Described as such, the organization of this collection corresponds to the bi-partite structure of the bestiary genre. The anthropomorphized animals are a fundamental characteristic of this literary collection, as well as of the bestiary genre in general. To begin with, the present section will show the ways in which Leonardo's representation of animals recalls some of his main beliefs, the first of which is the notion of *Necessità*, as loosely defined by the artist himself: "O mirabile *Necessità*, tu con somma ragione costringi tutti li effetti a partecipare delle lor cause, e con somma e inrevocabile legge ogni azione naturale colla brevissima operazione a te obbedisce" (ed. Marinoni, *Scritti* 22) ["O marvellous necessity, thou with supreme reason constrainest all effects be the direct result of their causes, and by a supreme and irrevocable law every natural action obeys thee by the shortest possible process" (ed. Irma A. Richter 6-7)]. Many Leonardo scholars have attempted to interpret this invocation to the *Necessità* principle.

Martin Kemp's interpretation and explanation appear to be the most cogent:

Governing everything we can see is one overriding principle. This is the principle of 'Necessity'. It dictates that form always perfectly fits function in nature, with no insufficiency or redundancy; it compels every force to expend itself in the most direct way available to it; it prescribes that the simplest design to achieve a given end will be followed; and it must be respected by any human contriver of artificial things. 'Necessity is the mistress and teacher of nature; necessity is the theme and inventor of nature, the curb, the rule and the theme.' (*Leonardo* 83)

The notion of *Necessità* was conceived by Leonardo primarily as a means to understand physical sciences such as the force and movement of water. According to this principle, nothing in nature is lacking or superfluous, for all of nature's processes are determined by

specific and irreversible causes. Nature consists of a harmonious and predetermined organization, and all its workings and processes are intimately interwoven with this design.⁷⁵

As might be expected, given Leonardo's propensity for finding unity in all things in life, *Necessità* was not only present in the artist's scientific experiments, but it also emerged in his painting techniques. In fact, Leonardo believed that painters should imitate the forms they observed in nature in their paintings, including fictitious animals: "When Leonardo instructed the painter how to compose an infernal monster he recommended that it should be founded on a compound of parts from animals known to exist in nature. The principle is that a monster could only exist or have existed if it was formed in obedience to natural law, and the parts of known animals provide a repertoire of forms which have been so designed" (Kemp, "Science and the Poetic Impulse" 206-07). The artist, therefore, is expected to adhere to the laws of nature and to create in such a way as to replicate nature: "E veramente questa è scienza e legittima figliola di natura, perché la pittura è partorita da essa natura" (ed. Vecce 145).

Such a practice is also manifest in some of the physical descriptions of the animals in the *Bestiario*, such as the passage on the dragon, which is an adaptation of Pliny's text. Here, Leonardo demonstrates his attention to, as well as his extensive understanding of the morphology of, animals; he says of dragons: "Il dragone. Questi s'accompagnan insieme e si tessano a uso di <g>raticci, e colla testa levata passano i paduli, e notano dove trovan

⁷⁵ In conducting his experiments, Leonardo adhered to the notion of *Necessità* and designated geometry as his main method of investigation. This is because he believed that nature was originally designed in geometrical terms, and could thus only be understood by means of geometrical formulations: "Nessuna certezza delle scienze è dove non si può applicare una delle scienze matematiche, over che non sono unite con esse matematiche" (ed. Vecce 199) ["There is no certainty in sciences where one of the mathematical sciences cannot be applied, or which are not in relation with these mathematics" (trans. Richter 241)]. Mathematical application (geometry is a branch of mathematics) was common in the Renaissance. Not only was it the preferred means of scientists by which to interpret phenomena, but it was also the basis of artists' techniques (e.g., perspective).

migliore pastura, *e se così non si unissin, annegherebbono. Così fa la unizione*” (ed. Vecce 82; emphasis mine) [“The Dragon. These go in companies together, and they twine themselves after the manner of roots, and with their heads raised they cross lakes, and swim to where they find better pasture; *and if they did not thus combine they would be drowned, therefore they combine*” (trans. Richter 270-01; emphasis mine)]. It is important to note that the italicized statements are not found in Leonardo’s ancient source.⁷⁶ This addition, or more accurately, clarification by Leonardo suggests his inclination to seek and explain laws of nature in order to illustrate anatomical structures and movements of animals, even when he is describing an imaginary beast. To demonstrate the movements of this mythical beast, Leonardo adheres to forms founded on existing animals, which, in this case, correspond to how dragons join “a uso di graticci” [“after the manner of roots”] to support their body weight and structure in water. The passage on the dragon echoes Kemp’s explanation cited above of *Necessità* as an all-encompassing view of the forms of nature as fitting their functions.

The example just analysed is a straightforward one; yet, it illustrates Leonardo’s interest in and obedience to natural causes and effects. Clearly, *Necessità* as it is displayed in the dragon description or in the process of painting is a more technical and scientific application of this principle. While these are no doubt valid applications of the principle, the present study proposes to examine how *Necessità* manifests itself in the *Bestiario* passages with more explicit moral and allegorical tones.

⁷⁶ According to Solmi, the part that Leonardo borrowed from the vernacular version of Pliny’s work corresponds to the following text: “Draconi. Questi serpenti sintrecciono tre o quattro insieme, in forma di graticci, et col capo alto nuotano, dove truovino migliori pasture” (*Scritti* 238). In Pliny’s Latin text, this description is attributed to the elephant. Leonardo’s italicized statement is not found here either.

Even among the descriptions with an unmistakable moral tone there are slight variations in meaning, for some texts are more reminiscent of traditional bestiaries, simply exemplifying human vices and virtues, while others seem to exhibit more complex and intimate relations with the laws of nature, thus being more reflective of *Necessità*. To make this distinction clearer, let us first consider the passages on the vulture and the turtle-dove, which embody gluttony and chastity, respectively. Both describe the natural tendencies of the animals in question, yet they do not provide further elaborations regarding their habitual activities. The passage on the turtle-dove was cited above. The one on the vulture reads as follows: “Gola. L’avvoltore è tanto sottoposto alla gola che andrebbe mille miglia per mangiare d’una carogna e per que<sto> seguita li eserciti (ed. Vecce 77)” [“Gluttony. The vulture is so addicted to gluttony that it will go a thousand miles to eat a carrion (carcass); that is, why it follows armies” (trans. Richter 265)]. In both examples, Leonardo simply describes a vertical relation between a vice and virtue and a corresponding behaviour.

Let us now turn to the passage on the oyster, a victim of treachery, which instead introduces a new dimension: “Ostriga. Pel tradimento. Questa, quando la luna è piena, s’apre tutta, e quando il granchio la vede, dentro le getta qualche sasso o festuca, e questa non si può riserrare, onde è cibo d’esso granchio. *Così fa chi apre la bocca a dire il suo segreto, che si fa preda dello indiscreto uditore*” (ed. Vecce 80; emphasis mine) [“The Oyster. For Treachery. This creature, when the moon is full, opens itself wide, and when the crab looks in he throws in a stone or seaweed and the oyster cannot close again, whereby it serves for food to that crab. *This is what happens to him who opens his mouth to tell his secret. He becomes the prey of the treacherous hearer*” (trans. Richter 267; emphasis mine)]. Of particular interest is the final comment in this passage, which seeks to explain the cause that

determines the oyster's fate. This concluding remark lends a more universal overtone to the behaviour of the oyster, compared to that of the vulture and turtle-dove, because it explicitly admonishes all those who behave in such a manner. In this regard, it reveals a truth that brings to mind the principle of *Necessità*, for it expresses an inalterable reality that operates as part of a much greater plan. Even without the final sentence, the reader of this passage could have predicted an inevitable end to the oyster's life, because the oyster committed two fatal errors: first, it did not take the time to examine its surroundings; second, it vulnerably – and unknowingly – exposed itself in the presence of the crab, its predator. The moral lesson imparted in this example may seem cruel and unjust, but it nonetheless recalls an infallible and inevitable truth that is attached to certain behaviours. In other words, the final statement confirms a conviction that postulates that certain consequences are tied to fixed causes and actions. Although Leonardo does not add similar statements at the conclusion of all his *Bestiario* texts, in this particular case, he felt compelled to warn his listeners or readers against becoming victims of their own haste and imprudence, as they are displayed in the oyster's actions. Leonardo's final comment appears to be a judgment that is grounded in worldly experience.

An example akin to the one above is the description that recounts a crocodile's hypocritical behaviour:

Coccodrillo. Ipocresia. Questo animale piglia l'omo e subito l'uccide. Poi che l'ha morto, con lamentevole voce e molte lacrime lo piange, e finito il lamento crudelmente lo divora. *Così fa l'ipocrita che per ogni lieve cosa s'empie il viso di lacrime, mostrando un cor di tigre, e rallegrasi nel core dell'altrui male con piatoso volto.* (ed. Vecce 80; emphasis mine)

[The crocodile. Hypocrisy. This animal catches a man and straightway kills him; after he is dead, it weeps for him with a lamentable voice and many tears. Then, having done lamenting, it cruelly devours him. *It is thus with the hypocrite, who, for the smallest matter, has his face bathed with tears, but*

shows the heart of a tiger and rejoices in his heart at the woes of others, while wearing a pitiful face. (trans. Richter 268; emphasis mine)]

Here, too, there is a concluding remark that encapsulates an invariable reality about the world in which we live. Slightly different from the previous example, this passage, in which the crocodile exhibits a false display of remorse and then unhesitatingly devours its victim, suggests that natural disposition is at the root of the crocodile's flagrant hypocrisy. Hypocritical by nature, as the *Bestiario* text implies, the crocodile can barely and only temporarily display a false attempt to alter its negative behaviour before it submits to a much stronger internal urge to consume its victim.

There is a complex force underpinning the behaviour in both the oyster and crocodile passages – a natural force, to be more accurate, that determines the outcome of both animals' actions; and the final statements in both texts are Leonardo's subtle expression of this driving force. Specifically linked to the behaviour of the animals, these rules or admonitions articulate a reality that is neither self-contained nor self-reliant, but is, instead, in conformity with a greater and constant universal truth. That is, these single demonstrations play an invaluable part in the powerful and irrevocable drama of nature – as determined by the principle of *Necessità* – and they draw attention to real consequences that transpire either because of a lack of respect towards or a lack of knowledge about certain pre-existing natural laws, or because of the inevitability associated with natural disposition. These incidents are not merely accidental or particularized; rather, they refer to universal truths which are underscored in Leonardo's use of nonspecific statements such as “*Così fa chi*” [“This is what happens to him who”] and “*Così fa l'ipocrita*” [“It is thus of the hypocrite”]. Indeed, the general use of “*chi*” points towards the universality suggested in both passages, thereby

enabling Leonardo to transcend the animal episodes in order to encompass all living beings within nature's realm.

Even though the principle of *Necessità* is typically examined by Leonardo scholars as it relates to the artist's paintings and scientific discoveries, there is no doubting its influence on the animal passages in the *Bestiario*. Examined within the parameters of this collection, *Necessità* suggests that human beings are not only part of the same design that governs animals but also of a greater pre-established harmony that exists between humans and the natural world. For each text describing an animal peculiarity simultaneously unlocks a behavioral tendency familiar to human beings. The *Bestiario* is not consistent in providing external clues that enable the reader to intuit human characteristics in those of the animals – this is especially true of the texts inspired by Pliny, which are generally more physiological and geographical in nature and do not make use of titles to guide and orient the reader towards a specific vice or virtue.⁷⁷ There is nonetheless a strong sense of familiarity that pervades the animal passages and that the reader readily recognizes and acknowledges as qualities that are natural to human beings as well. Seen in this light, the texts present themselves as brief moral reflections that appear to be the fruit of Leonardo's perennial observation of human life. Indeed, it is this quality of the *Bestiario* that reveals the artist's insight and sensitivity toward the human condition.

Based on the suggestions formulated thus far, the *Bestiario*'s allegorical representation of human vices and virtues implies that human beings may have subconscious and inalterable inclinations. To some, this may be a rather pessimistic interpretation of the

⁷⁷ The titles of the *Bestiario* differ according to Leonardo's sources. All the titles for the texts inspired by the *Fiore* announce the virtues and vices described; while those from *L'Acerba* and *Historia naturalis* bear the names of the animals.

human race, for it suggests that we enjoy only as much control as our natural dispositions allow and that attempts for change and betterment are futile and meaningless. Indeed, from this perspective, the *Bestiario* would seem to draw attention to our existential limits.

This suggestion is not entirely implausible if we recall Leonardo's famous sketches of faces, profiles, and caricatures of men and women scattered throughout his notebooks. These drawings are examples of the artist's practice of physiognomy, a theory that postulates that outward appearances reveal an individual's proclivities or state of mind. Leonardo referred to physiognomy as he aimed to contemplate, as Flavio Caroli states: "le relazioni fra i 'moti dell'animo' e la nascente fisiologia dei lineamenti, fra il 'giudizio' (l'Inconscio) e le sue manifestazioni sui tratti somatici della macchina-uomo" (8). The interpretation of facial characteristics helped Leonardo reproduce human emotions more realistically in the subjects of his paintings. However, his belief in the interiority of the individual as something which becomes visible in his or her outer appearance – and as such can be imitated in a painting – may also hold true for the *Bestiario*. In a similar way, Leonardo's written work represents visible signs of character and emotion because it classifies and demonstrates human temperament according to tangible and outward behaviour, as displayed in the animal habits. The theory underpinning physiognomy recalls the principle of *Necessità* in that both conceptions relate effects (be these physical or behavioral) to deeper and unseen causes.⁷⁸ Thus, while a protruding forehead or a long and pointed chin or a crooked nose can be associated with human cruelty, greed, and dishonesty, respectively, it would seem that similar traits like dishonesty and falseness could likewise be related to the outward actions of

⁷⁸ For more on Leonardo's study of physiognomy see Domenico Laurenza's *De figura umana: fisiognomica, anatomia e arte in Leonardo* (2001); and Michael Kwakkelstein's *Leonardo da Vinci as a Physiognomist: Theory and Drawing Practice* (1994).

the *Bestiario*'s fox who feigns death to capture its prey: "Falsità. La volpe, quando vede alcuna torma di sgazze o taccole o simili uccelli, subito si gitta in terra in modo colla bocca aperta che par morta, e essi ocelli le voglia<n> beccare la lingua, e essa gli piglia la testa" (ed. Vecce 75-76) ["Falsehood. The fox when it sees a flock of jackdaws or magpies or birds of that kind, suddenly flings himself on the ground with his mouth open to look as if he were dead; and these birds want to peck at his tongue, and he bites off their heads" (trans. Richter 264)].

Though Leonardo's practice of physiognomy suggests a belief that one's character is fixed, Leonardo's vision of the human condition may not be so pessimistic after all, for it needs to be viewed against the broader landscape of the artist's conception of nature. It must also be remembered that, in his notebook writings and drawings, Leonardo continuously exalted all the functions and intricacies of nature and his conviction that human beings are part of nature's design presupposes a more optimistic outlook on human life. More important, the reader of the *Bestiario* must bear in mind Leonardo's general attitude and ideals in order to move beyond the first impression of this writing to its more profound implications. This progression is facilitated if the *Bestiario* is considered in conjunction with its two medieval sources, for it is this comparison that most clearly demonstrates the transformations from the texts of Leonardo's sources to *his* writing and that, more importantly, sheds light on his more favourable attitude toward and vision of human beings and the universe.

It is not untimely to broach the subject of experience, a notion from which Leonardo never distanced himself throughout his lifetime. In fact, many of his notebooks contain philosophical maxims about the centrality of experience for deeper learning in human life:

“La sperienza, *interprete* in fra l’artifiziosa natura e la umana spezie, ne ’nsegna ciò che essa natura in fra mortali adopera da necessità constretta, non altrimenti operar si possa che la ragione suo timone operare le ’nsegni” (ed. Vecce 196; emphasis mine) [“Experience, the *interpreter* between formative nature and the human race, teaches how that nature acts among mortals; and being constrained by necessity cannot act otherwise than as reason, which is its helm, requires her to act” (trans. Richter 240; emphasis mine)]. The word “interpret” [“interpreter”] is particularly telling for it suggests that experience assumes an intermediary position between nature and the human race (Vecce 207). To put it in metaphorical terms, experience, in Leonardo’s view, is “a bridge between nature and humanity; informing us of our nature” (Parr 13). Experience, therefore, acts as the main catalyst for human interpretation of the multifarious and sophisticated systems of nature and thus enables (or “teaches”) human beings to know their role in nature. Leonardo asserts the primacy of experience over other methods of deduction, because it is the most certain and rational, and as such the only reliable and credible source of true discovery. Those who follow the path of experience are exposed first-hand to the underlying laws of nature and, in this way, will delight in the joy of discovery. This, according to Leonardo, cannot be achieved through *auctoritas* alone.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Leonardo often scorned those who were in the habit of acquiring knowledge by only citing the works of others: “Proemio. E’ da essere giudicati e non altrimenti stimati li omini inventori e ’nterpreti tra la natura e gli omini, a comparazione de’ recitatori e trombetti delle altrui opera, quant’è dall’obietto fori dello specchio alla similitudine d’esso obietto apparente nello specchio, che l’uno per sé è qualche cosa, e l’altro è niente. Gente poco obrugate alla natura, perché sono sol d’accidental vestiti, e senza il quale potrei accompagnarli infra gli armenti delle bestie” (ed. Vecce 189) [“Introduction. And those men who are inventors and interpreters between Nature and Man, as compared with boasters and declaimers of the works of others, must be regarded and not otherwise esteemed than as the object in front of a mirror when compared with its image seen in the mirror. For the first is something in itself, and the other nothingness. – Folks little indebted to Nature, since it is only by chance that they are invested with the accidental and without it I might class them with the herds of beasts” (trans. Richter 116: 1)].

We can relate experience to the *Bestiario* insofar as the animal descriptions bring to mind a series of rapid notes recorded from concrete experiments or direct observations of animal activity. Consequently, this rapid style infuses the writings with a sense of immediacy and freshness, an impression that reinforces the idea that each text acts as a single manifestation of nature confirmed through demonstrated experience, rather than as a rewriting of another text. It is difficult, for instance, to overlook the spontaneous and factual quality pervading the following passages on the partridge and on the spider: “Verità. Benché le pernici rubino l’ova l’una all’altra, non di meno i figlioli, nati d’esse ova, sempre ritornano alla lor vera madre” (ed. Vecce 75) [“Truth. Although partridges steal each other’s eggs, nevertheless the young born of these eggs always return to their true mother” (trans. Richter 263)]; and, “Ragno. Il ragno partorisce fuori di sé l’artifiziosa e maestrevole tela, la quale gli rende per beneficio la presa preda” (ed. Vecce 81) [“The spider. The spider brings forth out of herself the delicate and ingenious web, which makes her a return by the prey it takes” (trans. Richter 268)]. In his study on Leonardo’s general writing tendencies, Giovanni Ponte observes that the style such as the one in the descriptions of the partridge and of the spider was not uncommon in Leonardo between 1490 and 1499, the period in which the *Bestiario* was purportedly written, and noted that, in these years, Leonardo’s writings vividly captured the minutiae of observation and attempted to mirror the laws of nature: “[a]l punto di partenza sono sempre l’osservazione e la penetrazione della realtà considerata nelle sue forze e nelle sue leggi” (71).⁸⁰ In his *Bestiario*, Leonardo explains the animal properties in a meticulous manner so as to continuously stress observation founded upon realistic and

⁸⁰ Ponte’s observation echoes the opinion that many scholars share about Leonardo’s character and general attitude toward the investigation of life. Indeed, his comment is also reflected in Luporini’s earlier observation: “Caratterizza invece Leonardo [...] la preoccupazione di non perdere mai il contatto con la realtà fisica sperimentabile” (23-24).

plausible causes and effects. He prioritizes the wonders and peculiarities of the natural world, enabling the animal characters to be displayed in all their beauty and naturalness. Even in a written work such as the bestiary, whose thematic content is highly dependent upon allegory, he reveals his predilection for investigating natural phenomena and interpreting their secrets by means of a credible empirical method.

Leonardo's *Bestiario* is part of a long-standing tradition of written works that, in one way or another, attempt to allegorize human vices and virtues.⁸¹ Insofar as individual creativity and stimulation are legitimate reasons for assessing originality, it is not unreasonable to state that Leonardo offers, at the very least, an original series of animal writings and thus a contribution to the tradition of the bestiary genre. One such way in which Leonardo contributes is by his reconfiguring the allegorical dimension associated with the bestiary genre with the result that he depicts an objective and pragmatic reality. Allegory does not disappear in the *Bestiario*; it cannot, according to Northrop Frye: "Genuine allegory is a structural element in literature: it has to be there, and cannot be added by critical interpretation" (*Anatomy* 54). Indeed, the *Bestiario* structurally requires allegory in order to transmit its message, which can only be conveyed and completed when a reader advances from the description of the animal behaviour to its symbolic significance in human life. The authority of allegory, however, has obviously been diminished. On the one hand, this is due in part to Leonardo's reworking of the material borrowed from his two medieval sources, both of which employ allegory as a primary means of expression.⁸² On the other hand, it can be linked to Leonardo's assertion of the validity of experience over allegory. This reduction

⁸¹ Some exceptions exist, and these are outlined in the above sub-section "The Development of the Bestiary in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance."

⁸² This is in reference in particular to the elimination of Biblical citations from the *Fiore* and of the superfluous text from *L'Acerba*. These modifications are described in greater detail in the above section "Preliminaries to Leonardo's *Bestiario*."

of allegory has not negatively affected the *Bestiario*, for, as Arnold Clayton Henderson states, it is still possible to “preserve the *process* of allegorical thinking while making it generate surprising new meanings” (44). The textual and rhetorical modifications in the *Bestiario* expose a sort of rediscovery of the animals described in the *Fiore* and *L’Acerba* and fix the significance of the animals on earth. It is as though Leonardo chose to separate – and perhaps vindicate – physical and concrete forms from abstract and cryptic logic and authoritative religious texts. To this end, he posits a much different framework and state of mind in his literary collection.

To better understand the impact of the reduction of allegory in the *Bestiario*, let us direct our attention to the four modes of the bestiary, as explained by Clark: the literal or historical (found in the description of the animal; thus, the first part of the bi-partite structure), the allegorical, tropological, and anagogic (all three of which are encompassed in the moralization; the second component to the two-part structure) (*A Medieval Book* 23). The *Fiore* contains these four layers defining the genre. For example, the passage on the wolf,⁸³

⁸³ “According to Priscianus, correction comes from the loving desire to punish and correct others with words and deeds within measure and according to necessity. Whosoever departs from discretion and temperance in punishing departs also from the virtue of correction and falls into the vice of cruelty. Solomon says: ‘Madness dwells in the heart of young people, but the whip removes madness from their hearts. When they are whipped they do not die, but are only punished.’ The virtue of correction may be compared to the wolf. When he goes near a settlement and trips, falling and making noise so that he is heard, he takes the tripping foot into his mouth and bites it to punish it so that it be more careful on another occasion. Solomon says: ‘He who will correct another person will find great favor with this person.’ Seneca says: ‘The wise man corrects his own vices for the good of others.’ Solomon says: ‘Punish your friend covertly.’ And he also says: ‘Do not reprimand the madman. He will resent it. But reprimand the wise man and he will love you.’ Hermes says: ‘Open correction is not true correction.’ Diogenes says: ‘He who wants to be loved by his friend must punish him covertly, because kind punishment applied in secret provokes love. Harsh and public punishment breeds hatred.’ Cassiodorus says: ‘Should the one whom you reprove remain constantly vicious and reject your punishment, never cease to punish him every hour if he is your friend.’ Plato says: ‘Be sure not to reprove your friend in the presence of others or when he is angry.’ Of the virtue of correction we read in the Bible. God warned king Pharaoh several times through Moses to release God’s people whom he kept enslaved, and to be converted to God. But Pharaoh’s heart hardened and for nothing on earth did he want to do it. God, wanting to punish Pharaoh in order to turn him to Himself, sent him ten scourges as follows: The first was rain which became blood. The second was a rain of frogs. The third was obnoxious flies of all sorts. The fourth was beetles that covered the earth. The fifth a tempest that destroyed all trees and plants. The sixth, sickness and death of all animals. The seventh, crickets which the Bible calls locusts. The eighth was the death of all first-born children

symbolizing correction, begins with a description of the animal (literal or historic) and acknowledges the animal as the transmitter of a specific message (allegorical); it reveals the message as being correction for one's errors and those of others (tropological); and, finally, provides a scriptural example to indicate how this behaviour will lead to salvation (anagogic). In Leonardo's depiction of the wolf, still a symbol of correction, the levels in this hierarchy are no longer manifest: "Correzione. Quando il lupo va assentito intorno a qualche stallo di bestiame, e che per caso esso ponga il piede in fallo, in modo facci strepido, egli si morde il piè per correggere sé da tale errore" (ed. Vecce 74) ["Discipline. When the wolf goes cunningly round some stable of cattle, and by accident makes a false step, so that he makes a noise, he bites his foot off to punish himself for his folly" (trans. Richter 263)]. In the *Fiore* (not only in the wolf example), ascent towards a spiritual and eschatological reality (the anagogic mode) indicates the existence of a hierarchy of knowledge from which the moral lesson in the animal passage must be drawn. Leonardo eliminates the anagogic mode and transmits the same message on a single level of meaning. Consequently, he is able to suggest a new ideal of acquiring the moral-ethical knowledge contained in the animal description. That Leonardo is able to do so is testimony to the flexibility and power of the bestiary genre. Unlike his medieval predecessors, Leonardo does not espouse religious principles as a basis for morality, but rather endorses reason by enabling the logic (not *auctoritas*) in the allegory itself to legitimize the moral lesson within the text. In essence, he writes a bestiary advocating an independent process for a type of learning and reasoning that is confirmed primarily by experience ("la quale è maestra vera").

in Egypt. The ninth was a fog that made day into night. And after all this, Pharaoh and his army drowned in the Red sea" (Fersin 45-47).

Leonardo's firm belief in experience suggests that for him human beings have the faculties and potential to interpret the natural world without recourse to abstract explanations such as those deriving from religion, magic, astrology or other forms of art with enigmatic and occult qualities (i.e., those "sciences" which the artist defined as those that "principiano e finiscono nella mente").⁸⁴ Leonardo illustrates an approach that is rational and concrete and that an investigator of nature should employ to reach a more operative understanding of the secrets of natural phenomena. In fact, as a promoter of such an empirical method he was not alone, for "proprio questo si cominciò a tentare nel Rinascimento: di mediare ragione e esperienza" (Garin, *La cultura del Rinascimento* 146). Indeed, Leonardo's *Bestiario* is a sort of bridge between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, recalling medieval tradition by way of the genre and attesting to the renewed sense of human potential and capacity ("ragione e esperienza") philosophized and asserted by many Renaissance writers and thinkers.

As the *Bestiario*'s anthropomorphized animals suggest, Leonardo did not limit his experiences to animals, plants, inanimate objects, and scientific experiments. On the contrary, as a self-proclaimed *uomo dell'esperienza* ("man of experience"), he examined everything he saw in life including human beings, and he most likely delighted in studying his fellow men for the mysteries and subtleties of human nature that his observation might reveal. This attention to the human condition, perceived in the *Bestiario*, no doubt reveals the tendency of a profoundly reflective observer (thus, a philosopher of sorts).

The allusion to experience inspires a different way of thinking about the *Bestiario*'s allegorical representation of human traits. What is more, experience sheds light on the

⁸⁴ According to Leonardo, the eye enables you to immediately perceive natural reality in all of its certainty and universality: "L'occhio, che si dice la finestra dell'anima, è la principale via donde il comune senso può più copiosa e magnificamente considerare le infinite opere di natura" (ed. Vecce 143) ["The eye, which is the window of the soul, is the chief organ whereby the understanding can have the most complete and magnificent view of the infinite works of nature" (trans. Richter 56: 1)].

relationship humans share with life and the world, a rapport that aids humans to understand their position in the universe. Before exploring this relationship any further, let us return to the question about whether Leonardo might have believed that human beings had inalterable natural inclinations. Because the *Bestiario* identifies and classifies a number of human traits, it would seem to suggest that the artist did in fact hold this to be true. That is, Leonardo's recourse to this type of generalization and categorization is consistent with the main principles of *Necessità* because it supports the idea of a pre-established organization of the activities of all living creatures within the realm of nature. The *Bestiario*, like *Necessità*, suggests that nature subsists in human beings and that human action is governed by a natural force (i.e., in obedience to natural laws) that spurs one to act.

To attempt to answer the above question, it is necessary to revisit Leonardo's notion of experience, for it elucidates the artist's faith in human will and potential and, consequently, reverses the initial hypothesis that the artist's outlook on human life is negative.⁸⁵ By no means can experience supplant *Necessità*, which is such a vital principle for the artist, but it would seem that experience's dependence on *Necessità* exists only to the degree that the latter notion precedes the former (that is, it must first be understood and accepted in all its finite principles), for it serves as a decisive starting point for experience. A combined analysis of *Necessità* and experience is, in reality, a projection of the partnership in human beings between natural inclination and will. This analogy may seem erroneous at first, for it is instinctive to view will and natural inclination as two opposing internal forces, but it is possible for both forces to cooperate or negotiate. Indeed, awareness and knowledge of *Necessità* arouse curiosity and lead to experience: "Ogni nostra cognizione precipia da' sentimenti" (ed. Vecce 195) ["All our knowledge has its origin in our perceptions" (trans.

⁸⁵ Leonardo's pessimism about human nature should not be taken as an overall attitude that defines him.

Richter 239)]; and when these occur, the investigator of nature turns to “*ingegno umano*” [“human intelligence”] as Leonardo himself notes: “Chi disputa allegando l’autorità *non adopera lo ’ngegno*, ma piuttosto la memoria” (ed. Vecce 196; emphasis mine) [“Any one who in discussion relies upon authority uses, *not his understanding*, but rather his memory” (trans. Richter 241; emphasis mine)]. Pure speculation is not the product of the exercise of human intelligence; thus, reason must be used. Indeed, this cognitive faculty enables human beings to rationalize their role in nature and to enter into an active and creative relationship with the natural world. According to Leonardo, experience is the vehicle through which human beings stimulate and exercise their “*ingegno umano*” in order to come to terms with their position in the natural world, which is one of privilege with respect to other living creatures. This privileged role enables human beings to construct and scrutinize the complex processes of nature, as well as to evaluate them: “[p]adroneggiando conoscitivamente quei processi l’uomo invece può andare oltre” (Luporini 26). It is this cognitive process that consequently enables human beings to learn to react flexibly to nature’s influence, to elevate themselves in order to overcome human weaknesses, and to strive towards improvement in the human condition.

This privileged role of the human being in the universe was not an unfamiliar notion in Leonardo’s time, as it corresponds to the emergent and popular conception of man that circulated in the cultural environment of the Renaissance.⁸⁶ The impressions conveyed vis-à-vis Leonardo’s reinterpretation of his main sources and his final representation of animal

⁸⁶ This new notion of man was also reinforced in the Platonic philosophy advanced by Marsilio Ficino (1433-99) and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-94). The significant discoveries made in this period by the explorer Cristoforo Colombo (1451-1506), who sailed to the New World in 1492, and Nicholas Copernicus (1473-1543), who introduced the heliocentric model of the solar system (c. 1514) reinforced the idea that human beings had the potential to expand their realities into unknown worlds that would, in turn, enable them to better understand their lives on earth.

habits accentuate certain Renaissance themes such as the stress on experience, the praise of reason, and the centrality of human beings in the role of interpreters of the world; they also underscore Leonardo's independent approach in the acquisition of truth.⁸⁷ These developments, impressed as they were upon Leonardo's composition of the *Bestiario*, shed light on a changing reality of the world and attest to the continuous progress of life that Leonardo might have perceived in his environment. Luporini describes this idea and maintains that Leonardo's written works show awareness of this aspect of life: "Per chi pensa che la natura, l'uomo, la storia, insomma la realtà e il mondo, sono nient'altro che movimento, svolgimento e progresso, e per essi lotta, gli scritti e le ricerche di Leonardo rimarranno sempre una delle più affascinanti e cospicue testimonianze prodotte dal genio umano" (18). Luporini's comment helps us to understand how Leonardo's re-elaboration of his sources can, in fact, be interpreted as the artist's response to the changes and progress that he perceived not only in the period in which he lived but also in life in general. Even if he did so unknowingly, in his *Bestiario* Leonardo captures the continuity of reality, as well as some characteristic features of the Renaissance.

It would seem that Leonardo's outlook on human life is not entirely negative – it appears to contain signs of hope. While this optimism is also manifest in the *Bestiario*'s animal accounts that celebrate human strengths such as peace, justice and truth, virtues that are embodied in the beaver, bee and partridge, respectively,⁸⁸ it is the empirical methodology

⁸⁷ Indeed, Leonardo's composition of the *Bestiario*, mirrors Leonardo's general attitude, which Eugenio Garin defines as follows: "Resta la testimonianza di un atteggiamento: indipendenza da ogni autorità filosofica o religiosa; fiducia nella ragione; fiducia nell'esperienza come contatto diretto con la natura; [...] fiducia nella scienza non disgiunta dalla tecnica, anzi integrata da una concezione generale della realtà intesa come 'natura' legata da necessarie 'ragioni'" (*La cultura del Rinascimento* 149).

⁸⁸ See above for the full passages on both the beaver and the partridge. The text on the bee reads as follows: "Giustizia. E' si può assomigliare la virtù della iustizia allo re delle ave, il quale ordina e dispone ogni cosa con ragione, imperoché alcune ave sono ordinate andare per fiori, altre ordinate a lavorare, altre a combattere colle vespe, altre a levare le sporcizie, altre a compagnare e corteggiare lo re; e quando è vecchio e senza alie, esse lo

and ideology asserted by the artist in his writing that primarily leads us to perceive his hope in the human condition. Nature can certainly act as an obstacle to human success and progress, but human beings can learn to react flexibly to its, at times, oppressive influence and become artificers of their own destiny. To understand nature in all its forms, and to attempt this in the way in which Leonardo urges, means to believe – as perhaps the artist himself did – that humans are capable of living free from ignorance and fear.

portano, e s'evvi una manca di suo uffizio, senza alcuna remissione è punita (ed. Vecce 75)" ["Justice. We may liken the virtue of justice to the king of the bees which orders and arranges everything with judgement. For some bees are ordered to go to the flowers, others are ordered to labour, others to fight with the wasps, others to clear away all dirt, others to accompany and escort the king; and when he is old and has no wings they carry him. And if one of them fails in his duty, he is punished without reprieve" (trans. Richter 263)].

Chapter 2 The *Favole*

i. Preliminaries to Leonardo's *Favole*

Leonardo's *Favole*, numbering fifty-two fables,⁸⁹ are moral tales of varying lengths about animals, trees, random inanimate objects, the elements, and plants.⁹⁰ Leonardo scholars Fumagalli and Marinoni have divided the collection into two groups: those fables that are finished and those that are incomplete. The latter might have been preliminary outlines or simply themes meant to be developed later, as is suggested in this fable which consists of the following six words: "Favola della lingua morsa dai denti" (ed. Vecce 56) ["Fable of the tongue bitten by the teeth" (trans. Richter 309)]. Among the completed fables, the length of each ranges from a few lines to a few short paragraphs. While little more than half the fables were composed without a title, the remaining fables were assigned the generic title "Favola" by Leonardo.

In the previous chapter it was noted that the *Bestiario* was written over two years and compiled on multiple consecutive pages in his notebook. Among the four literary collections examined in the present study, the *Bestiario* constitutes an exception, for the remaining three collections are comprised of writings that were written over the course of many years and are found throughout Leonardo's manuscripts. Leonardo's fables, in fact, were written between 1483 and 1499, a fact which suggests that Leonardo might have written fables as he required them. They are scattered⁹¹ among five manuscripts: those currently known as the codex

⁸⁹ The numbering corresponds to that found in Vecce.

⁹⁰ These are listed in order of the frequency with which they appear in the collection.

⁹¹ It should be noted, however, that many fables are grouped together. Moreover, the five fables on folio 207 in the codex *Atlanticus* have corresponding drawings of their main protagonists: the cedar, the peach tree, the walnut tree, the fig tree (two sketches), and the elm.

Atlanticus (Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan),⁹² *Forster III* (Victoria and Albert Museum, London), *Arundel* (British Library, London), and the manuscripts *L* and *H* (Institute of France, Paris).

Though his reasons for writing fables remain unknown, it is thought that Leonardo composed many of them to be recited and used for oral entertainment at the ducal court in Milan. This hypothesis is not entirely unfounded given that Leonardo was reputed to be a witty conversationalist and talented narrator. This is attested in Giorgio Vasari's biography in *Le vite dei più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architetti* (first published in 1550) in which the author recalls Leonardo's eloquent manner of speaking and his ability to enrapture his audience: "[Leonardo] [e]ra tanto piacevole nella conversazione che tirava a sé gli animi delle genti" (Bellosi, and Rossi 546).⁹³ Vasari also notes that Leonardo was an excellent improviser of rhymes: "oltra ciò fu il migliore dicitore di rime a l'improviso del tempo suo" (550).⁹⁴ Seen in this light, Leonardo's reworking of his fables might have simply been connected to a practical and immediate purpose of public presentation.

Because Leonardo's later – and longest – fables are written almost exclusively and as a single unit in the codex *Atlanticus*, one must not exclude the possibility that he entertained the idea of assembling a single collection of fables. Vecce supports this theory and even points towards the fact that Leonardo's literary ambitions are proven by an improved literary and stylistic quality in some of them (68). Indeed, the revisions to some of his fables might have been made with the intention of eventually gathering them into a single collection. The two texts about the moth and the flame, which describe the same situation and theme,

⁹² The greatest number is found in this codex, which, in fact, contains most of the literary writings being studied in the present dissertation.

⁹³ ["His charming conversation won all hearts" (Hinds 157)].

⁹⁴ ["Besides this he was the best reciter of improvised rhymes of his time" (160)].

demonstrate how Leonardo returned to earlier fables to rewrite and elaborate upon them.⁹⁵ In his lifetime, Leonardo wrote some proems which were probably intended to preface the eventual publication of these texts. Taking this into account as well as the idea that Leonardo might have had the publication of a collection of fables in mind, Ponte even identifies a specific proem as the introduction that Leonardo might have meant to use for the entire corpus of his fables.⁹⁶

Displaying no obvious signs or clear evidence of direct imitation or transcription of previous fables by other authors, the *Favole* are thought to be the fruit of Leonardo's own creativity. Indeed, upon consulting various editions of Aesop's fables and conducting much research for other possible intertextual ties, Solmi states with conviction that: "Nè qui, nè altrove, trovasi traccia delle favole leonardesche, che, reputo, per profondo convincimento e lunghe ricerche, originali in massima parte del Maestro" (*Scritti* 147). Supporting Solmi's conclusion, Marinoni maintains that the fables are Leonardo's greatest literary achievement: "[le favole] rappresentano il maggiore sforzo stilistico di Leonardo" (*Scritti* 49). Despite the opinion of these scholars, it is quite possible that Leonardo consulted outside sources. The

⁹⁵ Fable 40 is a longer version of 25. The long version of the fable about the moth and the flame is footnoted in full below. The longer and later version includes another attempt by the moth to fly towards the flame; it also dwells more on the psychology of the moth and contains a brief dialogue between the moth and the flame.

⁹⁶ This is the proem identified by Ponte: "Proemio. Vedendo io non potere pigliare materia di grande utilità o diletto, perché li omini innanti a me nati hanno preso per loro tutte l'uti e necessarie teme, farò come colui il quale per povertà giugne l'ultimo alla fiera, e non potendo d'altro fornirsi, piglia tutte cose già da altri viste e non accettate, ma rifiutate per la loro poca valitudine. Io questa disprezzata e rifiutata mercanzia, rimanente de' molti compratori, metterò sopra la mia debole soma, e con quella, non per le grosse città, ma povere ville andrò distribuendo, pigliando tal premio qual merita la cosa da me data" (ed. Vecce 190) ["Introduction. Seeing that I can find no subject specially useful or pleasing – since the men who have come before me have taken for their own every useful or necessary theme – I must do like one who, being poor, comes last to the fair, and can find no other way of providing himself than by taking all the things already seen by other buyers, and not taken but refused by reason of their lesser value. I, then, will load my humble pack with this despised and rejected merchandise, the refuse of so many buyers; and will go about to distribute it, not indeed in great cities, but in the poorer towns, taking such a price as the wares I offer may be worth" (trans. Richter 115: 1)].

fact that he listed Aesop four times in his book lists⁹⁷ must be kept in mind. Leonardo, in fact, might have used Aesop as an inspiration and might have even borrowed materials from him in an attempt to imitate the ancient fabulist. Scholars have also proposed Leon Battista Alberti's *Apologi centum* (1437) as a source, but it is not known whether Leonardo ever possessed or consulted Alberti's Latin apologues. Leonardo's fable on the lily is often cited as having been influenced by Alberti: the sentence "Il ligio si pose sopra la ripa di Tesino, e la corrente tirò la ripa insieme col lilio" (ed. Vecce 66) ["The lily set itself down by the shores of the Ticino, and the current carried away the bank and the lily with it" (trans. Richter 310)] corresponds to a passage in Alberti's second apologue: "Lilii flos, perterritus et pallens, dum propinquus fons ad se esset derivatus, pristinam suam gravitatem ad omnes tumidiores undas, quom ad se adplicuissent, consalutandas converterat, quoad undarum appulsu procidit. Servasset ille quidem salutem si non dignitatem abiecisset" (Marsh 36).⁹⁸ Certainly, the subject matter – the lily – is the same, as is the moral of the story of lost hope for freedom (Vecce 72).

Like the *Bestiario*, the *Favole* are classified among Leonardo's minor works, receiving, for the most part, the attention of those scholars who first anthologized the artist's literary production in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as of those who were responsible for the publication of editions of this work from the mid- to late-1900s.⁹⁹ This means that most scholarly studies on the *Favole* are concerned with the collection's immediate features, namely, sources, style, and language. Ponte, for example,

⁹⁷ In Leonardo's book lists in the codices *Atlanticus* and *Madrid II*, Aesop is cited four times: "Isopo" (*Favole*, Cosenza, 1978); "Isopo in lingua franciosa" (*Les fables de Esope*, Lyon, 1484); "Isopo in versi" (*Aesopus moralizatus*, Verona, 1479); and "Favole d'Isopo." The editions given in parentheses are those suggested by Vecce (255-61).

⁹⁸ ["When a nearby spring overflowed its banks, a lily flower, pale and panicked, forgot its former gravity and bowed to greet the approaching swollen waves, but fell beneath their rushing waters. It would have saved its life if it hadn't sacrificed its dignity" (Marsh 37)].

⁹⁹ The names of the anthologists and the titles of their works are given in the Introduction.

examines the sentence structure in single fables and comments at length on the artist's writing style. He studies the *Favole* in the chapter of his book devoted to Leonardo's written production between 1490 and 1499, since it is during this decade that Leonardo began to conceive of publications on subjects that interested him.

Perhaps because of their purported originality, there appears to be a consensus among scholars that the *Favole* are Leonardo's most substantial literary writings because they are the most meaningful and accomplished.¹⁰⁰ As a consequence, greater attempts have been made by some Leonardo scholars to interpret the fables from a more critical perspective, eliciting important conclusions about the literary expression and lyricism of individual fables, as well as the deeper meanings and objectives of the entire collection. Some of these readers' observations have even provided stimuli for the later discussion on the philosophical dimension of the *Favole*. While Marinoni's brief *Bestiario e favole* provides a relatively detailed account of the grammar and stylistic expression adopted in the *Favole*, it also elaborates upon the two dominant themes pervading the fables: the ignorance and arrogance of human beings. Ponte and Fumagalli (the latter in her *Leonardo prosatore*) view the *Favole* as a faithful representation of Leonardo's interpretation of human life. That is, they perceive the writings as highly moral expressions that expound the artist's criticism of human fallacy and his pessimistic vision of the human condition. Malerba's reading of the *Favole* reveals Leonardo's adherence to natural laws and his belief in imagination or fantasy as equally valid instruments for interpreting nature. Finally, Vecce has noted a recurring pattern found in single fables that brings to mind the notion of *Necessità*:

Leonardo, pur conoscendo alcuni testi della tradizione favolistica antica e moderna (da Esopo agli *Apologhi* dell'Alberti), preferisce ricreare le brevi

¹⁰⁰ And yet, as will be shown later in this chapter, the *Profezia*, for example, is a very significant composition in spite of the fact that it has not generated much critical interest from scholars.

strutture narrative, variando in effetti quasi sempre una medesima vicenda: la sopraffazione, la violenza di una creatura su un'altra, o il vano insuperbire di un elemento che vuole porsi al di sopra o al di fuori dell'ordine naturale delle cose, e che viene perciò inevitabilmente punito. (*Leonardo* 102)

The concept of *Necessità* is emphasized in the observation that in the fables in which characters suffer negative consequences, there has been an attempt to challenge nature and thus disrupt a pre-existing natural order (“il vano insuperbire di un elemento che vuole porsi al di sopra o al di fuori dell'ordine naturale delle cose”). Carlo Filosa's reading of the *Favole* in his *Leonardo narratore* (1953) is likewise profound, offering compelling and critical insights into this literary collection. In his slim volume (a mere fifty-four pages in length), Filosa presents the view that Leonardo's fables reveal qualities about the way Leonardo envisioned the universe. According to him, Leonardo is caught between nature's concrete laws (some of which can be expressed in terms understood by human beings) on the one hand and its spiritual and mysterious realm (which is a less accessible form of knowing for human beings) on the other (17-18). The *Favole* are an expression of this reality, for they narrate examples that are familiar to all, but the causes determining the effects of certain actions in single fables cannot always be explained in concrete terms, for they are understood to derive from an ultimate source that lies beyond the human sphere. The implications of both Vecce's and Filosa's observations will be addressed more closely in the concluding part of this chapter.

Differing from the above commentators, David Marsh, the author of *Renaissance Fables: Aesopic Prose by Leon Battista Alberti, Bartolomeo Scala, Leonardo da Vinci, Bernardino Baldi* (2004), notes some of the ways in which Leonardo's *Favole* correspond to conventions of the fable genre. According to Marsh, a critical reading of the *Favole* reveals the intermingling of rhetoric and philosophy, a dimension that is not foreign to the fable

genre: “In its rhetorical application, the apologue¹⁰¹ functions as a subspecies of *exemplum*; in its philosophical dimension, it often concludes with a generalized *dictum*” (14). Examples of the *exemplum* and *dictum* can be found in the *Favole*, although it is important to note that these two parts do not always coexist in every fable by Leonardo. Evidence of the *exemplum* is evident in the succinctness of the narratives which enables Leonardo to illustrate moral truths to his audience by way of a simple and logical narrative.¹⁰² The use of terms suggesting a *dictum* appears in the pointed conclusions of the fables in which Leonardo appends qualifying phrases beginning “È detta per quelli che” [“This is said for those who”].¹⁰³ The *dictum* enables Leonardo to elevate the significance of the story by linking the drama to a higher notion. Regarding thematic points in common with the fable genre, Marsh observes that Quattrocento fabulists including Leonardo showed concern for imparting moral truths and for understanding both the natural and social reality in which they lived, thus recalling the tradition in which the *Favole* are inscribed (18).

ii. The History of the Fable

a. The Early Origins

Early versions of the fable can be traced to Mesopotamian literature,¹⁰⁴ dating back to as early as the twenty-fifth century BC. Much of what is considered literature in ancient Mesopotamia was originally delivered orally and only subsequently written in cuneiform

¹⁰¹ Essentially, apologues and fables belong to the same genre tradition and thus fall under the same category of writing; the word apologue is commonly used to refer to fables written in Latin.

¹⁰² The *Bestiario* is also a subspecies of the *exemplum* as it falls under the category of didactic literature.

¹⁰³ The application of this rhetorical device will be explained further in the sub-section “Philosophy: *Necessità*, Natural Law, and Ethics.”

¹⁰⁴ The region of Mesopotamia produced early civilizations like those of Babylonia, Sumer, Akkad, and Assyria, areas which roughly correspond to modern-day Iraq.

script on clay tablets.¹⁰⁵ Because they were not clearly separated from other genres such as the simile, parable, myth, etc., the ‘fables’ from Mesopotamia are not believed to adhere strictly to a fable genre as such,¹⁰⁶ but, rather, to the general category known as wisdom literature, a label that conveniently defines a corpus of literary writings produced in early Mesopotamian civilizations resembling one another in form and subject matter.

Wisdom literature, which dates as far back as 2500 BC when a Sumerian poem called *The Instructions of Šuruppak* is alleged to have been compiled, was moral-didactic in nature and thus intended to instruct people on moral and practical matters, often addressing those who needed to be corrected in their behaviour or were victims of injustice. Based on this early description of the fable’s origins, it becomes apparent how Leonardo’s fables, written centuries later, still reflect the moral dimension characterizing this long-standing literary genre. The following six Babylonian tales have survived: “The Tamarisk and the Palm,” “Nisaba and the Wheat,” “The Fable of the Fox,” “The Ox and the Horse,” “The Fable of the Willow,” “The Fable of the Riding-Donkey.” These types of fables are also referred to as *agon* or “contest literature,” a dramatized debate between rivals that took place before a god who served as judge to settle the debated question.¹⁰⁷ From the same period, we also have “The Elephant and the Wren” and “The Snake and the Eagle,” the latter of which comes from the Akkadian epic *Etana* (dating to around 2600 BC).

The early Hebrew tradition is the world’s touchstone of wisdom literature, with several examples of fable-like writings contained in the Old Testament books of Job,

¹⁰⁵ Of the fable-like writings from that age that have survived to modern times, most are fragmentary.

¹⁰⁶ The fable is still, at this point, undefined, and constitutes only a part of a larger body of writings that resemble one another; for example, similes, proverbs, myths, allegories and fables are integrated into one genre.

¹⁰⁷ Information on ancient Mesopotamian literature, including fables and contest literature, is found in volume one of Francisco Rodríguez Adrados’s *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable* (1999); and W. G. Lambert’s *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (1960). For a brief overview of the fable’s ancient history, see Christine Jackson-Holzberg’s translation of Niklas Holzberg’s *The Ancient Fable: An Introduction* (2002).

Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. Some examples of wisdom literature have also been traced to the ancient Egyptians and include *The Instructions of Amenemope* (probably composed between 1300-1075 BC) and *The Instruction for Merikare* (probably 2025-1700 BC). These Egyptian sources usually took the form of an elder teaching a young son or future king how to behave according to good moral codes of conduct.

Early evidence of the fable also emerges in the wisdom literature of India in the form of fable collections. Most likely written by Brahmin Vishnusaarman, the *Panchatantra*, also known as *The Fables of Bidpai* (c. AD 300), is the most well-known compilation of Indian fables to reach Western cultures. The entire work is framed by the story describing the Brahmin's attempt to educate the three children of the King Amarasati through the lessons found in the fables invented by the philosopher Bidpai. Structurally, the *Panchatantra* is comprised of five principal fables, each of which is narrated within the greater framework of the Brahmin and contains other shorter embedded fables inserted within additional frames. The fables in these collections emphasize the importance that Indian culture placed on circumstantial daily activities from which meaningful life lessons could be extracted. Indian fables are said to have been influenced by Greek fables and to a lesser degree by the Mesopotamian fabulistic tradition (Adrados 314: 1).

b. The Greek Fable

Fables deriving from the Mesopotamian civilization exerted a great influence on Greek fables, particularly in the seventh and sixth centuries BC, when there was much contact between Mesopotamia and Greece. Having cultivated the form and, in some cases, the

substance of the narratives from their Babylonian forerunners,¹⁰⁸ the Greeks did eventually establish their own version of the genre and subsequently created a model of fable that was uniquely Greek and eventually dominated Western literature.¹⁰⁹

The earliest surviving fable is attributed to Hesiod (active around 700 BC), one of the first Greek poets known, and resembles those from the Mesopotamian fable tradition. Hesiod is believed to have introduced the fable into Greek literature with his tale “The Hawk and Nightingale,” written in poetic form and included in his poem *Works and Days* (late-eighth century BC). With its moral-didactic slant, Hesiod’s fable recalls wisdom literature, thereby exemplifying one of the original uses of the genre as an *exemplum* and conveying the message that inferiors (the nightingale) should surrender to the will of their superiors (the hawk).¹¹⁰ The message is demonstrated in the nightingale’s failed attempt to sway the haughty eagle, its captor, with its incessant squawking. Primarily directed at Hesiod’s brother Perses, the fable opens with a didactic frame and “attests to the vigor, tension, and applicability of the genre, which may have been established in earlier times” (Snodgrass 137).

¹⁰⁸ Ben Edwin Perry stresses the fact that the form of the fable preceded the Greek version by many centuries: “In brief, what came to the Greeks from the Babylonians and Sumerians in the way of fable consists of three closely associated things: 1. the independent literary form which has been called *Rangstreit* or *Streitgedicht*; 2. the rhetorical device known as fable, being a fictitious story or statement picturing a truth metaphorically; and 3. a few concrete fable-motifs, such as that of the gnat and the bull in *Babrius*, [...], and the substance of the fable of the fox and eagle (*Aes.* 1), which comes from the Babylonian legend of Etana concerning the eagle and the serpent, and was used in a fable by *Archilochus*” (“Fable” 81).

¹⁰⁹ More information on the influence of the Mesopotamian model on the Greek fable is provided in Antonio La Penna’s “Letteratura esopica e letteratura assiro-babilonese” (1964).

¹¹⁰ The following is a modern translation of Hesiod’s fable: “Now I shall tell you a fable for kings who have understanding. / A hawk spoke to a speckle-necked nightingale cruelly, as he / Lifted her up to the clouds while gripping her tight in his talons. / Piteously she, transfixed by his crooked claws, was lamenting / When the imperious hawk addressed her in arrogant parlance, / ‘Why, little lady, such shrieks? One stronger than you now has got you; / Where you are going, I’ll take you myself, though you are a songstress, / For as I please I’ll make you my dinner or give you your freedom. / Witless is one who attempts to strive against those who are stronger. / When he is stripped of the prize it is injury added to insult.’ / Thus said the fast-flying hawk, that bird with the generous wingspan” (200-210; Hine 30). The principal addressee in the poem is Hesiod’s brother Perses, who, according to Hesiod, should stand up to his superiors for what rightly belongs to him (i.e., the estate inherited from their father). Indeed, one of the chief uses of this literary genre is to make the application of the fable correspond to the accompanying circumstances.

Approximately two generations later, Archilochus (c. 680-45 BC), a Greek writer and mercenary, composed the fables “The Fox Avenging His Wrongs on the Eagle” and “The Ape and the Fox.” The former was directly influenced by the “Eagle and the Serpent,” the myth-fable found in the epic *Etana* mentioned above. Much of what survives of these fables is stylized as epodes, lyrical verse that is generally personal and satirical in tone. Indeed, Archilochus exploited this form to direct scurrilous attacks against his adversaries (Rankin 91). The aim of Archilochus’s fables was not so much to instill a principle or to instruct, as in Hesiod’s fable, but to arouse passion and anger.¹¹¹

Other early Greek writers such as Aristophanes (c. 446-386 BC), Plato (428/7-348/7 BC), and Aristotle (384-322 BC) worked with fables in prose and referred to them in their writings, while Socrates (c. 469/70-399 BC) translated Aesopic prose while in prison.¹¹² In Book 2 of his *Rhetoric* (367-47 and 335-32 BC), for example, Aristotle relates two fables by Stesichorus and Aesop: “The Horse and the Stag” and “The Fox and Hedgehog,” respectively. These two examples in Aristotle’s treatise are believed to be the first written reference to the genre of fable. On the subject of rhetorical reasoning, Aristotle states that the fable is the second of two kinds of illustration, identifying its narrative structure as a useful and successful device in logical persuasion and argumentation (20.1-4); he narrates the two animal tales by Stesichorus and Aesop to illustrate his point (20.5-6).¹¹³

¹¹¹ In fact, the fable about the fox and the eagle was most likely meant to display the dishonesty and treachery of Lycambes, the man who reneged on his promise to bestow his daughter in marriage to the Greek poet. Though even less is known about the fable of the ape and the fox, it too is presumed to be an insult aimed at Lycambes.

¹¹² This list also includes Greeks like Herodotus (*Histories*), Sophocles (*Ajax*), Xenophon (Book 2 of *Memoirs of Socrates*), Demosthenes of Athens (he told the fable of “The Wolf and the Shepherd”), and Callimachus.

¹¹³ “5. ‘An example of a fable is that of Stesichorus about Phalaris and of Aesop about the demagogue. When the people of Himera had chosen Phalaris as dictator and were about to give him a bodyguard, after saying other things at some length, Stesichorus told them a fable about how a horse had a meadow to himself. When a stag came and quite damaged to the pasture, the horse, wanting to avenge himself on the stag, asked a man if he could help him get vengeance on the stag. The man said he could if the horse were to submit to a bit and he

Aristotle's commentary on the rhetorical effect of the fable may be applied to Leonardo's fables. If, indeed, Leonardo wrote fables for oral recitation at court, he would have no doubt had in mind (and perhaps exploited) the persuasive effects associated with this genre in order to effectively relay the fable's message to his audience. Indeed, though one might dismiss Leonardo's overall literary production as comprising writings used simply for court amusement, one must not lose sight of the fact that his texts were still highly dependent upon effective rhetorical techniques in order to be convincing to members of court, who were often well-educated and talented individuals.

After Aristotle, further definitions of the fable were proposed and cited by writers and rhetoricians alike. Aristophanes incorporated fables in his comedy *The Wasps* (422 BC) and later in *The Birds* (414 BC).¹¹⁴ Plato includes examples of fables in *Phaedo* (mid-fourth century BC), *Symposium* (sometime after 385 BC), and *Phaedrus* (c. 370 BC). Rhetoricians such as Hermogenes, Aphthonius, Theon, and Nicolaus focused their attention on the morally exhortative and amusing features of the fable in their *Progymnasmata*, preparatory manuals with exercises for students of rhetoric, compiled in the second to the fourth centuries AD. In their *Progymnasmata*, an entire theory is worked out describing the fable as

himself were to mount on him, holding javelins. When the horse agreed and the man mounted, instead of getting vengeance the horse found himself a slave to the man. 'Thus you too,' said Stesichorus, 'look out, lest while wishing vengeance on your enemies you suffer the same thing as the horse. You already have the bit [in your mouth], bodyguard and allow him to mount, you will immediately be slaves to Phalaris.' 6. Aesop, when speaking on behalf of a demagogue who was on trial for his life in Samos, told how a fox, while crossing a river, was carried into a hole in the bank. Not being able to get out, she was in misery for some time and many dog-ticks attacked her. A hedgehog came wandering along and, when he saw her, took pity and asked if he could remove the ticks. She would not let him and, when asked why, [said,] 'These are already full of me and draw little blood, but if you remove these, other hungry ones will come and drink what blood I have left.' 'In your case too, O Samians,' said [Aesop], 'this man will no longer harm you; for he is rich. But if you kill him, other poor ones will come who will steal and spend your public funds'" (Kennedy 162-63).

¹¹⁴ Aristophanes included "Aesop and the Bitch," "The Sybarite," and "The Sybarite Woman" in *The Wasps*, and "The Eagle and the Beetle," and "The Crested Lark Burying Her Father" in *The Birds*.

a literary genre and recommending it as a didactic tool to educate pupils in basic literary composition and to inculcate strong moral values.

The fable collection by the orator and antiquarian Demetrius of Phalerum (c. 350-c. 280 BC) marks the beginning of fable compilations, as well as a new role for this type of narrative. Demetrius was the first author to publish Greek Aesopic fables in a convenient handbook for writers and speakers who wished to cite certain fables in a particular situation. Much of what is known about Demetrius's work, no longer extant,¹¹⁵ has reached us through Diogenes Laertius, who commented that the compilation contained one hundred fables written on one book-roll and was called 'Aesopics' (Αἰσωπεία).¹¹⁶ Some scholars believe that this version contained an introduction with a brief description of Aesop's life. The collection reveals an active and deliberate search by Demetrius for fables that shared common objectives and functions (primarily as exempla). Through his collection, Demetrius contributed to defining and establishing stricter parameters for a single genre that was still only loosely and vaguely defined. Soon after his collection appeared, others followed suit, combining material from Demetrius's. His collection, as well as those of others, might have introduced an additional function to the fable: its role in education. No concrete evidence of such allusions exists, however, until the first to fifth centuries AD with the appearance of the *Progymnasmata*.

¹¹⁵ This collection is believed to have existed at least until the beginning of the tenth century and to have been used by Babrius, Phaedrus, Plutarch, Dio Chrysostom, Lucan, and Themistius when they were citing fables from Aesop.

¹¹⁶ In modern scholarship it is still unknown whether there existed an edition previous to the one compiled by Demetrius.

c. Aesop

The most famous collection of fables belongs to the Thracian slave Aesop (c. 620-560 BC),¹¹⁷ the fabulist who boasts a pivotal and privileged position in the evolution of the fable genre. Indeed, the fact that Leonardo listed Aesop four times in his inventory of books is evidence that the early fabulist retained his importance in the history of this literary genre, even well into the Renaissance. Some scholars doubt Aesop's existence, maintaining that the legendary fabulist was a literary figure invented solely for the purpose of establishing a founder of fables. It was not until later that Greek writers such as Plato, Aristophanes, and Aristotle, who credited Aesop with the creation of this literary genre, accepted his existence as a historical fact.¹¹⁸ Eventually, most scholars acknowledged Aesop's existence as true.

During his lifetime, Aesop was celebrated for his telling of clever animal tales, which were mostly veiled criticisms and ethical admonitions directed at individuals in positions of power, as well as veiled acts in defence of the common people in the face of authority. Aesop's incorporation of indirect criticism and amusement is a characteristic of fable that has persisted throughout this genre's history. Indeed, Leonardo's fables are clearly ethical commentaries on the poor conduct he observed in his society. An example of a pointed criticism, much in the style of Aesop, is Leonardo's fable on the thrushes:

Favola. I tordi si rallegrarono forte vedendo che l'omo prese la civetta e le tolse la libertà, quella legando con forti legami ai sua piedi. La qual civetta fu poi, mediante il vischio, causa non di far perde<re> la libertà ai tordi, ma la loro propria vita. *Detta per quelle terre che si rallegran di vedere perdere la libertà ai loro maggiori, mediante i quali poi perdano il soccorso, e rimangono legati in potenza del loro nemico, lasciando la libertà e spesse volte la vita.* (ed. Vecce 64; emphasis mine)

¹¹⁷ Aesop is purported to have been a Thracian slave under Iadmon on the island of Samos and to have been condemned to death by Apollo's priests at Delphi.

¹¹⁸ The little that is known about Aesop's life has reached us directly or indirectly from two historians: Herodotus and Eugeon of Samos. Further information about Aesop in other works is exaggerated or pure invention.

[The thrushes rejoiced greatly at seeing a man take the owl and deprive her of liberty, tying her feet with strong bonds. But this owl was afterwards by means of bird-lime the cause of the thrushes losing not only their liberty, but their life. *This is said for those countries which rejoice in seeing their governors lose their liberty, when by that means they themselves lose all succour, and remain in bondage in the power of their enemies, losing their liberty and often their life.* (trans. Richter 277; emphasis mine)]

This fable is believed to refer to the ruin of Ludovico Sforza (“la civetta”) in 1499-1500 and to his eventual loss of liberty of the state of Milan (“i tordi”). Leonardo’s final comment can be read as a rebuke of the incompetence of those who assumed positions of power in his lifetime. Like Aesop’s fables, then, Leonardo’s are also reflective of the socio-political realities in which the author lived. Though Aesop’s narrative method became quite prevalent among fabulists after his lifetime, it was quite new in the Greek tradition, differing from the more traditional elaborated forms of poems or songs designed to narrate tales. Not surprisingly, the Aesopic fable eventually assumed its own character, attracting the attention of many at the time of Aesop and later, while in the more elevated strata of society it became a topic of interest for high literary culture.

While animalistic and non-animalistic tales predated Aesop, the terminology adopted to identify these stories was, before Aesop’s fables came to light, unclear and ambiguous.¹¹⁹ Indeed, it was Aesop’s *Fables*, the title later given to these writings, that led Greek writers to coin the adjective *aesopic* (as in “Aesopic fable”), which now typically denotes the Greek

¹¹⁹ In the period of the Greco-Roman fable, speculation surrounding the definition and goal of the fable was prevalent among both rhetoricians and fabulists. In particular, the terminology to denote fable was broader and more inclusive, with the result that many writers, especially rhetoricians, sought to classify the fable more precisely. Before the modern period and especially during the Graeco-Roman period of its production, the fable underwent many changes in nomenclature: it was called the αἶνος, the λόγοι or μῦθοι from Sybaris, Libya, Cyprus, etc. In their original uses, the three terms assumed meanings such as “story,” “proverb,” “riddle,” “saying,” “myth,” “fable,” “speech.” The term αἶμος was prevalent in the time of Hesiod and Archilochus, while λόγοι and μῦθοι were applied later to the fable. Despite these attempts to label the fable with proper terminology, all three terms remained generic and did not effectively set the genre apart from other writings like the myth, proverb, riddle, and ballad, which were also pithy writings with moral overtones. Indeed, they remained too broad to limit the fable to a single classification of literary genre. It should not come as a surprise, therefore, that the three terms were eventually subordinated to the more popular and restrictive adjective *aesopic*.

fable. The word *aesopic* was adopted primarily to label a broad category of Greek literary writings that resembled one another in form and function.¹²⁰ Even in the treatises of the Greek rhetoricians (e.g., those of Plato and of Aristotle) *aesopic* was established as the main adjective to designate this category of story, thereby further solidifying Aesop's reputation as the inventor of the fable. In the endeavour to attach a proper nomenclature to the fable, Aesop's fables, rather fortuitous in their timing, played a strategic and important role, and Aesop unknowingly established a more definite set of criteria to define and categorize this type of narrative.¹²¹

The overall aim of the Aesopic fable is to extract a message for its reader in a clear and brief narrative style, with simple and succinct language. Most Aesopic fables are a few lines in length, with some even including dialogue between the protagonists, who, for the most part, are animals. Not surprisingly, this basic description of the Aesopic fable corresponds to Leonardo's fables as well. The fables that constitute Aesop's corpus have no connection to one another, with no plots overlapping, and are all independent stories, even though many animal protagonists appear in more than one fable. Moreover, specific characteristics attributed to the animals are more or less consistent in all fables (Zafiroopoulos 4).

¹²⁰ It should be noted, however, that the prevalent use of the term *aesopic* does not suggest that all fables were attributed to Aesop. Sometimes other terms used to denote fables or protagonists were used as labels to recall a particular fable.

¹²¹ Aesop and his adventures also inspired the novel-like *Life of Aesop*, which is dated between the first century BC and third century AD. For an account of the text tradition of the *Life of Aesop*, the following are useful as preliminary readings: Holzberg's *The Ancient Fable: An Introduction*; Perry's *Life and Fables of Aesop* (1952). Together with Adrados's first volume *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable*, these publications also offer a survey of the manuscript tradition of the *Fables of Aesop*.

d. The Roman Fable

Many Roman fables were published under the generic name of Aesop and were included or alluded to in some of the works of the following Roman writers: Ennius, Lucilius, Catullus, Horace,¹²² Livy, Plutarch, Seneca, Apuleis, Romulus, Lucan, and Avianus.¹²³ In Book 5 of his *Institutio oratoria* (c. AD 96), Quintilian praises fables for their practical and exemplary functions in primary education (11.17-23). In the same section, however, he remarks that fables, due to their inherent simplicity, attract primarily the uneducated mind and rural folk. Livy also expresses his low opinion of fables in *Ab urbe condita* (written between 27-25 BC) and, in telling the fable “The Belly and the Limbs” through the character Menenius Agrippa, asserts that the fable was a simplistic vehicle for illustrating an argument (2.32).

Consequently, Romans often limited themselves to brief references to fables in their works.

Among the Romans, the poet Avianus (AD 380) achieved the greatest success for his translation of forty-two of Babrius’s Greek fables into Latin elegiac distichs.¹²⁴ His *Fabulae* (c. AD 400) opens with a dedicatory letter in which the author exalts the fable genre for its intermingling of fiction and truth. Although Avianus used the standard Aesopic fable as a model, he was in the habit of lengthening and enhancing his own fables by attaching lofty phrases from Ovid and Virgil. Consequently, his fables differ markedly from the simple traditional Aesopic prose and at times are quite contrived. In the Middle Ages, Avianus was regarded as a minor authority in the fable genre.

¹²² Horace’s fable “Town Mouse and Country Mouse” is one of the most famous of antiquity; it is narrated in Horace’s *Satires*.

¹²³ It should be noted that when adopting the fable genre, many of these writers linked the fable to verse satire, a genre believed to have been created by the Romans. Lucilius was probably the first to use these two genres in tandem.

¹²⁴ According to Adrados, only five fables are original inventions of Avianus (270: 2): “The Anxious Man and the Envious Man;” “The River Fish and the Gudgeon;” “The Boy and the Thief;” “The Rustic and the Young Bull;” and “The Heartless Pig.”

Now considered a legendary figure, the fabulist Romulus¹²⁵ (fifth century AD?) is supposed to have rendered into prose several of Phaedrus's verse fables, thus popularizing Phaedrus in following ages;¹²⁶ his fables appeared under the title *Romulus*. Like Avianus's fables, the *Romulus* exerted much influence upon Western European medieval fabulists, most notably upon Gualterus Anglicus (fl. 1177), who is believed to have produced sixty-two versified fables also known with the title *Romulus* around the year 1175. In the medieval tradition, a number of Latin manuscripts of fables are attributed to Romulus; in fact, the transmission of Romulus's texts (alongside those of Avianus) constituted the majority of medieval Aesopica.

e. Babrius and Phaedrus

Babrius and Phaedrus¹²⁷ were Aesop's principal successors. A Hellenized Roman, Babrius (life dates unknown) composed fables in Greek iambic verse in the first or second century AD. Since no other collection has come down to us before his time, Babrius, it would seem, was the first to produce a collection of fables in Greek verse. He published approximately two hundred fables in two books,¹²⁸ each of which includes a separate dedication. Though the primary source for his fables is Aesop, he might also have used secondary sources such as the fable collection compiled by Demetrius of Phalerum. Mostly, Babrius treated his fables as a simple literary pastime.

¹²⁵ The authenticity of this name is in doubt.

¹²⁶ In fact, Phaedrus's collection was often recognized under the title of *Romulus*. This suggests that medieval fables inspired by the *Romulus* are indirect transmissions of Phaedrus.

¹²⁷ For more on these two authors see Perry's "Introduction" in *Babrius and Phaedrus* (1965); and Adrados (100-28: 2). Many scholars have succeeded in reconstructing the lives and works of Phaedrus and Babrius based on what is said of the two authors in the prologue of Avianus's book of fables.

¹²⁸ However, only 143 of these fables have survived in verse and have been collected into single publications from different manuscript sources, while the remaining fables exist only as paraphrases in prose.

A Macedonian who lived in Rome, Phaedrus wrote *Fabulae aesopiae* (first half of the first century AD), which includes Aesop fables in Latin iambic senarii¹²⁹ in five books. Though not all the fables originally contained in these books have reached us, it is believed that these books included approximately 150 fables. With respect to Babrius, Phaedrus is thought to have introduced more originality and innovations to the tradition of the fable genre because he did not always rely on Aesop as a primary source and model.¹³⁰ Instead, he adapted stories found in other sources or invented fables based on his life experiences. This sort of presentation saw Phaedrus's fables stand in their own right as writings reported for their value depending on the circumstances. More so than Babrius, Phaedrus concentrated on the satirical and entertainment value of the fable, rather than on its traditional moralistic and didactic ends.

The fables of Babrius and Phaedrus mark an important turning point in the history of the Aesopic fable, because, unlike previous anonymous fable collections that survived into the modern era, those of Babrius and Phaedrus showed evidence of literary and artistic intent.¹³¹ Phaedrus and Babrius bestowed literary status upon the fable genre, resulting in fables being read and enjoyed independently, without a supporting context which, in the past, accorded them purpose and meaning.

¹²⁹ The iambic senarius is one of the three iambic metres of Roman Antiquity (the two others being the iambic septenarius and the iambic octonarius). The iambic senarius is a pure form of the iambic trimeter composed of six iambs.

¹³⁰ Perry believes that Phaedrus referred to Demetrius of Phalerum's collection of Aesopic fables for his adaptations.

¹³¹ The aesthetic value of their collections is in large part also due to the fact that their fables were composed in verse and not in prose, as was customary in the tradition of fable-writing.

f. The Fable in the Middle Ages

Up to and including the thirteenth century, the fable genre enjoyed widespread popularity and was to encourage much original adaptation and composition in the Latin West. In the Greek East, the fable, at least until the ninth century, still remained firmly linked to its ancient tradition, while in the West, Avianus and Aesop bridged the ancient fable tradition and the Middle Ages.¹³² Indeed, the influence of Aesop and Avianus in the Middle Ages spawned many Latin imitations; some of the more well-known Latin fable collections include the *Novus Aesopus* (1215) by Alexander Neckham (1157-1217), *Novus Avianus* (eleventh-twelfth centuries) written by a writer from Asti, and *Novus Aesopus* (twelfth century) by the Italian known only as Baldo. The *Romulus*, on the other hand, influenced the *Liber Aesopi* (or *Aesopus communis*),¹³³ a versification in elegiac couplets of fifty-eight fables from the *Romulus* attributed to Gualterus Anglicus.¹³⁴

Deriving much of her material from the Latin fable tradition, Marie de France (fl. the late-twelfth century), one of the most talented voices in women's literature of the Middle Ages, wrote *Isopet* or *Ysopet* (c. 1189), a collection of 103 verse fables in Norman French belonging for the most part to the Aesopic tradition.¹³⁵ Marie was influenced by Henry Beauclerc's English version of the Latin *Romulus* and *Phaedrus*, the Indian *Panchatantra*, and the fables of the English monk Odo of Cerington, who wrote his fables (c. 1219-21) primarily for use for Christian edification.

¹³² It must be noted, however, that some medieval fable collections were also adaptations of Greek and Oriental models.

¹³³ Depending on the manuscript, the *Liber Aesopi* is comprised of sixty to sixty-three fables.

¹³⁴ Filosa disputes the attribution of this version of *Aesopus* to Gualterus Anglicus, arguing that the *Liber Aesopi* is the work of Bernardo da Bologna (*La favola* 6-13).

¹³⁵ This is confirmed by Marie's use of the term *Isopet* or *Ysopet*.

From the twelfth to fifteenth centuries,¹³⁶ the *Liber Aesopi* was one of the most widely-read Latin texts in medieval schools both in Italy and beyond. Though used primarily as *exempla* in scholastic settings for the study of rhetoric or in ecclesiastical environments for moral teachings, the fables from this collection incited other writers to produce versions in the vernacular, more commonly referred to as *Esopi volgari* or *Esopi volgarizzati*. The following works (composed between 1200 and 1400) are some of the most notable imitations during this time: 1) the twenty-three fables in verse in the codex *Vaticano latino 4834*; 2) the sixty-two fables in prose transcribed in the codex *Riccardiano 1338*; 3) the sixty-two fables transmitted in approximately twenty manuscripts and generally referred to as *Esopo volgarizzato per uno da Siena*; and 4) *Esopo toscano dei frati e dei mercanti trecenteschi*.¹³⁷ The version *Esopo toscano* is, in the words of Armando Bisanti, “il volgarizzamento che è da considerare [...] uno tra i più significativi volgarizzamenti di favole esopiche che, fra XIII e XV secolo, testimoniano l’indiscussa ed operante vitalità del genere favolistico nella letteratura italiana” (43). Beginning in the thirteenth century, the *Liber Aesopi* also influenced the works of some well-known writers and poets active in the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries: the sonnets of Chiaro Davanzati (died 1304), Cecco Angiolieri (c. 1260-c. 1312), and Cino da Pistoia (1270-1336/37). Though it cannot be confirmed that it was Anglicus’s version specifically that he knew, Dante too was familiar with the *Liber Aesopi* and even refers to Aesopic fables in the *Convivio* and in the *Inferno*.

¹³⁶ However, this section on the fable in the Middle Ages mentions works and writers only up to the fourteenth century.

¹³⁷ This list was compiled from two different sources: Armando Bisanti’s “La tradizione favolistica mediolatina nella letteratura italiana dei secoli XIV e XV” (1993) and Filosa’s *La favola e la letteratura esopiana in Italia dal medio evo ai nostri giorni*. The last item of the list is not included in Filosa’s work.

Though most of the *Novus Aesopus* or *Novus Avianus* collections were written in verse, there did coexist a production of fables most often composed in prose.¹³⁸ The production of prosaic fables peaked in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries especially when preachers, treatise writers, and rhetoricians, drawing from Phaedrus, Avianus, and Romulus, compiled manuals that arranged exempla according to themes. These collections, which were meant to be used as reference books, became quite popular and grew exponentially in size and material when compilers exercised more freedom in their selection of stories and transformed traditional tales by adding new characters to old tales. The compilers drew from sources that were not ancient (e.g., the *Roman des Renart*) or were from the East (e.g., the *Panchatantra*). These collections of exempla transformed the role of the fable in literary history and in society, widening its influence and development. Lending itself easily to adaptation in the context of the medieval pedagogical system and aesthetic mentality, the Aesopic fable enjoyed much success in the Middle Ages because of its educational and pragmatic effectiveness. Much like the bestiary, then, the fable infiltrated the classroom and church in the guise of an *exemplum* to be used as an instructional tool in order to impart lessons to students¹³⁹ or simplify abstract notions for religious congregations.

From the thirteenth century onwards, Latin and Greek fable compilations were rare, and the fable and its related genres were now composed in other languages such as French (*Roman de Renart* [c. 1250] by the French poet Pierre de St. Cloud), Hebrew (*Mishlé shu'alim* of Berechiah ha-Nakdan [c. twelfth century]), Castilian (*Libro de buen amor* by Juan Ruiz [c. 1283-c. 1350] and *El Conde Lucanor* [first published in 1337], Italian

¹³⁸ According to Filosa, exempla used in classrooms were typically written in verse while those delivered by preachers to the general public were most often in prose (*La favola* 23-24).

¹³⁹ In schools, for example, the fable was used as a tool to instruct students in Latin and Rhetoric. The texts that were most widely used in medieval schools were the *Liber Aesopi* and *Aesopus communis*.

(Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decamerone* [1350], and English (Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* [1387]). Moreover, beginning in the thirteenth century, the *Panchatantra* made its way into European culture through translations in Latin and in many vernacular languages.¹⁴⁰ These translations signalled the trend that eventually defined the fable in modern literatures (Adrados 562: 2).

g. The Fable in the Renaissance

There is evidence of a fable tradition in most European countries during the Renaissance. Spain revered Aesop and the stories from the *Panchatantra*, producing the widely-read fable collection *La vida del Ysopet con sus fabulas hystoriadas* (printed in 1489). Fable compilations also emerged in Britain, where William Caxton translated Accursius's book into English with the title *The Boke of Subtyl Historyes and Fables of Esope* (1485); in Scandinavia, with *Aesop's Leyned og Fabler* [*Aesop's Legends and Fables*] (1556) by Christien Pedersen; in Germany and in Holland; and in Switzerland, with Isaac Nicholas Nèvelet's *Mythologia Aesopica* (1610), a volume comprised of versions of Greek fables and other texts by Ausonius, Aphthonius, and Babrius. Very popular in its day, the *Mythologia Aesopica* was a source of inspiration for the work of Jean La Fontaine, the famous seventeenth-century French fabulist whose fables raised the level of the fable genre.

In Renaissance Italy, there was a rediscovery of Greek codices of Aesop's fables imported from Greece. This meant that writers and scholars alike had a larger repertoire of fables from which to draw than their medieval predecessors. The Renaissance, therefore, used the fable most often to teach and learn Greek rather than Latin, as had been the more

¹⁴⁰ Giovanni da Capua's *Directorium humanae vitae* (between 1262 and 1278), a Latin translation of the *Panchatantra*, was partly responsible for the diffusion of the Indian text in the West.

common function of fable in the Middle Ages. Moreover, Greek fables were translated into Latin by some of the most esteemed humanists of the Renaissance: Guarino da Verona (1374-1460) and his pupil Ermolao Barbaro (1453/54-93), Vittorino da Feltre (1378-1446), Ognibene da Lonigo (1412-74), and Rinuccio da Castiglione d'Arezzo (c.1395-c.1456).¹⁴¹ However, the most renowned translator of Aesopic fables into Latin is Lorenzo Valla (1406-57), who produced Latin versions of thirty-three Aesopic fables from a small Greek book upon which he happened. Valla's elegant and simple translation of these fables earned him fame beyond his lifetime and the borders of the Italian peninsula.

This revival of interest not necessarily in Aesop per se but in Aesopic literature in general also inspired some individuals to write original apologues in Latin, primarily in prose, and to reconceptualize the fable as a work of art rather than merely a brief moralizing and didactic narrative. Leon Battista Alberti (1404-72), for example, composed one hundred Latin apologues, his *Centum apologi*,¹⁴² in just nine days, between 16 and 24 December 1437. His collection influenced Bartolomeo Scala (1430-97), who compiled two Latin collections of apologues titled *Apologi centum* (1481) and *Apologorum liber secundus* (1488-92). Alberti was also a source of inspiration for vernacular imitations such as Leonardo's *Favole* and Bernardino Baldi's *Cento apologhi* (first published in 1590). One of the prevailing features of Alberti's apologues is their adherence to natural laws and, thus, their capacity to launch "a new sort of philosophical fable" (Marsh 2). Filosa, in fact, believes that, like Alberti, both Leonardo and Baldi can be labeled "mathematic" ("matematici") or

¹⁴¹ In 1423 Rinuccio returned to Italy from Crete and brought with him many Greek codices, among which there was a collection of Greek apologues, believed to be Aesop's, that had not yet been known to the West.

¹⁴² Alberti's use of the word *apologi* denotes the Latin tradition rather than the Greek one.

“scientific” (“scienziati”) fabulists as their fables convey a sense of realism and replicate natural cause-and-effect relations (*La favola* 119).¹⁴³

In addition to the thematic relation between Alberti’s *Centum apologi* and Leonardo’s *Favole*, there are outward correspondences between the two collections. Many of Alberti’s apologues resemble those in the *Favole*. In particular, Marsh notes that Leonardo’s fables 41, 22, 6, 39, and 5¹⁴⁴ are direct imitations of apologues 2, 9, 16, 58, and 65. Moreover, the brevity and rapidity exhibited in Alberti’s apologues might have had some bearing on Leonardo’s choice of style of writing (Filosa *La favola* 119).¹⁴⁵ Also in relation to style, neither Leonardo nor Alberti rely heavily on the traditional genre’s two structural parts of *promythium* and *epimythium*, technical terms referring to the fable’s introduction and ending, respectively, where the moral lesson in the fable may be communicated. Instead, Leonardo and Alberti prefer to write fables with the moral concealed in the nucleus of the narrative itself, suggesting that the moral lesson in the fable can be interpreted through intuitive means.¹⁴⁶ Finally, both Renaissance artists include a high number of plants, inanimate objects and animals as the protagonists of their fables.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ Despite this intersection between the two collections, only Baldi’s work inspired later authors – for example, Giovanni Mario de’ Crescimbeni da Macerata (1663-1728) and Luigi Carrer (1801-50) – to compose comparable fables, while Leonardo’s *Favole* became a subject of interest for scholars only in the late nineteenth century and are said to have inspired the modern writer Carlo Emilio Gadda (1893-1973) to write *Il primo libro delle Favole* (1952) (Marsh 276).

¹⁴⁴ Again, the numbering follows that adopted by Vecce in his anthology.

¹⁴⁵ Conversely, Filosa believes that Leonardo’s longer fables emulate Aesop’s more elaborate narrative tendency (“spiegata narrativa;” *La favola* 118).

¹⁴⁶ This is in contrast to their ancient predecessor Aesop, whose fables always have the moral comments affixed to the conclusions.

¹⁴⁷ Marsh made this observation in a comparative study in which he notes the number of times that gods, men, animals, plants, things, and mixed appear as protagonists in the fables of Renaissance writers Alberti, Scala (in two of his fable collections), Leonardo, and Baldi as compared to Aesop’s texts (16).

The two collections are also similar thematically, reflecting the personal convictions of both artists.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, their shared themes all reinforce the idea of a natural order that human beings are urged to obey: allow nature to follow its course; approach nature with knowledge of its operation and with acceptance of its pre-established system; be aware that all things in nature have a pre-determined course and purpose; and maintain direct contact (i.e., experience) with nature in order to avoid upsetting and disrupting the harmonious natural order.¹⁴⁹ These themes assume a central role in both collections, contributing to the overall “senso vivissimo, cioè, del rapporto di causa ed effetto, che diviene la stessa stringente logica (e in Leonardo l’impeto drammatico) del loro favoleggiar morale” (Filosa, *La favola* 119). Thus, the moral tales of Alberti and Leonardo rest upon a notion that theorizes that all occurrences in the world are causally determined by fixed natural laws.

While Alberti and Leonardo represent occasional fabulists, Francesco Filelfo (1398-1481) and Lorenzo Bevilacqua (exact life dates unknown) were true and proper ones, who devoted much time to their composition of fables. Despite being well-versed in Greek, Filelfo derived most of the material for his fables from Latin medieval collections, primarily from the well known *Liber Aesopi*. Filelfo’s collection of apologues is described by Filosa as heavily moralizing (“fortemente morale,” *La favola* 83). Thanks to his two *Hecatomythia* (1495 and 1499), Bevilacqua too was a noted fabulist both in Italy and in Europe. Bevilacqua’s apologues, satirical in tone, attempted to strike a balance between *delectatio* (delight) and *urbanitas* (refinement). A lesser-known writer named Accio Zucco (fl. about 1470) paraphrased each of the sixty plus fables from the *Liber Aesopi* in a Venetian dialect.

¹⁴⁸ In addition to reflecting the personal beliefs of the artists, both collections are also reminiscent of more traditional Aesopic prose that treats the following themes: punished pride and envy, the highly praised virtue of humility, the rewards brought about by caution and reflection, the profitability of collaboration based on generosity, the belief that virtuous actions are inherently rewarding, and the recognition of life’s fragility.

¹⁴⁹ Vecce recognizes the same theme in Leonardo’s fables, as noted above.

Each fable was preceded by a Latin epigram and followed by the moral in the form of a sonnet. Zucco's interpretation of these fables, known by the title *Aesopus moralizatus*, enjoyed much popularity for over a century after its composition and was one of the fable collections read most often in schools. Vecce, in fact, believes that the item "Isopo in versi" listed in Leonardo's book list in the codex *Madrid II* refers to Zucco's 1479 edition of the *Aesopus moralizatus* (258).

In addition to the rich production of fables in Latin in the Quattrocento, there were also some examples of popular vulgarizations of Aesopic fables in sermons and in literary works. Important to note is that three of the four works mentioned in this paragraph were listed on Leonardo's two famous book lists. They should, therefore, be considered as possible influences on the *Favole*. Pulci's poem *Morgante* included fables such as "La formica nel teschio" and "Il gallo e la volpe." The sermons of the Franciscan preacher Bernardino da Siena (1380-1444) often alluded to celebrated fables in order to arouse laughter in his audience: "La volpe ed il lupo nel pozzo," "Il vecchio, il fanciullo e l'asino," "Il capitolo degli animali," and "Il ciabattino e il banchiere." The vernacular translation of the medieval *Aesopus* by Fazio Caffarello is believed by Vecce to be the Aesop ("Isopo") to which Leonardo refers in his codex *Atlanticus* book inventory.¹⁵⁰ Lastly, Francesco del Tuppo (1430-98) compiled a fable collection simply titled *Esopo*.

In the sixteenth century in Italy there occurred a veritable flowering of Aesopic fable vulgarizations. Taking Alberti as his model, Baldi (1533-1617) composed his original fables during this time. The century also witnessed the preference displayed by writers to compose fables in vernacular verse. Indeed, it was not until the sixteenth century, when Phaedrus was rediscovered, that humanists such as Gabriele Faerno (1500-61), who compiled *Fabulae*

¹⁵⁰ Vecce believes Leonardo was referring to the 1478 edition published in Cosenza (257).

centum (published posthumously in 1564), began to compose fables in verse. Perhaps the greatest influence upon these writers is Ludovico Ariosto (1474-1533), who masterfully embedded apologues in his celebrated works, especially in his *Satire* (begun in 1514).

Although Ariosto's apologues were not original, few contemporaries could match his skill in adapting prose fables into verse. Distinguishing itself from the preceding century, the Cinquecento began to see the translation into Latin of entire fable collections, especially those from the East (e.g., the *Panchatantra*).

iii. The *Favole*: Leonardo as Fabulist

a. Form

Although the reasons why Leonardo composed fables remain, at this point, purely speculative, it is still possible to demonstrate the ways in which his fables reproduce structural and theoretical aspects commonly attributed to the fable genre. Therefore, it is useful to begin this section by illustrating the fundamental patterns and characteristics in Leonardo's collection and by describing the ways in which these correspond to some of the dominant and established features of the historical fable from Aesop onward.

Some fable theorists such as Ben Edwin Perry believe that a proper fable is a moral narrative including only animals ("The Fable" 72-73). Yet, history has shown that fabulists sometimes draw from a larger repertoire of characters. Indeed, Leonardo's contemporaries Alberti, Scala, and Baldi used trees, plants, inanimate objects, and even gods in their texts. The same can be said about Leonardo's *Favole* which, as we shall soon see, involve a rich cast of characters drawn from many areas of reality. Consequently, the intermingling of varied subjects infuses the *Favole* with unique and charming episodes, creating fascinating

dynamics and interplays between the protagonists and enhancing the philosophical component of Leonardo's literary collection. Even compared to the *Bestiario*, which also uses animals as characters, but is restricted to them as the genre's nomenclature implies, the *Favole* may be described as a more nuanced literary collection because the narration of each fable appears to be motivated not merely by habits associated with certain animals, but even by small and usually inconspicuous occurrences and objects. Despite the fact that the episodes in the *Favole* are fictitious and the use of characters such as a stone, razor, and crab may seem trivial, Leonardo clearly regards everything as meaningful and underscores the importance of all protagonists by representing them as equal contributors to the expression of morality in his fables. Indeed, brief as it may be even the fable about the wine and the drunkard communicates an important moral lesson: "Il vino consumato dallo imbrocchio. Esso vino col bevitore si vendica" (ed. Vecce 55) ["When wine is drunk by a drunkard, that wine is revenged on the drinker" (trans. Richter 287)]. A simple activity such as excessive drinking can yield surprisingly profound meanings, as it suggests that, in the greater picture, one must practise moderation in order to avoid negative consequences. As a result, there is a direct cause-and-effect correlation between the first sentence of the fable and the second one.

The sense of seriousness in Leonardo's deceptively light and frivolous fables is not uncommon among fabulists both before and after his time. The fable, in fact, is recognised for the confluence of playful and serious elements and has characterised it since antiquity: "Le convenzioni del racconto favolistico, che riproducono la particolare dissonanza tra il mondo irreal e giocoso della rappresentazione e la serietà del messaggio, si sono infatti fissate fin dall'Antichità, e sono restate accessibili da allora a chi ne abbia fatto oggetto di studio" (Jedrkievicz 11). In his *Progymnasmata* (second century AD), for example, Theon

expressed his awareness of the serious nature of the fable, defining the genre as *logos pseudos*. This designation is still accepted by modern fable scholars such as Perry, who has translated Theon's definition of fable as "a fictitious story picturing a truth" ("Fable" 74),¹⁵¹ thus emphasizing the fable's dual nature, at the same time both playful and serious. The idea of "picturing a truth" is further reinforced by Harold John Blackham's description of fable as a narration that depicts, rather than describes, since "fable is not argument" but is instead "devised to 'show' something" (175). Based on these descriptions, it can be deduced that a fable aims first to represent, not explain, actions. A fable is, in essence, a written image or exposition of a truth.

If the objective of fable is to expose a deeper meaning, its purpose, then, must dictate the steps of its principal narrative strategy. Fable strategy is the narration of a protagonist's dilemma and of the subsequent actions taken to resolve the problem, and the results – positive or negative – are always directly connected to the actions. With this in mind, it is important to note that this form of narration summons some degree of careful thought in readers in order for them to grasp the central message embedded in the fable. Blackham sums up this point: "A fable *shows* what it has to *show*, and leaves it open to *reflection*" (176; emphasis mine). A fable, therefore, not only requires an outside participant to interpret its truth (indeed, the verb "show" suggests that something must be seen by another), but it is also written with the assumption that this participant already possesses the means ("reflection" suggests that something is already known but requires time to reach) to arrive at

¹⁵¹ It should also be noted that Perry's opinion that, for a fable to be considered authentic, it must not only narrate an action concealing an "ethical truth" but must do so in the past tense ("The Fable" 67) is accepted by most fable scholars.

the truth it wishes to reveal in its depiction of an action. This process also reveals the universality in the message of the fable.

Each of Leonardo's *Favole* no doubt evokes a truth through the actions of the protagonists. In the present study, it will be argued that this truth, like that of the fable genre, is generally moral in nature. Similar to the traditional fable, the ethical component of Leonardo's fables relies upon the proper functioning of an underlying notion. Though Leonardo did not gather his fables into a cohesive work, there is an undeniable conceptual thread unifying his fables. This perceived unity in the *Favole* is the binary notion supporting and driving the narration. The notion is binary in nature precisely because it reflects the dualism of reality, that is, the notion that humanity is divided into good and evil or right and wrong. In essence, reality is conceived according to contrasts. The fable about the cedar makes this duality clear: "Il cedro, insuperbito della sua bellezza, dubita delle piante che li son d'intorno, e fattolesi torre dinanzi, il vento poi, non essendo interrotto, lo gittò per terra diradicato" (ed. Vecce 56) ["The citron,¹⁵² puffed up with pride of its beauty, separated itself from the trees around it and in so doing it turned towards the wind, which not being broken in its fury, flung it uprooted on the earth" (trans. Richter 309)]. Here, the cedar's vanity suggests that its contrast, modesty, would have yielded a different – and more positive – outcome. This suggestion, which is common knowledge to human beings, completes the dualism in the narrative. The texts constituting the *Favole* also embody this dualistic aspect in their wide-ranging protagonists, who, in turn, can be grouped into two simple categories: 1) those who exhibit virtues and are rewarded for their ability to pause and reflect upon the variables of a situation; 2) those who are punished for their vices and their inability or failure for reflection. In the few examples in which it is obvious to which group a fable belongs,

¹⁵² This is better translated as "cedar."

Using traditional genre devices, Leonardo attaches an explicit moral (an *epimythium*)¹⁵³ to the conclusion of the fable. In cases in which such a “moral tag” (Snodgrass 115) is appended, the conduct illustrated in the fable is more clearly understood and requires less effort and reflection on the part of the reader/listener. Leonardo’s fable about a razor that decides to no longer work shaving men’s beards only to discover later that nonactivity has caused its once-lustrous sheath to rust includes a concluding remark in which Leonardo criticizes mental sloth and laziness: “Questo medesimo accade nelli ingegni, che ’n iscambio dello esercizio, si danno all’ozio, i quali, a similitudine del sopradetto rasoio, perde la tagliente sua suttilità e la ruggine della ignoranza guasta la sua forma” (ed. Vecce 65)¹⁵⁴ [“The same thing happens to those minds which instead of exercise give themselves up to sloth. They are like the razor here spoken of, and lose the keenness of their edge, while the rust of ignorance spoils their form” (trans. Richter 280)]. As was mentioned above, most of Leonardo’s fables do not include a final moral comment and are thus less explicit in

¹⁵³ Leonardo sometimes wrote concluding morals, but never introductory ones (*promythia*).

¹⁵⁴ The fable about the razor reads as follows: “Favola. Uscendo un giorno il rasoio di quel manico col quale si fa guaina a se medesimo, e postosi al sole, vide il sole ispecchiarsi nel suo corpo: della qual cosa prese sommaria, e rivolto col pensiero indirieto, cominciò con seco medesimo a dire: ‘Or tornerò io più a quella bottega, della quale novamente uscito sono? Certo no; non piaccia alli Dei, che sì splendida bellezza caggia in tanta viltà d’animo! Che pazzia sarebbe quella la qual mi conducessi a radere le insaponate barbe de’ rustichi villani e fare sì meccaniche operazione! Or è questo corpo da simili esercizi? Certo no. Io mi vogli[o] nascondere in qualche occulto loco, e lì con tranquillo riposo passare mia vita; E così, nascosto per alquanti mesi, un giorno ritornato all’aria, e uscito fori della sua guaina, vide sé essere fatto a similitudine d’una rugginente sega, e la sua superficie non especchiare più lo splendente sole. Con vano pentimento indarno pianse lo inriparabile danno, con seco dicendo: ‘o quan[to] meglio era esercitare col barbiere il mi’ perduto taglio di tanta sottilità! Dov’è la lustrante superfizie? Certo la fastidiosa e brutta ruggine l’ha consumata!’” (ed. Vecce 64-65) [“A fable. The razor having one day come forth from the handle which serves as its sheath and having placed himself in the sun, saw the sun reflected in his body, which filled him with great pride. And turning it over in his thoughts he began to say to himself: ‘and shall I return again to that shop from which I have just come? Certainly not; such splendid beauty shall not, please God, be turned to such base uses. What folly it would be that could lead me to shave the lathered beards of rustic peasants and perform such menial service! Is this body destined for such work? Certainly not. I will hide myself in some retired spot and there pass my life in tranquil repose.’ And having thus remained hidden for some months, one day he came out into the air and issuing from his sheath, saw himself turned to the similitude of a rusty saw while his surface no longer reflected the resplendent sun. With useless repentance he vainly deplored the irreparable mischief, saying to himself: ‘Oh! how far better was it to employ at the barbers [sic] my lost edge of such exquisite keenness! Where is that lustrous surface? It has been consumed by this vexatious and unsightly rust’” (trans. Richter 279-80)].

conveying a truth. This, however, does not suggest that Leonardo did not expect his audience to be exempt from seeking truth. In cases where an appending remark is included, the binary notion underlying the collection not only facilitates the process of reflection referred to above, but also encourages it. This reflective period is able to occur because, upon reading all Leonardo's fables, the reader intuitively discerns the implied classification of actions into good and bad. The dependency of this genre upon active reader participation reinforces Blackham's belief in the "intuitive conception of fable" (180). More specifically, reader intuition refers to human beings' inherent ability to recognize and categorize the conduct, as either virtuous or not, depicted in fables. The moral truth at the heart of a fable is grasped because of a sense of familiarity pervading the actions in the fable, either because the reader has observed this behaviour or has experienced it personally or is instinctively aware of such knowledge.

In addition to the covert narrative technique driving this binary notion, the *Favole* have overt patterns that further stimulate reflection enabling the reader to identify desirable and less desirable examples of human moral conduct. For example, in fables in which inappropriate behaviour is criticized, Leonardo uses phrases such as "li parve avere trovato" (ed. Vecce 56) ["it seemed to her that she had found" (trans. Richter 278)], "trovandosi non potere fruire il piacere di vedere" (57) ["finding that she could not enjoy the pleasure of seeing" (284)], "con gran desiderio" (59) ["with ardent longing" (280)], or "credendo trovar" (67) ["believing to have" (my translation)]. Such phrases, almost exclusively used at the beginning of a fable, are clues suggesting weakness¹⁵⁵ and foreshadow the deception and/or illusion that the character in question is about to experience. Indeed, the verbs "parve"

¹⁵⁵ Some phrases are explicit in revealing weakness: "insuperbito della sua bellezza" (ed. Vecce 56) ["puffed up with pride of its beauty" (trans. Richter 309)]; "non potendo sopportare con pazienza" (57) ["unable to endure with patience" (279)]; and "volendo, [...], essere laldato da li omini" (63) ["wishing [...] that it might be praised by men" (282)].

(“seemed”) and “credendo” (“believing”) instinctively suggest that what is held to be true is, in fact, false. When, instead, protagonists in the *Favole* are hailed for their virtuous actions, the exercise of reason is a recurring action. Reason is seen to prevail in the following fable about the stone and the flint:

La pietra, essendo battuta dall'acciarolo del foco, forte si maravigliò, e con rigida voce disse a quello: “Che prusunzio’ ti move a darmi fatica? Non mi dare affanno, che tu m’hai volto in iscambio. Io non dispiacei mai a nessuno”. Al quale l’acciarolo rispose: “Se starai paziente, vederai che maraviglioso frutto uscirà di te”. Alle quale parole la pietra, datosi pace, con pazienza stette forte al martire, e vide di sé nascere il maraviglioso foco, il quale, colla sua virtù, operava in infinite cose. Detta per quelli i quali spaventano ne’ precipi delli studi, e poi che a loro medesimi si dispongano potere comandare, e dare con pazienza opera continua a essi studi, di quelli si vede risultare cose di maravigliose dimostrazione. (ed. Vecce 65-66)

[The flint on being struck by the steel marvelled greatly and said to it in a stern voice, ‘What arrogance prompts you to annoy me? Trouble me not, for you have chosen me by mistake; I have never done harm to any one.’ To which the steel made the answer, ‘If you will be patient you will see what a marvellous result will issue forth from you.’ At these words the flint was pacified and patiently endured its martyrdom, and it saw itself give birth to the marvellous element of fire which by its potency became a factor in innumerable things. This is said for those who are dismayed at the outset of their studies, and then set out to gain the mastery over themselves and in patience to apply themselves continuously to these studies, from which one sees result things marvellous to relate (trans. McCurdy 260-61: 2)].

Nature’s plan is just and thus bestows goodness and sustenance on all its parts. Here, the flint, displaying the virtue of patience and tranquility, is lucid and capable of exercising sound logic in the situation in which it finds itself. In the end, it is rewarded for its virtuous behaviour by producing “il maraviglioso foco” (“the marvellous element of fire”). Though much longer, the fable about the snowball also shows how reason prevails when concrete evidence is taken into consideration before a decision is made or a conclusion is reached.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ “Trovandosi alquanto poca neve appiccata alla sommità d’un sasso, il quale era collocato sopra la strema altezza d’una altissima montagna, e raccolto in sé la maginazione, cominciò con quella a considerare, e infra sé dire: ‘Or non son io da essere giudicata altera e superba, avere me, picciola dramma di neve, posto in sì alto

A careful reading of Leonardo's *Favole* reveals that such techniques are constant in his texts and can be regarded as subliminal signals used to stimulate reflection. Specifically, these signals engage readers with the fables themselves and encourage a perceptive reader to become self-reflective and self-analytical in day-to-day human experiences. To be sure, the relationship established between fabulist and reader is another characteristic of the fable genre. To demonstrate this point, let us return to Blackham's claim that the function of fable is to *show* something (i.e., an ethical truth). The intent to show suggests that the fable requires an active reader; in other words, a reader who will see and heed what is being demonstrated. Reader involvement is, of course, a prerequisite for many literary forms to the extent that a written text is not fully understood or necessarily complete until it is bestowed meaning by its readers. This was recognised early on by the eighteenth-century fable theorist Antoine Houdar de La Motte (1672-1731), who in the introductory discussion of his *Fables nouvelles* stressed the importance not only of the involvement of the reader of the fable but also of the fable's success contingent upon the interpretation of its reader. Leonardo's single fables no doubt reveal a genuine desire to move readers or listeners to reflect upon human

loco, e sopportare che tante quantità di neve quanto di qui per me essere veduta pò, stia più bassa di me? Certo la mia poca quantità non merta quest'altezza, ché bene posso, per testimonianza della mia piccola figura, conoscere quello che 'l sole fece ieri alle mia compagne, le quali in poche ore dal sole furono disfatte; e questo intervenne per essersi poste più alto che a loro non si richiedea. Io voglio fuggire l'ira del sole, e abbassarmi, e trovare loco conveniente alla mia parva quantità'. E gittatosi in basso, e cominciata a discendere, rotando dell'alte spiagge su per l'altra neve, quanto più cercò loco basso, più crebbe sua quantità, in modo che, terminato il suo corso sopra uno colle, si trovò di non quasi minor grandezza che 'l colle che essa sostenea: e fu l'ultima che in quella state dal sole disfatta fusse. Detta per quelli che s'aumiliano: son esaltati" (ed. Vecce 57) ["A small patch of snow finding itself clinging to the top of a rock which was lying on the topmost height of a very high mountain, and being left to its own imaginings, it began to reflect in this way, saying to itself: 'Now, shall not I be thought vain and proud for having placed myself – such a small patch of snow – in so lofty a spot, and for allowing that so large a quantity of snow as I can see here around me should take a place lower than mine? Certainly my small dimensions by no means merit this elevation. How easily may I, in proof of my insignificance, experience the same fate as that which the sun brought about yesterday to my companions, who were all, in a few hours, destroyed by the sun. and this happened from their having placed themselves higher than became them. I will flee from the wrath of the sun, and humble myself and find a place befitting my small importance.' Thus, flinging itself down, it began to descend, hurrying from its high home on to the other snow; but the more its bulk increased, so that when at last its course was ended on a hill, it found itself no less in size than the hill which supported it; and it as the last of the snow which was destroyed that summer by the sun. This is said for those who, humbling themselves, become exalted" (trans. Richter 281)].

experience by practising right thinking and common sense before one succumbs to immediate gratification and temptation in everyday life situations. At an abstract level, perhaps this is Leonardo's attempt to enter into conversation with his contemporaries about the uncertainties of life as he observed them, even if that meant that the truths he was to impart were restricted to the members at the Sforza court, where the artist presumably recited his fables.

In addition to using animals as his main characters, Leonardo also used plants, trees, and random inanimate objects (e.g., a stone, snowball, leaf, glass of wine, sheet of paper, and tree branch). His recourse to such a diverse cast of characters may be viewed as an expression of his respect for all things created, as well as of the wonder and awe he experienced in the face of nature, an attitude which, as was demonstrated in the preceding chapter, is also conveyed in the *Bestiario*. At the same time, the varied characters can be considered a testament to the power of Leonardo's imagination and creativity. Leonardo personifies objects otherwise deemed meaningless or unworthy, thus envisioning them as equal participants in the world. It would seem that, for Leonardo, all things in life – regardless of size and function – are valuable indicators of the way in which the world operates: “Most [of Leonardo's fables] exhibit his characteristically vivid feeling for the individual life or ‘essence’ of each ‘participant’ and possess a freshness which transcends their essentially imitative nature” (Kemp, *The Marvellous Works* 155). This sense of equality among the *Favole*'s chief characters is also perceived in the dialogues that are developed between unlikely interlocutors (e.g., in verbal exchanges between animals and inanimate objects or between plants and animals). Leonardo's assortment of protagonists is yet another reminder of a characteristic of fable, as defined by Blackham: “[the fable's] ‘showing’ is

translation of the general into the particular, what is meant in practice” (175). The fable is not in itself an abstract literary work and thus relies heavily upon the conceptual and intuitive thinking of the reader (or listener) in order for its meaning to come to life. The reader is expected to connect the abstract point (i.e., the general idea) to the real (i.e., the particular). From a narrative standpoint, Leonardo’s use of minutiae as characters facilitates the realization of the aim of fable, for it enables him to simplify general and more complex notions. This aspect of fable, in fact, contributes to the genre’s universal appeal. Leonardo’s fable about the net, an otherwise mundane object, is such an example; it represents arrogance and greed: “La rete che soleva pigliare li pesci, fu presa e portata via dal furor de’ pesci” (ed. Vecce 67) [“The net that was wont to take the fish was seized and carried away by the rush of fish” (trans. Richter 309)]. Conceptually, however, the attention given to detail in the *Favole* reinforces the idea that the truth in the fable being narrated is not self-contained, but is instead relevant in all contexts and environments; in other words, the ethical message Leonardo wishes to express is universal. While a fable describing the woes of a stone may seem overly particular and irrelevant to human experience, it is precisely the narration of such an anomalous episode that reinforces the idea that these truths are applicable to every niche of the human realm. The fact that Leonardo uses an inanimate object, for example, is merely a metaphor to relate a message with meaning in the greater scheme of things. Leonardo wishes to underscore his conviction that no experience in life is too minute to have meaning.

b. Philosophy: *Necessità*, Natural Law, and Ethics

There is an ethic that the fable genre wishes to address and advance. Throughout history, most fable collections that have been produced are a compendium of right and wrong human behaviours, though this classification is more inferred than systematic. While in some cases the ethic in fables is culturally specific, in most it is universal for the reason that it is familiar for readers from different social and cultural backgrounds (Perry, “The Fable” 66, 73). The universal appeal of this literary genre begs the question of the source of the moral truths it conveys. Since the morality that drives fables is recognized by many and sustains *one* truth only, it would seem to come from an unwritten higher law. Is the origin of these truths found in humankind or does it originate in something beyond the human experience? These and other similar questions will be the focus of the following pages regarding the philosophical dimension of Leonardo’s *Favole*. In answering these questions, the present study will reiterate the principle of *Necessità* in Leonardo’s thought, highlighting its presence in the *Favole*, as well as its relevance to a universal morality. This discussion will cast light on Leonardo not only as a fabulist, as already demonstrated, but also as a sort of moral philosopher. Recognizing Leonardo as such will place him among his contemporaries such as Alberti as well as among early thinkers such as Aristotle, the Stoics, and Cicero, all of whom, to a certain degree, shared the idea that some of the abstract phenomena of human experience were discoverable through natural law. A combined investigation of the ideas transmitted by past thinkers and by the *Favole* will reveal that Leonardo was indeed a sort of moral philosopher who, through his own notion of *Necessità*, cultivated reflections regarding natural law via the fable genre.

Perhaps the most compelling fables by Leonardo, in regard to *Necessità*, are the two about the moth that tries to penetrate the flame and sears its wings in so doing; these two fables were cited at the beginning of the chapter as fables 25 and 40,¹⁵⁷ the latter being an elaborated version of the former. Considered jointly, the two fables are particularly effective in demonstrating the role played by *Necessità* in questions regarding morality. Indeed, in these two fables, the moth's ignorance and blind desire are placed in a context in which the outcome of human moral behaviour is set and determined by a higher natural order. Though fable 40 is long, its plot can be summarized as follows: Lured by the shimmering of the candle's flame, the moth wishes to approach it as it would a flower. Not satisfied with its proximity to the flame, the moth flies directly through the flame, burning the tips of its wings as it does so. Stunned, the moth wonders how something so beautiful can be so harmful; unable to fathom the reason for this, it determines to go through the flame once again. This time, the consequences are more damaging; the moth singes its legs and what remained of its wings and falls into the oil from which the candle burns. Breathing its last breaths and contemplating the reasons for its unjustified end, the moth turns to the flame and says: “O maledetta luce, io mi credevo avere in te trovato la mia felicità; io piango indarno il mio matto desiderio, e con mio danno ho conosciuto la tua consumatrice e dannosa natura” (ed. Vecce 66) [“O accursed light! I thought that in you I had found my happiness! Vainly do I lament my mad desire, and by my ruin I have come to know your rapacious and destructive nature”] (McCurdy 260: 2)]. To which the flame replies: “Così fo io a chi ben non mi sa usare” [“Thus do I treat whoever does not know how to use me aright”]. In an exceptional case, Leonardo appends a detailed moral lesson to the end of the fable: “Detta per quelli i quali, veduti dinanzi a sé questi lascivi e mondani piaceri, a similitudine del parpaglione, a

¹⁵⁷ As mentioned earlier this is Vecce's numbering.

quelli corrano, senza considerare la natura di quelli; i quali, da essi omini, dopo lunga usanza, con loro vergogna e danno conosciuti sono” [“This is said for those who when they see before them these carnal and worldly delights, hasten towards them like the butterfly, without ever taking thought as to their nature, which they know after long usage to their shame and loss”]. Though fable 25 shares the same plot, it does not include a dialogue between the moth and the flame and may well be a first draft of its sister fable, since it was written on a page preceding that of fable 40¹⁵⁸ in the codex *Atlanticus*. It is merely comprised of a lament expressed by the moth: ““O falsa luce, quanti come me debbi tu avere, ne’ passati tempi, avere miserabilmente ingannati. O si pure volevo vedere la luce, non dovev’io conoscere il sole dal falso lume dello spurco sevo?”” (ed. Vecce 61)¹⁵⁹ [““O false light! how many must thou have miserably deceived in the past, like me; or, if I must indeed see light so near, ought I not to have known the sun from the false glare of dirty tallow?”” (trans. Richter 278)]. In both fables, experience and reason, not blind and selfish desire, would have informed the moth that something else was to be expected from this situation and that the flame was a force to be reckoned with; however, the moth’s unpreparedness and unawareness of this reality yielded a negative outcome.

¹⁵⁸ Fable 25 is on f.67r.a. and fable 40 on f.257r.b.

¹⁵⁹ The complete fable 25 reads as follows: “Favola. Non si contentando il vano e vagabondo parpaglione di potere comodamente volare per l’aria, vinto dalla dilettevole fiamma della candela, diliberò volare in quella; e ’l suo giocondo movimento fu cagione di subita tristizia; imperò che ’n detto lume si consumarono le sottile ali, e ’l parpaglione misero, caduto tutto brusato a piè del candellieri, dopo molto pianto e pentimento, si rasciugò le lagrime dai bagnati occhi, e levato il viso in alto, disse: ‘O falsa luce, quanti come me debbi tu avere, ne’ passati tempi, avere miserabilmente ingannati. O si pure volevo vedere la luce, non dovev’io conoscere il sole dal falso lume dello spurco sevo?’” (ed. Vecce 61) [“The vain and wandering butterfly, not content with being able to fly at its ease through the air, overcome by the tempting flame of the candle, decided to fly into it; but its sportive impulse was the cause of a sudden woe, for its delicate wings were burnt in the flame. And the hapless butterfly having dropped, all scorched, at the foot of the candlestick, after much lamentation and repentance, dried the tears from its swimming eyes, and raising its face exclaimed: ‘O false light! how many must thou have miserably deceived in the past, like me; or, if I must indeed see light so near, ought I not to have known the sun from the false glare of dirty tallow?’” (trans. Richter 277-78)].

The flame's reply in fable 40 is not only a more deliberate addition by Leonardo, but also a more enlightening comment because it exhibits the sublime law of nature (*Necessità*). By its very nature, the flame is "consumatrice e dannosa" ["rapacious and destructive"], and it is experience that enables one to understand this truth. In metaphorical terms, the flame represents a force that harms those who are unaware of its nature and dare to challenge it, as the moth attempted to do two times ("sanza considerare la natura di quelli") before reflecting on its very essence and power. The entire episode, in fact, is a metaphor for the ignorance shown by the moth. If, however, human beings use experience and reason to know nature and human nature, they will learn to cultivate correct reasoning and understanding about the fixed laws of nature and about the role of human beings in the natural order. Leonardo has represented the moth as one whose moral behaviour works against natural law. This is attested in the flame's reply – "Così fo io a chi ben non mi sa usare" – which is in direct reference to the moth's mistaken assumptions and unreasonable desires, as well as to its overall ignorance concerning the nature of the flame. In its response, the flame's use of the verbs *sapere usare* in the negative ("non mi sa usare") suggests that something needs first to be understood in order for it to be used with positive results. For progress to occur there is a preliminary step that must first be observed and that is to know the facts and their possible consequences, and to know how to analyze human nature in order to deduce its moral role in the greater natural order.

Only in hindsight does the moth realize that it should have known something about the flame before it plunged blindly into it. In fable 40, the moth bemoans its initial ingenuousness ("io *mi credevo* avere in te trovato la mia felicità"), while in fable 25 it admits that perhaps it ought to have recognized the destructive quality of the flame ("*non dovev'io*

conoscere il sole dal falso lume dello spurco sevo?”). In both fables, Leonardo stresses that something *ought* to be known by human beings, that is, that a prescribed degree of knowledge and experience is a prerequisite to rising above a rudimentary understanding of the way in which things operate and to gaining a deeper awareness of human moral behaviour in the world. Indeed, the very force behind Leonardo’s notion of *Necessità* is that it is insufficient to limit our knowledge and experience to our personal needs and desires, because there exists a law that is more universal than those created by humans and more powerful in determining the course of events in an individual’s life as well as in life in general. *Necessità* is a higher law of nature governing a greater order to which all human beings are subject; if human beings understand binding universal rules of morality, they are rewarded with favourable outcomes.

It may appear odd to relegate ethics to a realm of unchanging natural laws especially since morality, as it is generally interpreted in today’s society, is not something that can be easily compartmentalized into rigid notions of right and wrong. Since no two situations are identical, different criteria are required in single cases to evaluate morality and reach a conclusion with which all individuals involved can agree. It is normally believed that there is no such thing as *one* right or wrong behaviour, but that each act is situational and must be measured against its immediate contexts. Seen in this light, therefore, ethics is interpreted not in an absolutist but in a relativistic or personal manner. Leonardo’s principle of *Necessità* opposes this way of seeing morality and supports instead a world in which there exist absolute laws by which all people should abide. Leonardo writes fables that function within a universal moral framework that prioritizes the value of one act over another. The following pages will show that he was not, in fact, the only one to do so during the Renaissance, as the

comparative analysis with Alberti's *Centum apologi* will demonstrate, nor was his or Alberti's adherence to a theory of natural law rooted in recent history. On the contrary, it will be shown that natural law theory existed centuries before Leonardo's time.

Dorothy Koenigsberger's study *Renaissance Man and Creative Thinking* sheds light on theories that were advanced by Alberti, Leonardo, and Nicholas of Cusa (1401-64), and on their shared notion of "analogy-based harmony" (12), a demonstration of nature's harmonious order through analogy. It is mainly to the notion of "analogy-based harmony," as described by Koenigsberger, that the present study refers in its analysis of the *Centum apologi* and the *Favole*. Although Koenigsberger applies this concept to Alberti's and Leonardo's art and science, she nonetheless approaches it as one that is transferable and that crosses disciplinary boundaries to permeate all their works.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, it is difficult to conceive that Alberti and Leonardo, given their entrenched faith in universal interconnectedness, did not frame their fables within a system that mirrors their assumptions about greater universal laws.

There is a sense of repetition in *Centum apologi* and the *Favole* that is connected to the recurrence of themes asserting universal principles. For example, Alberti repeats the notion of allowing things to be guided by natural laws in apologues 5, 19, 34, 37, and 95, while in Leonardo the validity of experience in one's pursuit to learn about reality emerges in fables 28, 11, 16, 40, 52, 41, and 5. The repetition of these themes reinforces Vecce's observation, noted above, about a recurring event ("una medesima vicenda") uniting Leonardo's fables. The fact that both artists repeat such themes validates the following statement by Koenigsberger: "The recurrence of natural operations gives nature a rhythmical quality" (59). That is, similar to the rhythmic quality of nature's cycles, the recurrence of

¹⁶⁰ See Koenigsberger xi-xiii.

themes mirroring natural laws creates a pattern in the two collections that simulates an internal circular movement. The repetition and circularity in Alberti's and Leonardo's fables is simply in accord with the profound ways in which nature moves and operates. Moreover, a single fable is a single experience or one part of an implied greater whole (i.e., the harmony in nature) and thus represents a microcosm in the macrocosm. Because Alberti and Leonardo assign definite beginnings and ends to all the actions described in their fables, each fable, with its prescribed finite parts, has its place in nature and fulfills its role in the cyclical paradigm of the natural order. *Centum apologi* and the *Favole* evoke repetition and circularity from the balanced relationship of parts (i.e., the fables) to the whole and from their interdependence with each other, reproducing the equality and harmony found in nature. As a whole, these Renaissance fable collections are analogous to a strict unity of continuous and harmonious relationships.

Laws of nature are decipherable in the realm of human experience and can, therefore, be imitated in human works (Koenigsberger xii). The *Centum apologi* and *Favole* represent an analogy of the much larger organization governing nature, but a structural dissection of the collections reveals that each fable, exemplifying natural principles, is comparable to a part in the greater whole of nature. What is more, the fact that humans, animals, plants, and inanimate objects are featured as protagonists suggests that laws of nature are impressed upon all things and have validity in all levels of experience in the human sphere. The following two Alberti apologues show no discrimination between human and inanimate objects that convey the same meaning: "12. Ambitiosus aegre ferens quod imago sua se ex speculo non salutasset, primo perturbari iracundia coeperat, dehinc despicere, quomque aequae simulacrum responderet, illis itaque fregit. Postque haec indoluit, se ex uno plures

effecisse irrisores” (Marsh 40).¹⁶¹ The other apologue is about a book and a mouse: “19. Liber, in quo omnis ars libraria esset perscripta, opem petebat ne a sorice abroderetur. Irrisit sorex” (44).¹⁶² Though Leonardo does not use humans as characters, there is no discrimination either between the characters and their actions in the following two fables, despite the fact that a reader will find the moral in the first fable about the donkey, and not the second about the crab, more relevant, simply because its principal character – the donkey – has a more immediate presence in the realm of human experiences: “Addormentatosi l’asino sopra il diaccio d’un profondo lago, il suo calore dissolvé esso diaccio, e l’asino sott’acqua, a mal suo danno, si destò, e subito annegò”¹⁶³ (ed. Vecce 56) [“An ass having gone to sleep on the ice over a deep lake, his heat dissolved the ice and the ass awoke under water to his great grief, and was forthwith drowned”] (trans. Richter 279)]; and “Favola. El granchio stando sotto il sasso per pigliar e pesci che sotto a quello entravano, venne la piena con rovinoso precipitamento di sassi, e collo rotolarsi sfracelloron tal granchio” (ed. Vecce 67) [“A Fable. The crab standing under the rock to catch the fish which crept under it, it came to pass that the rock fell with a ruinous downfall of stones, and by their rush the crab was crushed”] (trans. Richter 309)]. Metaphorically, the characters in these fables are all equal and necessary parts of the harmonious organization of nature, thus reinforcing the idea that all events are analogous to natural order and all experiences are valid sources of knowledge of the laws governing reality. Indeed, the many examples using small inanimate

¹⁶¹ [“12. A conceited man was annoyed that his image in a mirror did not greet him. At first, he burned with rage, and next showed contempt. When his image did the same, he struck the mirror and shattered it. But he soon regretted having multiplied his mockers” (Marsh 41)].

¹⁶² [“19. A book, which fully described all of the bookmaker’s art, begged a shrewmouse not to gnaw at it. The mouse laughed at it” (45)].

¹⁶³ The donkey also traditionally represents human foolishness and for this reason may be more familiar to a reader.

objects¹⁶⁴ emphasize the idea that natural principles pervade all levels of existence. The equal consideration of an animal and inanimate object in a single work also suggests that neither Alberti nor Leonardo believed that hierarchies existed in the cognitive process of deeper human understanding about the world – a notion recalling “the Renaissance tendency in theory of knowledge to eliminate hierarchical divisions and characterize the human mind as the agent that could seize the essence of the images and discover the laws of nature” (Koenigsberger xii). The harmony, truth, beauty, and goodness expressed in nature is knowable to the human mind and all experience and reason will lead to deeper understanding; thus, it is not necessary for human beings to journey into supernatural realms to arrive at this truth.¹⁶⁵ Since human beings themselves represent the microcosm in the macrocosm, they themselves reflect natural principles; thus, the ultimate authority human beings should heed in the acquisition of learning is that which was given to them naturally and which they possess within.

Seen in this light and in comparison with Alberti’s *Centum apologi*, the single texts in the *Favole* are stimuli for humans to understand the world through direct contact with it and to reproduce their understanding of it in their own works or lives. This idea, too, was discussed in relation to the *Bestiario*. In fact, both literary collections by Leonardo studied thus far appeal to their readers to reflect upon reality and to attempt to perfect their understanding of its laws and reproduce these laws in their lives. Just as the *Bestiario* suggests so too the *Favole* advance the opinion that knowledge of universal laws is perfectible through human reason and direct experience with reality.

¹⁶⁴ For example, Alberti writes apologues in which he uses characters such as a rudder and oars, golden candelabra, jug of Samian clay, and cog on a wheel; while some of Leonardo’s fables feature a blade, mirror, net, ink and paper, and snow ball.

¹⁶⁵ This notion was also stressed in the *Bestiario*.

In both the *Centum apologi* and *Favole*, the stress on experience and rational thought among human beings is reinforced through negative demonstrations. That is, in some fables, protagonists who are unaware of the order and harmony in nature suffer negative consequences because of their futile attempts to disrupt natural order. This is manifest in the dog's actions in Alberti's apologue 5: "Canis cum tauro dimicaturus victoriam sperabat, quod adversario dentes superiores deessent. At cornibus tauri saucius, 'non istaec,' inquit, 'putassem'" (Marsh 38).¹⁶⁶ From the dog's naïve and ignorant comment "non istaec putassem" ["I didn't think of that!"] it is clear that Alberti is not only criticizing the dog's unpreparedness and unawareness, but also suggesting that an opposite behaviour might have yielded a different result. Indeed, the phrase itself "non me l'aspettavo" necessarily indicates that a better result – a contrast – could have been produced in this situation. The bull's horns, a natural physical attribute, were a force to be reckoned with, but one of which the dog was unaware and could not see because he was blinded by irrational desire to triumph over the bull. Alberti's apologue is similar to Leonardo's fable, in the longer version cited above about the moth, who, like the dog, uttered a naïve and ignorant remark about the consequences of its actions. In Leonardo's fable, however, the protagonist receives a direct response from nature, which is personified by the flame. Nature's reply suggests that the moth could have diverted the negative consequences had it applied reason to consider the true nature of the flame. Moreover, it recalls Bongioanni's observation on the sometimes fatalistic aspect of the *Favole*: "La vita si sostiene sempre a spese di se stessa... chi vuol esser più astuto di Natura, tosto [Natura] lo stronca" (226-27). In other words, those who, like the moth, attempt to challenge nature are quickly thwarted by nature itself, for nature, according

¹⁶⁶ ["5. A dog that was about to fight a bull expected to win because his opponent had no sharp teeth. But after the bull's horns had gored him, he exclaimed: 'I didn't think of that!'" (Marsh 39)].

to Leonardo, does not break its laws: “Natura non rompe sua legge” (ed. De Micheli 53).

Through individual fables, Leonardo impresses upon his readers the idea that there is more to what is seen initially and superficially. The moth fable reinforces a truth “that embod[ies] consistent principles that typify absolute values” (Koenigsberger 62) about a greater whole of nature (*Necessità*) that lies beyond the confines of concrete material experience.

Using a varied spectrum of fable characters, both Alberti and Leonardo highlight the role that a human being ought to assume in the preservation of natural harmony. In particular, they promote sound reasoning derived from experience above all other forms of induction. The following examples draw attention to Alberti’s and Leonardo’s faith in human beings’ innate ability to reason about the workings of nature: “23. Vermis nucem in qua esset ortus corrodebat. ‘O igitur ingrate atque impie!’ dixit nux, ‘mihine, quae tu ut esses effeci, non desinis pestem inferre?’ Respondit vermis: ‘Si genuisti ut inedia peream, iniuria est’” (Marsh 46).¹⁶⁷ Leonardo’s fable about the ant expresses the same idea: “Favola. La formica trovato uno grano di miglio, il grano sentendosi preso da quella gridò: ‘Se mi fai tanto piacere di lasciarmi fruire il mio desiderio del nascere, io ti renderò cento me medesimi’. E così fu fatto” (ed. Vecce 56) [“Fable. The ant found a grain of millet. The seed feeling itself taken prisoner cried out to her: ‘If you will do me the kindness to allow me to accomplish my function of reproduction,¹⁶⁸ I will give you a hundred such as I am.’ And so it was” (trans. Richter 278)]. Both the worm and grain of millet show an understanding that rises above a rudimentary knowledge of reality. In their logical and measured replies, they point out what does not appear obvious to the nut and ant. In Leonardo’s fable, the moral lesson is the virtue

¹⁶⁷ [“23. A worm gnawed at the nut in which it was born. ‘How ungrateful and impious you are!’ the nut exclaimed. ‘Would you destroy the one who brought you into the world?’ ‘If you bore me to die of hunger,’ the worm replied, ‘you did me wrong’” (Marsh 47)].

¹⁶⁸ This is better translated as “[i]f you will do me the pleasure of allowing me to fulfil my desire to be born.”

of patience recommended to the ant by the grain of millet; in the end, the ant's patience is rewarded. The rational explanation by the grain of millet is one which takes into consideration the entire fabric of existence. In order for the ant to receive what it desires (the grain of millet for nourishment), the laws of nature require it first to take a series of steps, one of which includes patience. In this way, the harmonious order of nature will function properly and sustain all its parts (i.e., provide food for the ant), rather than be disrupted, as the ant had first attempted to do. According to natural law, the manifestation of the ant's desires will be granted only in such a manner. Leonardo's grain of millet, like Alberti's nut, manifests its understanding of the efficiency of natural laws, whereas the nut and ant do not.

Notwithstanding these conceptual parallels between Alberti and Leonardo, Koenigsberger notes that: "[A]ny comparison of Alberti and Leonardo will show definite differences between the *modes of expression* of their points of view. These differences are not the result of a clash between their basic conceptions of natural harmony, but are implicit in their different *applications of the idea*" (57; emphasis mine). This difference transpires in *Centum apologi* and in the *Favole*, bringing to light the ways in which the Renaissance authors differ in their "modes of expression" and "applications of the idea." Specifically, it will underscore the applicability of the law of nature in Leonardo as opposed to Alberti. Let us first begin with an examination of some of the stylistic and structural differences between the two collections before discussing the different applications and expressions of the two authors' ideas.

Arguably the greatest difference between these Renaissance fables is linked to literary intention. While it is clear that Alberti conceived his one hundred Latin apologies for formal publication, it still is not known whether Leonardo had similar aspirations for his fifty

or so fables. Both authors, it may be deduced, wrote their fables from different points of departure and, consequently, within different parameters.

In typical Renaissance style, *Centum apologi* opens with a dedicatory letter¹⁶⁹ in which Alberti defends the style and cryptic quality of his apologues and wishes his dedicatee enjoyment in reading them. Then, in a final gesture of false modesty and as a sign of respect and tribute to his ancient predecessor – common formalities in Renaissance literature – Alberti follows this epistle letter with a shorter prefatory letter addressed to Aesop, in which he declares that he is “very eager to have [him] judge these hundred apologues” (Marsh 35). Aesop replies, assuring Alberti of his unquestionable talent as a fabulist. Leonardo, on the other hand, wrote his fifty fables rather haphazardly throughout five separate notebooks. Though it would be unfair to say that Leonardo did not make any attempt to create fables with any literary or artistic merit, in the strictest sense of the word, it might perhaps be more accurate to view his literary intentions as being broader and perhaps more oratorical in nature, since it is generally believed that he wrote fables for recitation at Ludovico’s court in Milan.

These observations raise the issue of deliberate choice. Because *Centum apologi* is a planned publication, a fact which no doubt posed certain constraints for Alberti, it is deliberately intellectual, esoteric, and literary. Indeed, it exhibits a style that is formal and refined. Moreover, Alberti’s apologues were written in Latin, a loftier and more literary choice in the Renaissance and one that carries philosophical implications with it. Finally, the moral application discernible in their form and content proves that the author had polished them. Leonardo’s fables, on the other hand, reveal a style that is more spontaneous and

¹⁶⁹ The letter is addressed to Francesco Marescalco (d. 1482), a learned young Ferrarese canon who studied with Guarino da Verona.

matter-of-fact, and less hermetic and sophisticated. They were written in a Tuscan vernacular, containing grammatical and syntactical errors and, for the most part, represent first drafts. These characteristics yield a noteworthy conclusion about Leonardo, which is that perhaps he was more engrossed in his pursuit of knowing than concerned with the aesthetic beauty and usefulness of his fables. This is not an unreasonable assumption to make about Leonardo, for it is compatible with the way in which he lived his life and conducted nearly all the experiments reported in his surviving manuscript pages.

The key phrases from Koenigsberger's statement – "modes of expression" and "applications of the idea" – reveal how the arrangement of the *Favole* produces a difference in philosophical slants between Leonardo and Alberti. It is, however, a difference of degree and not of kind, and it amounts to a difference primarily between theory and practice. In *Centum apologi*, Alberti expresses notions about laws of nature analogous to Leonardo's, but he constructs boundaries and gives precedence to esthetic and literary applications: "In his works it is clear that [Alberti's] overwhelming commitment is to the production or reproduction of beauty, in and above the exploration of nature for its own sake" (Koenigsberger 50). Leonardo's fables, on the other hand, are more immediate and visceral. Not only the fables themselves, but also the physical layout of the *Favole* is a literal demonstration of how Leonardo's life and works are themselves microcosms within the macrocosm. The principles and harmony of nature are functional in Leonardo in the same way that each of his fables is in harmony with all the things surrounding it in the manuscripts. Indeed, Leonardo's manuscripts are a testament to his insatiable curiosity and desire to know, for they are filled with countless drawings, visual experiments sometimes accompanied by written explanations, and notes revealing spontaneous thoughts or pondered

observations. These were all attempts (even steps) towards a deeper understanding of things. The *Favole* are not exceptions to Leonardo's well-known method of recording and storing information. The physical spaces in which Leonardo's fables are found could be interpreted as the literal "application of his ideas" because he compiles fables where there are no visible boundaries between the space occupied by the fables and the remaining materials in the notebooks. Leonardo's fables were written interspersed in a context in which divisions between one form of human activity and another are eliminated. Like nature, the fables co-exist alongside parts that seem unrelated, but, in reality, are interconnected and interdependent with each other in a greater order. The law of nature creates order in the chaos of Leonardo's notebooks. With this in mind, the question of theory and practice arises in connection with Alberti and Leonardo. While *Centum apologi* shows a separation of theory and practice in Alberti, the *Favole* underscores a convergence of these in Leonardo.

Leonardo's principle of *Necessità* reflects a way of thinking that was common among some Renaissance contemporaries; it also immerses itself in a tradition of natural law theory conceptualized by thinkers who lived centuries before him. The idea that the world was governed by a law of nature – one that superseded human laws – can be traced back to Plato and Aristotle, both of whom discuss pre-existing forms in nature in the *Republic* (about 375 BC?) and in *Nicomachean Ethics*,¹⁷⁰ and *Rhetoric*, respectively. It was not until the Stoics and the emergence of later works such as Cicero's *De legibus* (composed between 54-51 BC) and Thomas Aquinas's *Summa theologia*¹⁷¹ (1265-74) that notions of natural law were systematized and internationalized.

¹⁷⁰ There is no exact date of composition for the *Nicomachean Ethics*, but it is said to be based on notes from Aristotle's lectures at the Lyceum from c. 335/34 to 323 BC.

¹⁷¹ It should be noted that with Aquinas the notion of natural law is immersed in a Christian context.

William Gairdner, the author of *The Book of Absolutes: A Critique of Relativism and a Defence of Universals*, discusses natural law as moral law in two chapters¹⁷² and summarizes the law of nature in one succinct sentence: “The natural law is an ordinance of right reason that follows nature and is promulgated for the common good” (185). In other words, natural law is not human law, and yet it serves human beings because it is a good for all and is accessible to human beings through right reason. In these two chapters in which Gairdner primarily discusses natural law as it is manifested in today’s society, in particular in international law, he is careful to remind his readers that natural law is not a modern notion and has its foundation in Greek thought.

The Stoics were the true innovators of natural law; indeed, it was not until Stoicism that natural law was connected to rules of morality (Striker 209).¹⁷³ This fact is of great relevance to the present discussion on the *Favole*. Gairdner’s following statement echoes the Stoic idea of natural law: “In short, traditional natural law says no human good (or passion, or emotion) is *necessarily* good unless it is valued within a reasoned and natural moral framework” (168). Naturally, the goodness propagated by nature was honourable (i.e., virtuous), and according to the Stoics, it prescribed right conduct as following the four cardinal virtues: wisdom, temperance, courage, and prudence. The Stoics believed that everything in human society deemed just and good had its true and ultimate source in nature.

¹⁷² Specifically, he does so in chapters eight and nine, respectively titled “Universals of Law: The Natural Law and the Moral Law” and “The Natural Law and the Moral Law at Work in the World.” For a detailed account of the tradition and theory of natural law, the study suggests the following readings to supplement Gairdner’s study: *Natural Law and Natural Rights* by John Finnis (1980) and *The Tradition of Natural Law: a Philosopher’s Reflections* by Yves R. Simon (1965). Though less expansive than the above studies, Gisela’s short essay “Origins of the Concept of Natural Law” in *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (1996) is quite informative and helpful.

¹⁷³ Plato and Aristotle are the first in Western civilization to articulate ideas that point towards a natural law. However, while their theories on such a notion are still related to ethics, which is of greater interest in the present study, both Greek philosophers more specifically refer to a notion of natural justice (i.e., correct justice) than to one of natural law.

Thus, natural law expressed a rational and harmonious order that had been perfected by nature. Holding this belief, the Stoics attempted to demonstrate how natural law was a positive influential force in an individual life. Human beings, in all their actions, should follow this nature not only because it is perfect and rational in the highest degree, but also because it is good for them. By adhering to the will of nature, a person will lead a happy and harmonious life, because “nature is not only rational, but also provident and benevolent, so that the best order of the universe must *eo ipso* be the best for each part of the whole” (Striker 230). The Stoics also described the idea of the necessity of the parts to and for the order and harmony of the cosmic whole, much in the same way that individual fables in the *Favole* are interdependent within a greater whole.

The Stoic doctrine of natural law gained much of its importance and influence via Cicero (106-43 BC), who is credited with systematizing this theory in his attempt to accord natural law with Roman civil law (*ius civile*); his efforts to blend these two laws are manifest in two of his works: *De re publica* (composed between 54-51 BC) and the incomplete *De legibus*.¹⁷⁴ Regarding the latter work, James E.G. Zetzel states that “[t]he exposition of the idea and implications of natural law in Book 1 is the fullest exposition of Stoic doctrine on the subject that survives, the idea of the *cosmopolis* or world city” (xxii). Indeed, in *De legibus*, Cicero, at the request of his two listeners Atticus and Quintus, attempts to explain civil law, but believes it is necessary to begin his discussion with the origin of laws, which, according to him, originate in nature. Accordingly, the justice that ought to be upheld in laws derives from nature as well. Nature, therefore, is the ultimate source, as is echoed in the Stoics. Also reminiscent of the Stoics is the fact that Cicero believes that human beings are a

¹⁷⁴ Cicero initiates discussion of natural law through the interlocutor Laelius in Book 3 of the former work; however, it is not until Book 1 of the latter work that he elaborates this philosophical notion.

unique and superior species because they are endowed with the divine gift of reason.

Because it is divine, reason is judged to be right reason, and because nature is ruled by the force of god, right reason is found in nature as well. Through right reason, human beings possess the capacity to live their lives according to natural law, which is naturally just and virtuous.

Considered within the context of the *Favole* (as well as of the *Bestiario*), Leonardo's principle of *Necessità* has thus far revealed itself as an influential force determining the outcomes of the actions of protagonists. Predominantly and put simply, it has shown that virtue yields positive effects, whereas vice produces negative ones. Against the historical background of natural law, *Necessità* is now immersed within a wider theoretical framework. What has been said and demonstrated thus far about *Necessità* in the *Favole* remains valid and true; yet, the history of the tradition of natural law has no doubt accorded more depth to these literary writings both as a whole and individually to the actions described in single fables. *Necessità* has justified the case for morality as something intimately intertwined with nature. Indeed, the moral system in the *Favole*, sometimes revealed in the form of an *epimythium*, does not reflect Leonardo's personal opinion, but is an expression of a law based purely on a natural order. It prescribes what is morally binding for all human beings and is an indirect reminder to readers about the existence of the permanent moral duty and obligation to which everyone and everything is bound. Without doubt, the fable genre has facilitated Leonardo's expression of his ethics, but at the same time he has surpassed some of its conventions and devices. For example, the *epimythium* and *promithyium*, two central parts of the fable's tri-partite structure, somewhat aid readers to understand the universal moral

lesson, whereas Leonardo's near elimination of these structural devices reinforces his belief that human reason will naturally lead human beings to behaviour that is good for all.

Leonardo's fables can certainly be viewed as overt pillars of justice or concern for the common good (though these values may have only been intuited by readers). Since a fable points to a moral truth, it is expected that a single fable will contain profound moral implications. Leonardo's fable on the ant is simple and brief, and yet it exemplifies the sense of justice intrinsic to natural law. The grain of millet, using its ability of right reasoning, demonstrates to the ant that it would be doing a great disservice or injustice to itself and to the grain by taking or consuming it now. By nature, the grain, in its "desiderio del nascere" ["desire to be born"] is capable of providing sustenance for many. There is no doubt that the grain is concerned with its self-preservation, but it also points out a function (or law) of nature whose purpose, if adhered to correctly, is for the common good. The sense of justice that emerges from this fable is connected to the idea that natural law is, as stated above by Striker, "provident and benevolent," thus rewarding good moral effort and supporting an order that provides for all parts of nature. This recalls the Stoic description of natural law as being just and thus sustaining all parts of the whole.

The fable about the thrushes, cited above as well, also shows concern for the common good. Here, Leonardo draws upon the political context to call attention to the ubiquitous law of nature in human existence. Like human desires and emotions, political activity is morally binding if it is to follow natural law. As Leonardo demonstrates in this fable, politicians and the public alike should adjust to *Necessità* if both parties wish to enjoy a harmonious state. The message in Leonardo's closing remarks (the *epimythium*) suggests that political actions should be regulated according to natural law if, as in this case, there is to be a common good:

“Detta per quelle terre che si rallegran di vedere perdere la libertà ai loro maggiori, mediante i quali poi perdano il soccorso, e rimangono legati in potenza del loro nemico, lasciando la libertà e spesse volte la vita” (ed. Vecce 64) [“This is said for those countries which rejoice in seeing their governors lose their liberty, when by that means they themselves lose all succour, and remain in bondage in the power of their enemies, losing their liberty and often their life” (trans. Richter 277)]. In this fable, those who for the malevolence of another party (“quelle terre che si rallegran di vedere perdere la libertà ai loro maggiori”) [“those countries which rejoice in seeing their governors lose their liberty”] do not live according to natural law are dealt a worse hand. Indeed, those countries in the fable are now dealing with a more challenging reality (“poi perdano il soccorso, e rimangono legati in potenza del loro nemico, lasciando la libertà e spesse volte la vita”) [“they themselves lose all succour, and remain in bondage in the power of their enemies”]. Such an outcome is not the result of misfortune, but of ignorance of the laws of nature.

While the *Favole* manifest justice, their primary objective is to advance virtuous behaviour. In discussing their notion of natural law, the Stoics also attempted to show that natural law is virtuous, since justice, as their critics claimed, is not necessarily self-evident and requires standards that are to be maintained.¹⁷⁵ For this reason the goal of natural law is the attainment of the four cardinal virtues – wisdom, temperance, prudence, and courage – which, if adhered to, are just and good for all. While Leonardo’s *Favole* do not include titles like the *Bestiario* to specify the virtue or vice represented in a fable, it is quite clear that the fables favour certain virtues over others, including some of the cardinal virtues.

Wisdom no doubt trumps all other virtues represented in Leonardo’s repertoire of fables, epitomizing both a virtuous life and a reasonable human being. It becomes self-

¹⁷⁵ The critics of this Stoic doctrine made this point.

evident in a context in which morality is the essential motif, for Leonardo would not describe the errors committed by his protagonists if he believed them to be wise. In the *Favole*, temperance follows wisdom in importance and is a virtue dear to the artist. To express his respect for temperance, Leonardo writes many fables in which he criticizes those with much pride and arrogance. Like the many other fables, the fable about the cedar is one such example and so too are others about trees – the peach, nut, and fig – guilty of envy and swollen pride: “Il persico, avendo invidia alla gran quantità de’ frutti visti fare al noce suo vicino, diliberato fare il simile, si caricò de’ sua in modo tale, che ’l peso di detti frutti lo tirò diradicato e rotto alla piana terra” (ed. Vecce 62-63) [“The peach, being envious of the vast quantity of fruit which she saw borne on the nut-tree, her neighbour, determined to do the same, and loaded herself with her own in such a way that the weight of the fruit pulled her up by the roots and broke her down to the ground” (trans. Richter 281)]; “Il noce mostrando sopra una strada ai viandanti la ricchezza de’ sua frutti, ogni omo lo lapidava” (ed. Vecce 63) [“The nut-tree stood always by a road-side displaying the wealth of its fruit to the passersby, and every one cast stones at it” (trans. Richter 282)]; and “Il fico stando sanza frutti nessuno lo riguardava; volendo, col fare essi frutti, essere laldato da li omini, fu da quelli piegato e rotto” [“The fig-tree having no fruit, no one looked at it; then, wishing to produce fruits that it might be praised by men, it was bent and broken down by them”)]. These four fables – including the one about the cedar – are found in consecutive order on the same manuscript folio and are accompanied by simple sketches of trees. The negative outcome in all four instances is tied to the trees’ false expectations about existence. Their greed and vanity are excessive because they are in opposition to nature’s laws of interconnectedness which rely on the balanced parts of the whole. Thus, if one desires too much, the balance is disrupted.

Certainly, the two fables about the moth and the flame illustrate prudence. Even pithy fables such as the one about the net and the lily can emphasize, in an immediate yet effective manner, the importance of exercising prudence. In all these examples in which the protagonists showed excessive passions and desires, Leonardo did not confer positive outcomes for any of their decisions. Within the context of natural law, temperance is moral and virtuous because it sustains the harmonious natural order; when it is not exercised, it interrupts this harmony. A description offered by Bongioanni summarizes well the justification for which nature punishes anything or anyone desiring more value and importance than another thing or person in the world: “[è] di necessità che ogni animale guardi a ciascuno degli altri dicendogli: ‘tu mi servi’; ma se esso vuole arrogarsi il diritto di soggiungere: ‘tu mi servi *per me*’, tosto la Natura risponde; ‘no, tu mi servi *per me*’ e lo annichilisce affinché esso ritorni ‘natura’” (221). Bongioanni’s observation reinforces Gairdner’s above definition of the laws of nature as governing an existence that is meant for the common good.

An exposition of representative fables has shown that Leonardo conceptualizes (and internalizes) a system of moral codes which demonstrates *Necessità* as a theory reflecting the more ancient and broad notion of natural law. *Necessità* is a law of nature. Indeed, its strong presence in the *Favole* illustrates that some human conduct is either absolutely moral or immoral according to a pre-established higher order. *Necessità* shows cause and effect as it really is. When the dynamics of certain circumstances are not understood – as was shown in the fables about the moth, the fruit trees, and the thrushes – the cause-and-effect relation is broken. Though much effort has been made to show how *Necessità* concretely manifests itself in given situations, little has been said regarding the nature of this force upon human

actions. In other words, it is not particularly clear what motivates this force and why it exerts its power so unilaterally. This is more of an abstract matter, and the tradition of natural law has no doubt shed light on the workings of this force. In particular, the ancients discussed above have provided a theoretical framework within which to understand the ethical map that guides natural law (and consequently human beings who follow the will of nature). But we are still left with the question posed at the beginning of this section: Does natural law originate in something beyond the human experience?

To begin to answer this question, it is useful to refer to Gairdner, who states that “natural law is [...] a transcendent generality of an abstract nature that manifests everywhere in concrete and particular ways” (195). This statement no doubt holds true in Leonardo’s collection of fables in which even inanimate objects are used as characters to demonstrate a higher natural law that is in effect “everywhere in concrete and particular things.” Gairdner also refers to a transcendental quality of the natural law, which invites debate around the origin of natural law and presupposes a higher lawmaker. Related to this, it is worth mentioning that Cicero conceived of the notion of natural law only as one supported by a system of Providence. In fact, in *De legibus*, Cicero asks Atticus, an Epicurean, if he will make concessions about his own beliefs so that Cicero may make his discussion on natural law on the assumption that “all nature is ruled by the force or nature or reason or power or mind or will – or whatever other word there is that will indicate more plainly what I mean – of the immortal gods” (1.21).¹⁷⁶ Leonardo is not known for showing much inclination towards supernatural speculation or for having strong religious faith. The point of the argument, however, is not about religion per se. Cicero, in fact, is not referring to religion

¹⁷⁶ The Latin version reads as follows: “deorum immortalium vi [natura] ratione potestate mente numine, sive quod est aliud verbum quo planius significem quod volo, naturam omnem regi” (Ziegler 30).

either, but more specifically to the existence of a divine and immaterial source. Leonardo's *Necessità* is based upon the belief that there exists a force originating in nature and exerting its influence in the human realm. But, again, what is behind this force?

Before tackling this brief but complex question, it is necessary to return to Koenigsberger, and in particular to her idea that Leonardo's philosophy and works are supported by a belief in spirituality. Although Leonardo envisioned nature as a continuous integration of parts to the whole, she argues that the Renaissance artist also imagined this unified operating system as something encompassing a spiritual, and thus less tactile, region (60). By many others in his time, this spiritual place was relegated to faith, but in the case of Leonardo it was, as Koenigsberger says, an "unvoiced assumption" in the artist's comprehensive conception of nature. Unlike his Neo-Platonist contemporaries, Leonardo did not explore this region of nature by contemplating supernatural theories, preferring instead to leave this mysterious area to his imagination and to investigate only what his mind was capable of knowing. The "unvoiced assumption" about the spiritual region in Leonardo's works and thought suggests his belief in a divine source. Leonardo conceived nature and the human mind as having a divine source because both were, in fact, designed and created by God. Consequently, nature is knowable and accessible to human beings because its principles are imprinted in the human mind.

This additional knowledge no doubt complements (and completes our understanding of) Leonardo's vision of nature. Moreover, it enables us to envisage a longitudinal sequence that begins with a divine point and then descends to nature and finally to the human mind. More important, it uncovers the mystery behind the workings of *Necessità*. And so, to return to the question concerning the primary source of *Necessità*, it can be inferred from this

further insight into Leonardo's idea of reality that the force of *Necessità* must derive from a divine source. Although it is uncommon and even irrelevant to speak about divine manifestation in the context of fables, in the application of *Necessità* (and by extension of natural law) to the *Favole*, our understanding of the presence and influence of this principle in single fable actions has deepened and become clearer. *Necessità* is commanded by a divine design. Following in the tradition of natural law, Leonardo's principle, displayed as it is in the *Favole*, mirrors the natural law conceptualized by the Stoics and later by Cicero in that it presupposes faith in a higher being who, as lawmaker, is morally triumphant over all human law.

Chapter 3 The *Facezie*

i. Preliminaries to Leonardo's *Facezie*

Marinoni writes that the *Facezie* belong to “un Leonardo minore; non quello che scruta i misteri cosmici, ma quello che conversa amabilmente cogli amici” (*Scritti* 54).¹⁷⁷ Indeed, this literary collection has a lighter tone and less abstract implications than either the *Bestiario* or *Favole*. Despite this, it still reveals much about its author and some of his views regarding humanity.

Leonardo wrote twenty-eight¹⁷⁸ facetiae between circa 1490 and 1504,¹⁷⁹ during the first ten years of which he was employed at Ludovico's court. Although scholars like Richter label the facetiae jests and tales and even categorize some fables as facetiae,¹⁸⁰ many of Leonardo's facetiae can be distinguished from his other literary writings because he used the

¹⁷⁷ Except for this statement, Marinoni says little else in his introduction about Leonardo's facetiae.

¹⁷⁸ This count reflects Vecce's. Marinoni includes only twenty-six facetiae in his anthology. The two added by Vecce include an unfinished facetia: “Uno va dinanti al suo amico, il qua' lungo tempo era passato che noll'avea visto, e non fu da quell'ricettato come li pareva meritare. Dolendosi di tale atto rispose non essere mai stato diviso da lui” (138) [“One was walking in front of a friend whom he had not seen for a long time, and he was not greeted by him as the occasion required. To show that he did not mean to offend him the friend told him that he had never been separated from him” (trans. Pedretti, *Commentary* 273: 2)]. Vecce also includes part of a tale from Leonardo's *Trattato della pittura* as it serves as a good example of a witty reply (cited below in italics). The tale tells about King Mathias, the ruler of Hungary from 1458 to 1490, who, upon being presented a portrait of his beloved, expresses his preference for painting rather than for poetry: “Portando il dì del natale del re Mattia un poeta un'opera fattagli in laude del giorno ch'esso re era a beneficio del mondo, et un pittore gli presentò un ritratto della sua innamorata, subito il re rinchiuse il libro del poeta e voltossi alla pittura, et a quella fermò la vista con grande ammirazione. Allora il poeta forte isdegnato disse: ‘O re, leggi, leggi, e sentirai cose di maggior sustanzia che una muta pittura.’ Allora il re, sentendosi riprender del risguardare cose mute, disse: ‘O poeta, taci tu, che non sai ciò che ti dica. Questa pittura serve a miglior senso che la tua, la quale è da orbi’” (139; emphasis mine) [“The reply of King Mathias to a poet who competed with a painter. On King Mathias' birthday a poet brought him a poem composed in praise of the event which he said was for the benefit of the world, and a painter presented him with a portrait of his beloved. The King quickly closed the book of the poet and turning to the picture fixed his eyes on it with great admiration. Then the poet very indignantly said: ‘Oh King, read, but read, and you will learn matter of far weightier substance than a mute picture.’ Then the King, resenting the reproach that he was admiring mute things, said: ‘Silence, oh poet, you do not know what you are saying; this picture serves a nobler sense than your work which might be for the blind’” (trans. Richter 65-66: 1; emphasis mine)]. The king's witty reply reinforces Leonardo's argument that painting serves a nobler sense – sight – than poetry.

¹⁷⁹ According to Ponte, the earliest facetia written by Leonardo is on folio 358v.a of the codex *Atlanticus* and can be assigned to circa 1487. This facetia was later erased by Leonardo and then rewritten on folio 119r.a in the same manuscript (75). Some facetiae were written as late as 1508.

¹⁸⁰ Richter includes the two tales about wine while both Vecce and Marinoni classify these as fables.

designation ‘Facezia’ at the beginning of some of the texts. Since they were written when the artist was at the Sforza court, the *Facezie* are also believed to have been composed and recited for general courtly entertainment. Ponte states that they were written for “trattenimento personale” (75), although it is not entirely clear what that personal use might have entailed. During the final decade of the fifteenth century, Leonardo carried out writing exercises to improve his style and syntax;¹⁸¹ perhaps, then, the facetiae were one of many such exercises. It is not known whether Leonardo ever intended to publish his facetiae as a comprehensive work. Like the *Favole*, the *Facezie* are scattered throughout his manuscripts (*Atlanticus*, *Trivulzianus*, *Madrid II*, *Forster*, *C*, *F*, *W*, *H*, and *M*) among the literary writings written during his Milanese period (i.e., the *Bestiario*, *Favole*, *Profezia*). This collection is the least homogenous (“la meno omogenea;” Vecce 139), because it is a compendium of texts that Leonardo randomly recorded when he heard or read them. Unfortunately, he did not acknowledge his sources. Vecce notes that this tendency is demonstrated by the following reminder written by Leonardo in the codex *Atlanticus*: “Nota ogni cosa. Facezie” [“Note each thing. Facetiae” (my translation)]. Leonardo’s method of collecting facetiae was common in the Renaissance; in fact, few of the facetiae that circulated were original as most were recycled material taken primarily from Cicero and Macrobius (fl. AD 400). Although no scholar has traced the *Facezie* to one direct source, it is generally agreed that Leonardo drew from the popular tradition of the Tuscan novella, which includes the tales of Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-75) and Franco Sacchetti (c. 1335-c. 1400). In fact, the facetia about Madonna Bona corresponds to the last part of Sacchetti’s novella 21:

Sendo uno infermo in articulo di morte, esso senti battere la porta e domandato uno de’ sua servi chi era che batteva l’uscio, esso servo rispose essere una che si chiamava Madonna Bona. Allora l’infermo, alzato le braccia

¹⁸¹ See Introduction.

al cielo, ringraziò Dio con alta voce, poi disse ai servi che lasciassino venire presto questa, acciò che potessi vedere una donna bona innanzi che esso morissi, imperocché in sua vita ma' ne vide nessuna. (ed. Vecce 136)¹⁸²

[A sick man finding himself in *articulo mortis*¹⁸³ heard a knock at the door, and asking one of his servants who was knocking, the servant went out, and answered that it was a woman calling herself Madonna Bona. Then the sick man, lifting his arms to Heaven, thanked God with a loud voice, and told the servants that they were to let her come in at once, so that he might see one good woman before he died, since in all his life he had never yet seen one. (trans. Richter 291)]

Many humorous stories were taken from Leonardo's contemporaries Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459), the inventor of the modern *facetia*, and also Lodovico Carbone (1435-82), the Ferrarese humanist. Though Solmi claims there is no immediate trace of the *Liber facetiarum*, Poggio's famous collection of *facetiae*, in Leonardo's *facetiae* (*Scritti* 108), Leonardo did list the title of Poggio's collection as one of the books he possessed,¹⁸⁴ and so it is quite likely that he was inspired by his predecessor's tales. Indeed, Leonardo's coarsest and most immoral *facetiae* strongly echo Poggio's. The *facetia* about the priest who makes sexual advances towards a woman is described by Ponte as being the most reminiscent of Poggio's tales ("la meno lontana dagli esempi poggiani;" 75):

Facezia. Una lavava i panni e pel freddo aveva i piedi molto rossi, e, passandole appresso, uno prete domandò con ammirazione donde tale roschezza dirivassi; al quale la femmina subito rispuose che tale effetto accadeva, perchè ella aveva sotto il foco. Allora il prete mise mano a quello membro, che lo fece essere più prete che monaca, e, a quella accostatosi, con dolce e sommessiva voce pregò quella che 'n cortesia li dovessi un poco accendere quella candela. (ed. Vecce 134-35)

¹⁸² The following is the last part of Sacchetti's tale: "Non istante molto e venendosi nelli stremi, che poco avea di conoscimento, andò a lui una sua vicina, come tutte fanno, la quale avea nome Donna Buona, e disse: 'Basso, Dio ti facci sano; io sono la tua vicina 'donna' Buona.' E quelli con gran fatica guata costei e disse, che a pena si potea intendere: 'Oggimai, perchè io muoia, me ne vo contento, ché ottanta anni che io sono vissuto mai non ne trovai alcuna buona.' Della qual parola niuno era da torno che le risa potesse tenere, e in queste risa poco stante morì" (Marucci 68).

¹⁸³ This is better translated as "on the point of death."

¹⁸⁴ In the codex *Atlanticus* (f.210r) Leonardo lists "Facetie di Poggio" in the inventory of his books. Leonardo scholars believe that Leonardo probably owned the vernacular edition published in Venice in 1483.

[*Knavish fire*. A woman was washing clothes, and her feet were very red with cold. A priest who was passing by asked her with amazement whence that redness came, and the woman replied at once that it was the result of the fire she had burning below. Then the priest seized that part of him that was responsible for his being a priest instead of a nun, and drawing close to her, with a sweet and soft voice begged her to be so kind as to light that candle for him. (trans. Speroni 187)]

Poggio's influence may also be detected in another of Leonardo's *facetiae* which plays on the double meaning of the word "correggia:" "Facezia. Due camminando di notte per dubbiosa via, quello dinanzi fece grande strepido col culo; e disse l'altro: 'Compagno, or veggo ch'i son da te amato'. 'Come?', dissi l'altro. Quel rispose: 'Te mi porgi la *correggia* perch'io non caggia, né mi perda da te'" (ed. Vecce 134; emphasis mine) ["Two fellows were walking at night along a dark, unfamiliar street. The one who was walking ahead broke air noisily; whereupon, his companion said, 'Now I know that you love me.' 'How is that?' asked the other. The first fellow replied, 'You offer me a *belt* [the Italian word *correggia* means both 'a belt' and 'a fart'] so that I will not fall, and will not lose you'" (trans. Speroni 187; emphasis mine)].¹⁸⁵ Regarding Carbone, Vecce identifies a note in the *Madrid II* codex referring to a *facetia* that Leonardo heard in the court of Ludovico that alludes to a longer tale from Carbone's *Cento trenta novelle o facetie* (1466-71?):¹⁸⁶ "Facezia dell'arciprete di Sancta Maria del Monte, che sta a Varese, che fu mandato legato al Duca 'n scambio d'uno sparviere" (ed. Vecce 137) ["Facetia of the archpriest of Santa Maria del Monte over Varese, who was tied up and sent to the Duke in place of a hawk" (trans. Pedretti, *Commentary* 276: 2)]. Carbone's tale tells how a mayor, with a poor knowledge of Latin grammar, receives a letter written in Latin and misinterprets the word *accipitrem* ["hawk"] for *arciprete*

¹⁸⁵ As mentioned in the Introduction, Richter did not include the more risqué *facetiae* in his anthology.

¹⁸⁶ As far as is known, this is the first collection of jokes in the vernacular.

[“archpriest”]. Thus, he sends the archpriest, rather than a hawk, in a large sack to the duke of Ferrara.¹⁸⁷

Ancient sources have also been discovered in the *Facezie*. In his early study on the Italian novella tradition, Letterio Di Francia notes that the following facetia recalls Cicero’s joke about the height of his son-in-law, a short man, carrying a large sword at his side:

Uno vede una grande spada allato a un altro e dice: ‘O poverello! ell’è gran tempo ch’io t’ho veduto legato a questa arme: perché non ti dislegghi, avendo le mani disciolte e possiedi libertà?’ Al quale costui rispose: ‘Questa è cosa non tua, anzi è vecchia’. Questo, sentendosi mordere, rispose: ‘Io ti conosco

¹⁸⁷ “108. Fo scripta una lettera per parte del duca nostro ad uno podestate di Carpaneto in modenese, chiamato Polo da Foiano, ne la qual si conteneva che dovesse pigliare un sparaviero e mandargelo legato in uno sacheto che non fugiesse. Le parole erano per lettera in questa forma: ‘Dilectissime noster, capias accipitrem et mitte nobis ligatum in sacculo ne aufugiat.’ Misser lo Podestà, che sapeva de la grammatica di montagna, legendo questa parola *accipitrem* intese che significasse l’accipriete, e chiamò Pavaione, so genero, e dicegli: il Signor mi scrive ch’io pigli l’accipriete e che gel mandi legato in un sacheto, che ’l non fugga; qualche tradimento de’ haver fatto costui, lieze quella lettera. Pavaione, che ne sapea tanto de la grammatica, quanto il misser, liege e dice: Questo è certo che *accipitrem* vien a dire l’accipriete; ma non ditti niente al nodaro perché l’è so parente; e mandono per l’acciprete, dicendogli che l’era presone del duca. Il buon homo innocente risponde che sempre è presone del suo signore, ma che non ha facto mal niuno. Or ben – disseno coloro – bisogna pure obedire. E cussì, messolo nel sacco, il condusseno a Ferrara. Vanno da Lodovico Casella, dicendogli che hanno exeguito quel che giè stato commesso; Lodovico risponde che non sa covelle di tal commissione: Ma havettivu littere? Mai sí, dicono costoro, e mostrano la littera. La qual legendo Lodovico, se l’ebbe piacere non è da dimandare; ma per non discoprire la ignorantia soa disse che ’l seria col Signore, e fogli risposto che lassasseno pur il priete, perché altro s’era deliberato. E credo che d’alora in qua se son scripte le littere per vulgare acioché non incontrasse più tal scandalo che per sparavieri se [pigliasseno gli acciprieti]” (Salza 74-76) [“Our Duke had a letter written to Polo da Foiano, who was mayor of Carpaneto, in the Modena district. This letter, which was written in Latin, said that he should catch a sparrow hawk and send it to him tied up inside a sack, so that it would not get away. The letter read as follows: ‘Dilectissime noster, capias accipitrem et mitte nobis ligatum in sacculo ne aufugiat.’ (‘Dear friend, catch a sparrow hawk and send it to us tied in a small sack, so that it will not get away.’) The mayor, who knew rustic grammar, upon reading the word *accipitrem* (‘hawk’), took it to mean *arciprete* (‘archpriest’) and called his son-in-law Pavaione and said: ‘Our lord wrote me, and he wants me to catch the archpriest and to send him to him tied up in a sack, so that he will not flee; he must be guilty of some treachery! Read this letter.’ Pavaione, who knew just about as much grammar as his uncle, read the letter and said: ‘There is no doubt that *accipitrem* means the archpriest; but don’t mention a word of this to the notary, for he is a relative of his.’ Thus they sent for the archpriest and told him that he was a prisoner of the Duke. The good man, who was innocent, replied that he was forever a prisoner of his lord, but that he was not guilty of anything. ‘Well,’ they said, ‘we still must obey.’ Thus, they put him into a sack and brought him to Ferrara. They went to Lodovico Casella, and they told him that they had carried out what had been requested of them. Lodovico replied that he was ignorant of such a request and asked them: ‘But have you a letter?’ They replied: ‘Certainly,’ and showed him the letter. You can imagine how much Lodovico enjoyed reading it; but not to disclose their ignorance, he said that he would check with the Duke, who sent back word that the priest be released because he had changed his mind. And I believe that from then on, letters were written only in the vulgar tongue in order to avoid a repetition of the blunder of mistaking a hawk for an archpriest!” (Speroni 75-76)]

sapere sì poche cose in questo mondo, ch'io credevo che ogni divulgata cosa a te fussi per nova'. (ed. Vecce 139)¹⁸⁸

[A man saw a large sword which another one wore at his side. Said he: 'Poor fellow, for a long time I have seen you tied to that weapon; why do you not release yourself as your hands are untied, and set yourself free?' To which the other replied: 'This is none of yours, on the contrary, it is an old story.' The former speaker, feeling stung, replied: 'I know that you are acquainted with so few things in this world that I thought any notorious¹⁸⁹ thing would be new to you.' (trans. Richter 290)]

It is most probable that Leonardo read Cicero's tale in Carbone's collection, in which facetia 105 is reminiscent of Cicero's: "Tullio nostro, vedendo il socero suo di piccola statura cum una gran spada a lato, trepando disse: Chi ha legato mio socero a cussí gran cortello?" (Salza 73).¹⁹⁰ Cicero teases his son-in-law about his height by noting that he appears to have been appended to the sword and not vice-versa. Having its origin in Macrobius's *Saturnalia* (c. AD 395) is the witty reply in Leonardo's facetia about the painter who explains why his children do not equal the beauty of his paintings: "Facezia. Fu dimandato un pittore, perché facendo lui le figure sì belle, che eran cose morte, per che causa esso avessi i figlioli sì brutti. Allora il pittore rispose che le pitture le fece di dì e i figlioli di notte" (ed. Vecce 137; emphasis mine) ["A painter was asked why, since he made such beautiful figures, which were but dead things, his children were so ugly; to which the painter replied that he made his pictures by day, and his children by night" (trans. Richter 289; emphasis mine)]. In Macrobius, the humorous tale involves a famous portrait painter in Rome.¹⁹¹ Though

¹⁸⁸ Cicero's jest about his son-in-law is recorded in Macrobius's *Saturnalia* (2.3.3): "Idem cum Lentulum generum suum, exiguae staturae hominem, longo gladio adcinctum vidisset: 'Quis – inquit – generum meum ad gladium adligavit?'" (Marinone 324) ["Seeing his son-in-law Lentulus (who was a very short man) wearing a long sword, he said: 'Who has buckled my son-in-law to that sword?'" (Vaughan Davies 166)].

¹⁸⁹ This is better translated as "well-known."

¹⁹⁰ ["Our Tullio, upon seeing his son-in-law, who is a short man, wearing a great sword at his side, exclaims: 'Who tied my son-in-law to such a large knife?'" (my translation)].

¹⁹¹ In *Saturnalia* (2.2.10): "Apud L. Mallium, qui optimus pictor Romae habebatur, Servilius Geminus forte cenabat. Cumque filios eius deformes vidisset: 'Non similiter – inquit – Malli, fingis et pingis'. Et Mallius: 'In tenebris enim fingo – inquit – luce pingo'" (Marinone 320) ["Servilius Geminus happened to be dining at the

Leonardo's facetia may have its roots in the *Saturnalia*, it is more probable that he derived it from a popular tradition that is documented in *Antiquitates italicæ medii ævi* (1738-43) by Lodovico Antonio Muratori (1672-1750); in the *Antiquitates*, a collection of seventy-five dissertations on varying subjects relating to medieval civilization, the said facetia is represented as a legend wherein Giotto¹⁹² and Dante are the interlocutors.

Leonardo was attracted to the facetia because of its rapid style and brief structure ("la struttura breve;" Vecce 15). Not surprisingly, the *Bestiario* and *Favole* have this feature in common. Not all Leonardo's facetiae are brief, however; three in particular (numbers 16, 23, and 24) are akin to short stories ("novellette;" Ponte 78) and, thus, reflect both categories of Cicero's division of the facetia into short witticisms (*dicacitas*) and longer humorous tales (*cavillatio*). Facetiae 23 and 24 were among the last written (c. 1503-06). This has induced Ponte to believe that their fluency of style was connected to the artist's improved writing skills acquired later in his life (78). Each of Leonardo's facetiae is complete, except for one which lacks a response to the question: "Facezia. Perché li Ungheri tengan la croce doppia" (ed. Vecce 135) ["Why Hungarian ducats have a double cross on them" (trans. Richter 310)]. Ponte also acknowledges the brevity of Leonardo's facetiae, but focuses on this quality as it is reflected in the syntax and vocabulary of these writings. Though from the beginning he asserts that Leonardo's stylistic and lexical choices are popular and colloquial in nature, Ponte demonstrates, citing examples of facetiae chronologically, that Leonardo tends to shift from a popular to a literary style, that is, from colloquialisms to Latinisms. Ponte's is an insightful study, successfully drawing attention to the artist's struggles and efforts to write

house of Lucius Mallius, who was held to be the best portrait painter in Rome and, noticing how misshapen his host's sons were, observed: 'Your modeling, Mallius, does not come up to your painting.' 'Naturally,' replied Mallius, 'for the modeling is done in the dark but the painting by daylight'" (Vaughan Davies 164)].

¹⁹² Being the artist, Giotto represents the painter with the ugly children in this humorous tale.

facetiae that were straightforward and incisive and that, ultimately, were highly expressive and witty.

Dialogue is critical not only in the *Facezie*, but also in the facetia genre in general. Indeed, in most cases, the action is not as important as the verbal exchange of the characters. In the examples of Leonardo's brief facetiae that contain witty retorts, action assumes a supporting role, while dialogue constitutes the nucleus of the structure and represents the force of the entire facetia. The fact that the witty remark is the punch line is evident in the following facetia in which a character triumphs over another by way of a witty remark: "Uno disse a un altro: 'Tu hai li occhi mutati in istran colore'. Quello li rispose: 'Egli è perché i mia occhi vedono il tuo viso strano'" (ed. Vecce 134) ["A man said to another: 'Your eyes are changed to a strange colour.' The other replied: 'It is because my eyes behold your strange ugly face'" (trans. Richter 290)]. The witty retort is a sign of intelligence and victory. Leonardo displays his ability to create witty and natural dialogues, in which, in some cases, the characters' words are so forceful as to silence their critics.

As is evident in the facetiae cited above, the interlocutors are not real or even well-defined fictitious characters, for they are simply identified as "uno" or "una" to denote gender or "un ladro" ["a thief"], "un merciaio" ["a merchant"], or "un prete" ["a priest"] to describe their profession. Vecce suggests that this way of denoting characters was simply a cursory way for Leonardo to remember a facetia he might have heard elsewhere (139). If, in fact, Leonardo recorded facetiae as he heard them, he most likely recorded the pleasantries generically in an attempt to summarize the facetiae. Whether the choice to use generic protagonists was intentional, the effect of these on his facetiae suggests that the human

behaviour represented in a facetia is not individual, but universal. The ambiguity focuses on humanity as a whole rather than on a specific group or individual.

Studies on the history of the facetia genre often mention Leonardo's *Facezie*. Typically, they summarize some of the defining characteristics of his facetiae and may describe other key features such as the structural and content-related parallels with the facetia genre. However, as with Leonardo's other literary writings, few, if any, comprehensive critical studies on the *Facezie* exist, with most scholars focusing on the linguistic and stylistic aspects of single facetiae instead. Ponte is among those scholars who concentrate on the linguistic dimension of the *Facezie*, as was the case with his treatment of the *Bestiario* and *Favole*. Specifically, he examines the style and syntax of Leonardo's facetiae. The main argument in his analysis is that, in the facetiae written at a later stage in the artist's life, there is noticeable progress as the syntax becomes more complex and literary. Ponte also cites examples that Leonardo later revised in order to enhance their lyricism and style.

In the existing anthologies of Leonardo's writings, all or some of the *Facezie* have been transcribed (or translated) and data regarding their sources, manuscript locations, linguistic variances, and any anomalies or idiosyncrasies have been noted. Quite accurately, some of the scholars note that Leonardo's attraction to the facetia genre was symptomatic of the Florentine taste for wit and wisdom during the Renaissance. Speroni documents this Renaissance attitude and tendency in his anthology, *Wit and Wisdom of the Italian Renaissance*, a collection of facetiae by well-known Italian Renaissance figures, including Leonardo. Speroni offers a sample of witty tales in order to present the nature of wit and humour in the Italian Renaissance. Unlike other anthologists of Leonardo's literary production, Speroni invents titles for the facetiae by Leonardo included in his compilation,

basing his titles on the content of the stories. For example, Leonardo's facetia about the friend breaking wind is given the title "A Proof of Affection," while that about Madonna Bona "Consolation of a Dying Man." It must be stressed that these are not titles given by Leonardo.

As was noted in the Introduction, the findings of the authors of these anthologies are no doubt invaluable to furthering our knowledge about the *Facezie*, but little space has been devoted to an elaboration of the deeper meanings that may be inherent in these writings. One exception is Caramella's compilation, which offers few yet thought-provoking insights into the *Facezie*. For example, in the following facetia, Caramella perceives Leonardo's skepticism about the possibility of social justice and his awareness of the unbridgeable gap between the classes in society:

Uno artigiano andando spesso a vicitare uno signore, senza altro proposito dimandare, al quale il signore domandò quello che andava facendo. Questo disse che veniva lì per avere de' piaceri che lui aver non potea; perocché lui volentieri vedeva omini più potenti di lui, come fanno i popolari, ma che 'l signore non potea vedere se non omini di men possa di lui: e per questo i signori mancavano d'esso piacere. (ed. Vecce 133)

[An artisan often going to visit a great gentleman without any definite purpose, the gentleman asked him what he did this for. The other said that he came there to have a pleasure which his lordship could not have; since to him it was a satisfaction to see men greater than himself, as is the way with the populace; while the gentleman could only see men of less consequence than himself; and so lords and great men were deprived of that pleasure. (trans. Richter 288)]

Caramella believes that the *Facezie*, and especially the example just quoted, are an expression of Leonardo's contempt for human foibles and injustices and his preference for solitary exploration of the human intellect and potential. Vecce also detects a social critique in the facetia cited above, in particular as it relates to the new and higher position now

occupied by artisans and artists in Renaissance society (“un motto che allude alla tematica dell’inserimento sociale degli ‘artigiani’ ed ‘artisti;’” *Leonardo* 102).

Filosa does not attach as much importance and depth to the *Facezie* as he does to the *Favole*. Yet, placing Leonardo’s facetiae in the tradition of humorous writings by humanists, he does highlight the presence of moral open-mindedness in his works (“la spregiudicatezza morale;” *Leonardo narratore* 14) and mentions some features that the *Facezie* have in common with the other writings.

In his introduction to Leonardo’s literary writings, Richter cites Leonardo’s *Study of Five Characters* (c. 1494),¹⁹³ a satirical drawing of grotesque faces, and suggests that the sketch complements some of the artist’s literary texts, though he does not specify which (260). In his commentary on Richter’s classic anthology, Pedretti remarks that it is tempting to connect the drawing with the *Facezie* given that, like the facetia genre, it is a caricature of the ridiculous in human beings (259: 2). The correlation singled out by Pedretti – and possibly Richter – is a valid one that Kemp revisits in his more recent study on Leonardo, where he states that, while the *Facezie* “provide the literary background” for these drawings, the satirical sketches are the “visual equivalent” (*The Marvellous Works* 156) of the facetia genre. To discuss the influence of the comical element in Leonardo’s facetiae on his artwork or vice-versa, it is necessary to refer to the *Trattato dell’arte della pittura, scoltura et architettura* (1584) by Giovan Paolo Lomazzo (1538-1600). In this treatise, Lomazzo states that Leonardo is the main contributor to the comical component in painting and tells an anecdote in which the artist, who delighted in joking, once narrated pleasantries to a group of peasants and then, in order to record the amusing situation, later produced the above sketch

¹⁹³ The page on which this sketch is found is housed in the Windsor Library.

of grotesque faces.¹⁹⁴ For Leonardo, there was a natural transition from the narration of comic tales to executing a painting or drawing featuring comical or caricatural elements. Indeed, it is not difficult to connect the naturalness expressed in human faces when one is laughing with the spontaneity and immediacy arising from the episodes described in *facetiae*.

ii. The Tradition of the Facetia

In the West, the *facetia* as a literary form originated with the ancient Greeks and, due to its wide use and broad appeal, it quickly entered the oral and written traditions of other early Western cultures. Indeed, it gained the favour of many people and was created and reproduced in works by both prominent and obscure writers. Chronologically, the tradition of the *facetia* begins with the *apophthegm* – a moral lesson embedded in a humorous tale or the wise sayings of illustrious men – which were recited orally and recorded in written works. Eventually, *apophthegms* expanded as a literary form and examples of this Greek text and its related genres such as the *facetia* became the subject of theoretical analysis, as well as the interest of collectors who gathered short literary forms including ancient and modern *facetiae* into comprehensive collections. The chronology of the *facetia* will become evident in the following description of the evolution of this popular literary genre.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Luciano Migliaccio's article "Leonardo 'auctor' del genere comico" (1995) is an excellent synthesis and critical study of Lomazzo's main ideas on this subject.

¹⁹⁵ For an historical account of the *facetia*, see the following: *One Hundred Renaissance Jokes: An Anthology* (1988) by Barbara C. Bowen; *Wit and Wisdom of the Italian Renaissance* by Speroni; *Burle e facezie del '400* (1958) by Giorgio Pullini; chapter four in *Storia dei generi letterari* (1924) by Di Francia; and "Per la storia della facezia" (1918) by Giovanni Fabris. Throughout this section, for detailed information on *facetia* writers and their collections including manuscript editions, reprints, authorship and attribution, see the above works by Bowen, Di Francia, and Fabris.

a. The Greek Apophthegm

Given the importance that the Greeks attached to the art of language, it is not surprising that the facetia began to take shape in early Greek civilization. Verbal wit was largely favoured and admired in both the public and private spheres of Greek culture. The most prevalent features of the apophthegm were its brevity and adherence to reality, two defining components of the form and content of the facetiae. In its public adaptation, the content of the apophthegm usually praised the actions of famous men such as Socrates (c. 469-399 BC) or Alexander the Great (356-323 BC) and was designed to incite awe rather than laughter, whereas in the private sphere its goal was to ridicule and arouse laughter. Regardless of the context in which it was used, the apophthegm embedded both educational and entertaining elements in its narrative structure.

Except for those included in the two Socratic writings by the historian Xenophon (c. 430-355 BC), the *Memorabilia* (begun c. 385 BC) and the *Symposium* (date of composition unknown), no examples of ancient Greek apophthegms survive today. The only other evidence that the apophthegm enjoyed wide popularity and significant production comes to us by way of Aristotle, who in *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book 8.8) describes three humorous dispositions – wit, buffoonery, and boorishness – and the implications of each in social settings, while in his *Rhetoric* (Book 3.18.7) he briefly alludes to the function of humour and laughter in speech. Aristotle is regarded as the first to treat humour and laughter from a theoretical standpoint and, more specifically, as the initiator of the rhetorical interpretation of humour.

b. The Romans

Evidence that the production of apophthegms was considerable in ancient Greece is provided by the Romans, in particular by Cicero, who, in his *De oratore* (55 BC) identifies Socrates as a witty speaker and refers to the popularity of witticisms as well as to manuscripts on jesting in Greek culture (2.54). More so than in Greece, however, the apophthegmatic form flourished in classical Rome because of the appreciation that the Romans had for wit and wisdom.

Among the many Romans who showed interest in this jocular literature we may include the following writers:¹⁹⁶ Plautus (c. 254-184 BC), who peppered his comedies with pleasantries; Julius Caesar Strabo (c. 130-87 BC), who in his leisure time delighted in collecting and inventing amusing anecdotes¹⁹⁷ and whose wit and humour are praised in Cicero's *De oratore*; Plutarch (c. AD 46-120), who discusses the nature of appropriate *facetiae* at the table in his *Quaestiones convivales* (c. AD 100); Aulus Gellius (c. AD 125- after 180), who, drawing from Plutarch, narrates examples of quick-witted repartee in his *Noctes Atticae* (AD 159); Macrobius, who produced the most extensive and influential original collection of Roman *facetiae* in his dialogue *Saturnalia*; the historian Tacitus (AD 56-117), who published some *facetiae* in the *Annales* (dates of composition unknown); Quintilian, who in his *Institutio* theorizes on humour and laughter; and Cicero, who not only gathered Strabo's dicta into a single collection but, more important, was also the first to attempt to theorize on humour in Book 2 of his *De oratore*. Cicero is also responsible for

¹⁹⁶ The names included here are those of well-known Roman authors. See Fabris for information on less well-known Roman writers of *facetiae*.

¹⁹⁷ Fabris notes that we are indebted to Strabo for famous mottos such as "*perge audacter* [go on boldly]," and "*veni vidi vici* [I came, I saw, I conquered]" (98).

introducing the term *facetiae* into the vocabulary used to describe these types of witty sayings and anecdotes.¹⁹⁸

From the above list of names, it is important to distinguish the principal writers in the tradition of the *facetia*; namely, Plutarch, Macrobius, Quintilian, and Cicero. The first two are connected to the symposium tradition of joking at the banquet table and were quite well-known in the Renaissance. Plutarch's *Quaestiones convivales* is an elaborate work comprised of twenty books. In Conversation 1, Book 2, Plutarch describes the questions and jokes that are most suitable for conversation at the banquet table and, in so doing, reveals extensive knowledge of earlier jokes and witty retorts by Cicero and other Latin and Greek authors. The second half of the conversation is an extensive and well-constructed discussion on *facetiae*. In the symposium tradition, however, Macrobius's *Saturnalia* is most prominent and influential. Although Plutarch's work was his main Greek source and model, Macrobius was greatly influenced by Cicero and quoted – and praised – many of the Roman orator's witticisms in his *Saturnalia*. Macrobius's influence extended well into the Renaissance, as is proven by Leonardo's *facetia* about the painter who gives a witty reply to explain the unsightliness of his children. Macrobius attributes Cicero's success as an orator and consul to his masterful ability to use wit and humour in his speeches in the Forum. *Saturnalia* consists of conversations that take place in Rome during the holiday honouring Saturn. Of special interest here is Book 2, which is a recounting of the after-dinner conversation that occurred on the first day. When the guests express the wish to entertain themselves in a high-brow manner, Symmachus, one of the guests, suggests that they share famous jests with one another (1.8).

¹⁹⁸ Other words used were *ineptiae*, *ioci*, *sales*, *ridicula*, *fabellae*, *dicteria*, *lepores*, *apte* or *facete dicta*.

Both Cicero and Quintilian represent the rhetorical tradition of the *facetiae*, though it should be noted that Cicero held the more leading and innovative position in this development. Not only did he gain recognition for the theories that he elaborated in parts of *De oratore* (2.54-71), which also made him an archetype for later theorists on wit and humour, but he was also well known in life for his own indiscriminate use of jokes. In fact, Cicero's reputation as a wit gained him notoriety in some circles, while others paid tribute to his wittiness by gathering *facetiae* attributed to him into compilations. Tiro, Cicero's secretary and friend (as well as slave), collected Cicero's *facetiae* into three books, but the collection has not survived and is documented only in the work of others. As a theorist, Cicero's influence was especially strong on Quintilian, and then, through Quintilian, on Renaissance writers such as Giovanni Pontano and Baldassar Castiglione.

De oratore presents a dialogue between some of the most prominent orators of Cicero's time. Halfway through Book 2, Antonius, one of Cicero's interlocutors, asks Julius Caesar Strabo to share his thoughts concerning the nature and rules of humour, given that he is known to be a witty orator. Reluctantly complying with his friend's request, Strabo begins to discuss the nature of laughter and elaborates upon the rules governing the use of humour and jokes in oratory and the benefits to be derived from it by the orator. Throughout his explanation, he illustrates his ideas with real examples so that this section of *De oratore* also becomes a sort of collection of the witty sayings and anecdotes of past and present persons. More important, as part of his treatment of humour, Strabo establishes Cicero's fundamental classification for the theory of the laughable: first, he distinguishes between humour used in longer narratives (*cavillatio*) and jokes or short witty retorts (*dicacitas*), and then between two types of wit, one based on content (*in re*), another on words (*in verbo*). Regarding the

latter distinction, Strabo describes many categories of jokes based on content and language¹⁹⁹ that an orator can use, often supplementing his arguments with real examples attributed to specific individuals. *De oratore* is believed to be the first ancient rhetorical work containing an elaborate theory of humour and the first attempt to systematize the *facetia* genre. In Edwin Rabbie's view, Cicero's support of humour in oratory is his reply to those who criticized his copious use of jokes (208), in addition to being his most innovative contribution to the theory of rhetoric (217).

Cicero's distinctions remained influential beyond his lifetime and can be applied to Leonardo's *facetiae* as well. For example, the division between types of wit into *in re* and *in verbo* can be identified in the following two *facetiae* from Leonardo's collection. The first, about a friend who breaks a friendship to uphold the reputation of his close friend, is an example of wit based on subject matter (*in re*):

Uno lasciò lo usare con un suo amico, perché quello spesso li diceva male delli amici sua. Il quale lasciato amico, un dì, dolendosi collo amico, e dopo il molto dolersi, lo pregò che li dicesse quale fusse la cagione che lo avessi fatto dimenticare tanta amicizia. Al quale esso rispose: 'Io non voglio più usare con teo perch'io ti voglio bene e non voglio che, dicendo tu male ad altri di me tuo amico, che altri abbiano, come me, a fare trista impressione di te, dicendo tu a quelli male di me tuo amico; onde non usando noi più insieme, parrà che noi siano fatti nimici e 'l dire tu male di me, com'è tua usanza, non sarai tanto da essere biasimato, come se noi usassimo insieme'. (ed. Vecce 134)

[A man gave up his intimacy with one of his friends because he often spoke ill of his other friends. The neglected friend one day lamented to this former friend, after much complaining, entreated him to say what might be the cause that had made him forget so much friendship. To which he answered: 'I will no longer be intimate with you because I love you, and I do not choose that you, by speaking ill of me, your friend, to others, should produce in others, as in me, a bad impression of yourself, by speaking evil to them of me, your friend. Therefore, being no longer intimate together, it will seem as though we had become enemies; and in speaking evil of me, as is your wont, you will not be blamed so much as if we continued intimate.' (trans. Richter 290)]

¹⁹⁹ For more detail on these categories, see Rabbie 211.

Even though this facetia is comprised mostly of words, constituting the friend's explanation for his decision, the humour clearly lies in the act of ending the friendship in order to "protect" his friend's reputation. Indeed, while the friend who has been abandoned may not agree with his friend's decision, it is certainly a clever justification for ending the friendship. The story itself (i.e., the content), therefore, provides the fodder for the humour in this facetia. Conversely, the facetia about the man discussing Pythagoras shows wit based purely on the witty retort (*in verbo*):

Facezia. Uno, volendo provare colla alturità di Pitagora come altre volte lui era stato al mondo, e uno non li lasciava finire il suo ragionamento, allor costui disse a questo tale: 'E per tale segnale che io altre volte ci fussi stato, io mi ricordo che tu eri mulinaro'. Allor costui, sentendosi mordere colle parole, gli confermò essere vero, che per questo contrassegno lui si ricordava che questo tale era stato l'asino, che li portava la farina. (ed. Vecce 137)

[A Jest. A man wishing to prove, by the authority of Pythagoras, that he had formerly been in the world, while another would not let him finish his argument, the first speaker said to the second: 'It is by this token that I was formerly here: I remember that you were a miller.' The other one, feeling himself stung by these words, agreed that it was true, and that by the same token he remembered that the speaker had been the ass that carried the flour. (trans. Richter 289)]

This facetia emphasizes and praises the man's dexterity in replying in kind to the first speaker's insult. It is, in brief, a sharp war of words. This observation is enforced by the phrase "*sentendosi mordere colle parole*" (emphasis mine) ["feeling himself *stung by these words*" (emphasis mine)]. The final witty retort by the second speaker is the crux of the facetia, having the most impact and conveying a sense of witty finality to the entire facetia.

Cicero's influence is acknowledged in Quintilian's analysis of laughter in the *Institutio* (6.3). Quintilian, in fact, begins his study by defending Cicero's habit of joking in serious environments. Following this, he briefly explores the sources of laughter and then examines forms of wit and jokes and under what circumstances these can be used to arouse

laughter. Quintilian makes many references to Cicero. Indeed, his analysis was written with the idea of providing a structural improvement to the theories elaborated in *De oratore*. As a result, while Cicero's section devoted to the comic is more jovial and entertaining, even as it lacks a clear methodology, Quintilian's is more focused and didactic and is thus a more intense and schematic study of laughter and humour. The theoretical component of Quintilian's chapter begins with a survey of the terminology related to the laughable and then continues with a lengthier section on the classification of what is laughable and what causes laughter. Some of these attempts at schematization of the theory of humour are meant to clarify Cicero's distinction between *cavillatio* and *dicacitas*.

c. The Facetia from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance

The facetia genre was not as revered in the Middle Ages as it was in the Classical period and as it would eventually be in the Italian Renaissance, especially in Tuscany. By no means does this suggest that witty anecdotes were no longer valued or even in use during the medieval period. On the contrary, some popular compilations of tales and anecdotes such as Jacopo da Verazze's *Legenda aurea* (c. 1260), *Gesta romanorum*²⁰⁰ (c. the end of the thirteenth century or the beginning of the fourteenth), and *Fior di virtù* contain some stories and witticisms that could be said to constitute collections of facetiae. Humorous tales during the Middle Ages were embedded within the context of the more popular *exemplum* genre. Often, then, the laughable was cloaked in moralizing and mystical garb. That is not to say that wit and humour were removed from amusing anecdotes, for they were appreciated and useful in keeping the attention of readers or listeners when inserted in sermons, but they were

²⁰⁰ The authorship is unknown. The collection is sometimes attributed to Helinand of Froidmont (c. 1160-after 1229), a French poet, or Pierre Bercheure (c. 1290-1362), a French author.

qualities now relegated to second place. In the later Middle Ages, the only evidence of an interest in anecdotes for their pure comic appeal comes to us by way of the first Italian humanist Francesco Petrarca (1304-74), who collected 114 untitled Roman and non-Roman jokes in his unfinished work *Rerum memorandarum libri* (compiled between 1343-45). Petrarca divides the second of his four books into three sections on wit (2.37-91)²⁰¹ and acknowledges Cicero's contribution to the theory of joke-telling. Many of the pleasantries in Petrarca's work were taken from Macrobius's *Saturnalia*; Petrarca's collection marked the first time that jokes had been collected since *Saturnalia*.

It is not until the fifteenth century, however, that wit and humour become the salient features of the comic tale as well as the chief end that writers wish to achieve in their humorous anecdotes. In this century, the facetia becomes an independent and lively literary genre, for the open-mindedness associated with the Italian Renaissance, especially in Florence, offered fertile ground in which facetiae could grow and flourish. This literary genre appealed to the cultured men and women of this period not only because of their taste for wit and wisdom, which were sought-after and esteemed attributes in the learned individual, but also because of the value that was placed on both serious and more lighthearted pursuits in one's life. What people did in their leisure time also defined who they were as individuals and was just as important for their sense of self-achievement as what they accomplished in public life. The assembling of facetiae or the delighting in them might have been good reasons for relieving the mind from more onerous tasks such as intellectual debate or political obligations. The taste for wit and wisdom was manifest in all circles of society, and not necessarily just among humanists, for courtiers, too, revered and even encouraged witty

²⁰¹ The three sections are titled as follows: "De facetiis ac salibus illustrium," "De mordacibus iocis," and "De ingenio paupertatis."

and pleasant conversation in social and informal gatherings. This may relate to the belief that Leonardo might have written his *facetiae* for pleasant courtly entertainment.

The *facetia* in the fifteenth century is frequently said to have close ties with the Italian *novella*,²⁰² exemplified by the anonymous *Novellino* (believed to date from the final two decades of the thirteenth century), Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Sacchetti's *Il trecentonovelle* (completed in 1392-93), and Masuccio Salernitano's *Novellino* (which appeared posthumously in 1475). Not coincidentally, three of the four above-mentioned writers and works exerted their influence on Leonardo's literary writings, including the *Facezie*; Masuccio's *Novellino* was even listed among Leonardo's inventory of books. The *facetia*, like the *novella*, culminated in a final punch line and its goal was to amuse or to impress a moral lesson on its readers (though with more subtlety with respect to the fable genre). In both forms of narrative, moreover, those who most often bore the brunt of these tales were immoral clergymen, promiscuous women, and dim-witted individuals. The narratives also show a strong adherence to concrete and unadorned representations of reality. Indeed, the authors of these writings revealed themselves to be keen and objective observers of everyday life and seemed committed to representing reality as they observed it. For example, they did not hesitate to expose the immorality and hypocrisy of priests. In their representations of the world as they saw it, the tone was often ironic, bitter, skeptical, polemical, popular, comical, or unbiased,²⁰³ depending on the real message behind the narrative. Finally, both the *novella* and *facetia* could be said to be democratic in nature because protagonists from all ranks of society had an equal voice. Thus, the routine activities or blunders of the merchant, artisan,

²⁰² The *facetia* overlaps with many short literary forms such as the apothegm, fable, short story, *exemplum*, epigram, proverb, maxim, and practical joke. This sometimes makes it difficult to distinguish it from other literary forms.

²⁰³ These tones were also prevalent in burlesque verse of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, for example in Cecco Angiolieri's poetry.

thief, notary, servant, and prostitute are narrated alongside those of the prince, pope, patron, and humanist. It was even possible for servants to outsmart their masters with a witty reply and be rewarded for their wit.

Unlike the novella, however, the facetia was less descriptive and more spontaneous, less explanatory and more episodic in nature, with a language that was typically very succinct, objective, and straightforward. It was also less concerned with psychological characterization and usually lacked the moral dimension that was more common to the novella. The facetia was characterized by its more concrete and explicit representation of reality.²⁰⁴

With the revival of the classics in the fifteenth century, the facetia separates itself from the Italian novella, becoming an autonomous literary genre, and is now conceived in the manner of the witty sayings and anecdotes found in the works of classical authors. Early Quattrocento humanists such as Antonio Beccadelli (1394-1471), known as il Panormita, and Enea Silvio Piccolomini (1405-64) were drawn to the genre and penned their own facetiae. In 1455, Panormita composed *De dictis et factis Alphonsi regis Aragonum*, a work recounting both serious and humorous stories about his patron Alfonso of Aragon, king of Naples from 1442 to 1458. One year later, in 1456, Piccolomini added a commentary to Panormita's *De dictis*, in which he narrates the tales and witticisms he heard about King Alfonso and other famous individuals. Piccolomini's facetiae became quite successful, so much so that for nearly two centuries afterwards they were cited in many collections both in Italy and abroad.

²⁰⁴ In fact, it very closely adheres to everyday happenings, and much of its dialogue and language is meant to heighten these actions in the tales.

The appearance of Poggio's *Liber facetiarum* around the mid-fifteenth century gave great impetus to the growing popularity and use of the genre. Poggio's *Liber* (compiled between 1438-52, but printed for the first time as a complete edition in 1470) permanently established the facetia genre as independent from similar genres such as the *exemplum* or novella and marked the beginning of the modern joke. Poggio's facetiae represent a milestone in the history of the genre, spawning many subsequent joke books in Italy and across the Alps, particularly in France and Germany. Of all the works Poggio produced in his lifetime, this anthology made him most recognized not only in Italy but also abroad.

The *Liber* is a collection of 273 titled facetiae in Latin featuring both fictitious and historical characters. In his conclusion, Poggio informs his reader that these tales were related orally at the *Bugiale*,²⁰⁵ a space reserved for the amusement of the pope's secretaries, where he and others would meet to share risqué stories. Indeed, the general rule in these informal gatherings appeared to be the lack of restrictions, for neither Poggio nor his companions spared anyone from their wit. Some of the erotically-charged tales would certainly have caused embarrassment even among the most liberal-minded individuals of the time.

Poggio is a key figure in the history of the genre not only because he reinstated the classical term *facetia*, first used by Cicero, but also because he revived the classical notion that the facetia is a written exercise meant to relax the mind and elevate the spirit. In fact, he says as much in the preface to his *Liber* as a pre-emptive response to critics of his tales:

“Quod si rusticiores erunt, non recuso quin sentiant quod volunt, modo scriptorem ne culpent, *qui ad levationem animi haec et ad ingenii exercitium scripsit*” (6; emphasis

²⁰⁵ *Bugiale* is derived from the Italian word *bugia*, a falsehood, and is interpreted by Poggio as a place of lies.

mine).²⁰⁶ Thus, with Poggio's *Liber* there is a renewed emphasis upon individual pleasure and delight as well as a continuation of the classical tradition of this genre. Unlike the classical exemplar of the *facetia*, however, Poggio's *facetiae*, along with those of his successors, possess a different character: they are more vulgar and licentious in nature and less adulatory and reverent than their classical antecedents. Poggio infuses the *facetia* with a new spirit, which was to exhibit itself even more forcefully in later works.

Poggio's *Liber* inspired many others to compile similar collections. Though Leonardo did not compile a cohesive collection of *facetiae*, he listed Poggio's famous book among his inventory of books; and some of his single *facetiae* suggest that he read Poggio's tales. This hypothesis is best supported by the more daring and scandalous entries in the *Facezie*. A more in-depth analysis of Leonardo's *facetiae* in relation to Poggio's will be developed in the next section of this chapter. For the moment it will suffice to cite one example of a *facetia* whose tone and subject matter are highly evocative of Poggio's famous tales:

Uno andando a Modena ebbe a pagare cinque soldi di gabella della sua persona. Alla qual cosa, cominciato a fare gran cramore e ammirazione, attrasse a sé molti circostanti, i quali domandando donde veniva tanta maraviglia, ai quali Maso rispose: "O non mi debbo io maravigliare con ciò sia che tutto un omo non paghi altro che cinque soldi, e a Firenze io, solo a metter dentro el cazzo, ebbe a pagare dieci ducati d'oro, e qui metto el cazzo, e coglioni e tutto il resto per sì piccolo dazio? Dio salvi e mantenga tal città e chi la governa". (ed. Vecce 134)

[As one was entering into the city of Modena and was asked to pay a five penny toll for his person, he began to shout out how much that request amazed him and caused many people to assemble around him asking him the reason for his amazement. Maso (such being his name) replied: 'Why should I not be amazed, since a whole man is asked to pay as little as five pennies to enter; and in Florence only to put in the penis I had to pay ten golden ducats, and here I put in the penis, the testicles, and all the rest for such a small duty.

²⁰⁶ ["Should my readers happen to be too rustic, I leave them at liberty to think what they please; my only request is that they should not condemn *an author who has written but with a view to relaxation and the culture of his mind*" (5-6; emphasis mine)].

God bless and protect this town and those who rule it!’ (trans. Pedretti
Commentary 274: 2)]

Some of the words used by Leonardo are clearly meant to shock and embarrass readers: “cazzo” [“prick” (my translation)] and “coglioni” [“balls” (my translation)]. Clearly, these were common words used in the spoken language, but ones that would have created some discomfort among the listeners. Indeed, the large crowd gathering to hear Maso’s exclamations is evidence that such language caused heads to turn. The audacity shown in this facetia, not only by the vocabulary but also by the explicit subject matter, very much recalls Poggio’s facetiae, some of which, with their shock value, elicited a strong reaction from the audience.

Poggio inspired others to write facetiae and gather them into collections; the better known texts were assembled by Carbone; the priest Arlotto Mainardi (1396-1484), more commonly known as il Piovano (“The Priest”) Arlotto; the celebrated Tuscan poet and humanist Angelo Poliziano (1454-94); and the well-known Neapolitan humanist Giovanni Pontano (1426-1503).

Carbone’s *Centotrenta novelle o facietie*, of which only 108 facetiae have survived, is the first anthology of facetiae written in the Italian vernacular. It was dedicated to Borso d’Este, duke of Ferrara (1450-71) so that, as it is stated, he might use it to temporarily free his mind from his stately duties and labours. Carbone’s tales feature well-known contemporaries as well as ancient personalities; not all of them, however, are original, some, for example, having been taken from Poggio. Very popular in Italy during its time and for centuries afterwards, il Piovano’s *Motti e facezie* (composed between 1477-88, and first printed in 1514-16) was different from other contemporary collections because it features the author himself as the protagonist and includes accounts of his justness, compassion, and

charity. Thus, this collection is a portrait of the wit and wisdom, and in general of the character of the priest from Fiesole. Il Piovano's *facetiae* were very well received and admired beyond Italian borders. After Poggio's, in fact, this is the best known collection of *facetiae* compiled and published by an Italian writer. The anonymous *Detti piacevoli* or *Bel libretto* (c. 1480?), generally attributed to Poliziano, is a compilation of over four hundred very brief anecdotes, maxims, proverbs, and riddles in the vernacular, many of which refer to members of the Medici family and to other well-known fifteenth-century personalities. Finally, in 1499, Pontano, following in the footsteps of Cicero and Quintilian, began to develop a theoretical analysis of wit and humour deemed appropriate for the conversations of the cultured people of his time. Pontano's analysis resulted in an elaborate classification of humour contained in the six books of his *De sermone* (printed posthumously in 1509). His work distinguishes itself from the many *facetiae* anthologies from this period because it is a combination of theories about wit and humour (the first three books) and of illustrative jokes (over two hundred in the last three books), which, despite his influence, are more elegant and less obscene than Poggio's. Though taking his lead from Cicero and other classic authors, Pontano diverges from the classical tradition because he no longer restricts wit and humour to professional environments such as the court, but considers them essential qualities for any cultured individual. The significance of *De sermone* for Leonardo will be discussed below in connection with the *Facezie*.

The *facetia* continued to spread in the sixteenth century, when the taste for witty and wise sayings intensified further. In particular, this century saw an increase in the number of anthologies of *facetiae*, of which the most popular belonged to the Vicentine polymath Lodovico Domenichi (1515-64), whose final edition of his *Facetie, motti et burle di diversi*

signori et persone private (1564)²⁰⁷ is divided into seven books and includes nearly one thousand anecdotes from both Italian and foreign sources. The sheer size of Domenichi's collection was sufficient to catapult him to fame as a collector. Hundreds of the facetiae in his collection were taken from Poliziano's *Bel libretto*,²⁰⁸ while others came from il Panormita, Piccolomini, Poggio, and Pontano. Indeed, many of Domenichi's facetiae were either paraphrases or direct translations²⁰⁹ of facetiae by other writers and, because of this, Domenichi is often accused of plagiarism.²¹⁰ In spite of this accusation, his collection circulated widely and was sometimes copied because it was well written in a good literary style and, on the whole, highly entertaining.

The sixteenth century is important for the history of the facetia also because of the rich production of collections it witnessed outside the Italian peninsula. After Poggio's, the most popular Renaissance collection of facetiae belongs to the German humanist Heinrich Bebel (1472-1516/18), "il Poggio della Germania," according to Fabris (111). In his third edition of *Facetiae* (printed in 1512), Bebel included 441 Latin anecdotes and fables in three books; the content of his brief writings targets immoral priests, foolish peasants, and wanton women; satirizes the Church and religion; and revels in obscenities. Barbara C. Bowen compares Bebel to Pontano in so far as the German humanist viewed facetiae as meaningful

²⁰⁷ Domenichi compiled two previous editions which did not earn him as much public favour as the third. His first edition was printed in 1548 as *Facezie e motti arguti di alcuni eccellentissimi ingegni et nobilissimi signori*, and the second in 1562. The second edition is very similar to the final edition but is comprised of only six books.

²⁰⁸ As related in Fabris's article, Domenichi received this *Bel libretto* from his friend Stradino, also an avid collector of facetiae by Piovano Arlotto and, after reading it, was inspired to print it with an appendix that he wrote (118). Printed in 1548, this first edition contains fewer than thirty facetiae that were actually authored by Domenichi.

²⁰⁹ For example, he translated from Johannes Gast's *Sermones convivales*, the German collections of Heinrich Bebel, and the Latin work of Pontano.

²¹⁰ Fabris's comment on Domenichi's methodology as a collector of facetiae and its differences with respect to modern scholarship helps us to understand Domenichi's plagiarism: "Solamente il Domenichi non si è curato di dare quelle indicazioni che erano necessarie per stabilire la paternità dei singoli brani, anzi ha cercato di rendere più che mai difficile una tale ricerca; ma poteva egli forse prevedere gli odierni progressi del metodo storico?" (123).

for the study of *humanitas* (*Humour* sec. II). Bebel's *Facetiae* were very popular in Europe and appeared in later compilations and other works. One of the most prominent figures of the Renaissance, the Dutch humanist Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466/69-1536) wrote a brief dialogue "Convivium fabulosum" which was published in his *Opera omnia* (1524). In it, nine friends tell ten jokes, some of which are about famous personalities while others are personal anecdotes. Erasmus also composed *Apophthegmatum opus* (published in 1531), a celebrated collection of famous sayings from classical antiquity. Like Pontano, Erasmus thought it important that a humanist display *festivitas* ["pleasant humour"]²¹¹ in addition to erudition. Erasmus criticized the licentious and sacrilegious content of Poggio's tales, which made them inappropriate for a refined and respectable individual.

A special place in the history of the facetia is reserved for the Mantuan Baldassar Castiglione (1478-1529), who theorized upon the decorum of humour and narrated facetiae in Book II of his *Il libro del cortegiano* (1528), a conduct book for the Renaissance courtier and court lady. The Italian Renaissance produced similar manuals that discuss humour and relate facetiae: *De cardinalatu* (1510) by the Tuscan humanist Paolo Cortesi (1465/71-1510); *Galateo* (published posthumously in 1558) by the Florentine writer Giovanni della Casa (1503-56); and *La civil conversazione* (1574) by the Piedmontese Stefano Guazzo (1530-93). These treatises all discuss the rules to observe when jests and humorous anecdotes are used in civil conversations and present some examples of facetiae.

Recreating the cordial environment in Cicero's *De oratore* and recycling many of the Roman orator's jokes,²¹² Castiglione engages the interlocutors of his treatise in a discussion

²¹¹ Bowen defines this term as follows: "a fundamentally joking approach to life which always tries to find humor in any given situation" ("A Neglected Renaissance" 146).

²¹² Cicero is Castiglione's chief source for *Il libro del cortegiano* and follows the structure in *De sermone* quite faithfully; Aristotle and Quintilian also exerted some influence on the Renaissance writer's ideas about humour.

on the proper ways in which humour was utilized by the Renaissance courtier (2.41-95).²¹³

Throughout this section, Castiglione describes sources of humour with illustrative jokes and even introduces his own tri-partite classification of the facetia: “festività or urbanità” [“long humorous narratives”], “detti or arguzie” [“witty retorts”], and “burle” [“practical joke”].

The first and second categories correspond to Cicero’s *cavillatio* and *dicacitas*, respectively, with the second occupying a large portion of the discussion. Many jokes from classical authors such as Cicero and contemporaries such as Poggio and Pontano are appropriated to illustrate the author’s arguments concerning the comic. Castiglione made a significant contribution to the theory of humour with his addition of the third category, namely the *burle* or practical jokes. Greater details regarding Castiglione’s theory of humour and how they might relate to Leonardo will be given in the next section of this chapter.

Thanks to writers such as Pontano and Castiglione, the Italian Renaissance made significant theoretical contributions to the tradition of the facetia genre. At the same time, this period exhibited an interest in the facetia not so much for its rhetorical implications as for its effects on the individual. As Marcello Ciccuto more accurately explains, “la facezia riesce a distinguersi sì, a livello generale, per un intento essenziale di distrazione [...], ma anche e soprattutto per la sua natura di particolare narrativa fondata su un’idea di equilibrio spirituale, di sagace arte del vivere” (Introd. *Facezie* 47; emphasis mine). The facetia viewed as accommodating the need for distraction from more onerous responsibilities in one’s life cannot be overlooked, for this outlook not only motivated many facetiae collectors and writers from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but, from a historical and cultural point of view, it also sheds light upon the spirit of an entire age. Facetiae were composed and

²¹³ Pugliese’s *Castiglione’s The Book of the Courtier (Il libro del cortegiano): A Classic in the Making* (2008) traces the development of Castiglione’s theory of humour through the five manuscripts.

gathered into collections because of a renewed interest in the everyday human activity of the material world, in the nuances of human nature, and in the quality of living that people could aspire to in their lifetime. Renaissance authors and collectors of *facetiae* were concerned with chronicling and celebrating all aspects of life and humanity, especially the less heroic side. This aspect of the *facetia* is manifest in Leonardo's *Facezie*, the individual texts of which are a celebration of the multiplicity that comprised human life.

iii. The *Facezie* in the Quattro- and Cinquecento: Form, Content, and Theory

Ponte makes a comment that is worth repeating in the analysis of Leonardo's texts: "Che Leonardo fosse consapevole di inserirsi così in una tradizione letteraria, può dimostrarlo anche il fatto che passò dal titolo 'Risposta faceta' del f. 358 al titolo 'Facezia' del 119, titolo generico confermato poi negli altri casi" (76). Ponte is referring to what is purported to be the earliest *facetia* written by Leonardo circa 1487, a *facetia* found in the codex *Atlanticus* that relates the story mentioned above about a priest using sexual innuendo to seduce a laundress. Ponte believes that this *facetia* was deliberately reworked and recopied on another folio by Leonardo and later more formally titled "Facezia," thus identifying it as a specific literary form. Some of the *facetiae* written in the following years were also labeled as such. In Ponte's view, this evidence confirms that Leonardo knew that he was participating in a tradition of a popular literary genre when writing his *facetiae*. It also suggests that he was familiar with some formal narratological mechanisms of the *facetia* genre.²¹⁴

To show how Leonardo's tales adhered to conventions of the Renaissance *facetia* and to demonstrate how they contributed to the tradition of this literary genre, it is useful to

²¹⁴ According to the transcriptions in Vecce's anthology, ten of the twenty-eight *facetiae* are introduced by the generic title *Facezia*.

describe some salient features of the Italian Renaissance facetia. To clarify, the elements of facetia under consideration will reflect primarily the type of facetia first introduced by Poggio in the mid-Quattrocento, since it was the Tuscan humanist who established a precedent for this literary form in the period.

In the Quattrocento the facetia shared many traits with the novella²¹⁵ and the latter genre, along with burlesque literature in general, prepared the ground and set some pre-conditions for the flourishing of the facetia in the Quattrocento. Eventually, the facetia became an independent literary form, refining some shared qualities with the novella and adapting to the spirit of the times. At this time, the facetia also distinguished itself for its claim to portray life more truthfully (Pullini 73).²¹⁶ A noteworthy break with the novella occurs with the appearance of Poggio's facetiae, which expressed contemporary socio-cultural interests and concerns more liberally than the novella. Having written his facetiae in Latin, Poggio also broke with the tradition of the use of Latin for elevated subjects, demonstrating that even a marginal form of literature such as the facetia could use Latin as its main vehicle of expression.²¹⁷ The compilation of the *Liber* in the mid-Quattrocento coincided with a period of cultural open-mindedness towards the human experience on earth. Thus, the facetiae emulating Poggio were more risqué than the novella, as facetiae writers showed more tolerance towards taboo subjects such as sex. As Ciccuto keenly observes, the

²¹⁵ The facetia also shared some thematic qualities with fourteenth-century burlesque verse literature. See chapter one from Pullini's study for more details.

²¹⁶ This non-literary aim is supported by the following statements made in Poggio's preface to his *Liber*: "Eloquentiam vero in rebus infimis, vel in his in quibus ad verbum vel facetiae exprimendae sunt, vel aliorum dicta referenda, quaerere, hominis nimium curiosi esse videtur. Sunt enim quaedam quae ornatius nequeant describi, cum ita recensenda sint, quemadmodum protulerunt ea hi qui in confabulationibus conjiciuntur" (3-4). ["A style of studied elegance for such trifles, for jests which should be literally told, or related in the very words primitively used, would be sheer affectation. Such tales require no setting off, but should be recited just as they fell from the characters that figure in them." (3-4)]

²¹⁷ These comments are not meant to imply that Poggio was the first to use Latin for more humble and lowly subjects. Though the aim of this chapter is not to conduct a linguistic analysis of Poggio's vocabulary, Tateo's article "Il lessico dei comici nella facezia latina del Quattrocento" is a noteworthy study of Poggio's comical use of Latin in his facetiae.

attitude of these writers was a reflection of the “nuova disinvoltura umanistica” (Introd. *Facezie* 51), that is, of the self-confidence of the Renaissance individual. Those who wrote or gathered facetiae into collections in the Quattrocento showed an interest in representations of reality as it really was. They did this with an assured sense of freedom and ease.

Structurally, Renaissance facetiae were briefer and more rapid than the novella. This is because they were more concerned with witty repartee and the action itself than with description and psychological characterization.²¹⁸ Indeed, Renaissance facetiae were like visual narrations of single episodes. Because of the importance of action in facetiae, this genre relied on few formal narrative structures or devices and, instead, focused on concrete depictions of real-life incidents in order to convey the point. Ciccuto states that in a facetia it was enough to represent nothing more than one protagonist (“un astante”) and one referent (“un preciso referente”) towards which the protagonist could express a particular attitude that would either challenge or submit to the referent (Introd. *Facezie* 48). This, of course, was done in a specific episode which was typically familiar to those who were reading or listening to the facetia.

Since brevity allots less space to description and embellishment and more to the bare act itself, it enables the main action in the facetia to be more prominent. This strategy is used in Leonardo’s facetia about the prostitute who tricks a priest by exposing the sexual organs of a she-goat and then receives monetary payment from the priest, who mistakes it for the female genitalia: “Una putta mostrò il cuno d’una capra ’n scambio del suo a un prete, e prese un grosso, e così lo beffò” (ed. Vecce 135) [“A young woman showed the vulva of a

²¹⁸ This difference constituted a definite departure from the novella, and instead, a return to the ancient roots of the facetia.

she-goat to a priest instead of her own, and took a *grosso*²¹⁹ from him, thus fooling him” (trans. Pedretti, *Commentary* 274: 2)]. Here, brevity simply and effectively lays bare the prostitute’s brazen gesture. In fact, there is little to represent and describe in this facetia, but the swift physical act of illustrating the animal’s genitalia and the priest’s reaction to this gesture. This facetia recalls Ciccuto’s observation cited above that, for a facetia to work, there need be significant interaction only between two characters (“un astante” and “un preciso referente”) displaying a particular attitude. Framed within the minimal narratological structure of this facetia, the prostitute’s act is exposed freely and candidly, resulting in a full impact on the reader. The prostitute’s attitude towards the priest is audacious and scandalously blunt and brusque; the direct and simple narratological approach used by Leonardo matches the swift gesture of the prostitute.

Because of their emphasis on concrete representations of reality, facetiae assign an important role to the main action because it gives shape and significance to the entire narrative. Consequently, the success and efficacy of facetiae are contingent upon their ability to convey and depict principal actions. The following facetia by Leonardo is another example in which action is the crux of the narrative. This time, the actions depicted stimulate a process of mental visualization as a result of the sequence of swift actions culminating in a final prank, the equivalent of a written or spoken punch-line. Indeed, the quick actions must be visualized in order to be appreciated and understood fully:

Uno disputandosi e vantandosi di sapere fare molti vari e belli giochi, un altro de’ circustanti disse: ‘Io so fare uno gioco il quale farà trarre le brache a chi a me parrà’. Il primo vantatore, trovandosi senza brache: ‘Che no, – disse – che a me non le farai trarre! E vadane un paro di calze’. Il proponente d’esso gioco, accettato lo ’nvito, impromutò più para di brache e trassale nel volto delle calze. E vinse il pegno. (ed. Vecce 133)

²¹⁹ A *grosso* is a silver coin used in Italy in the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

[A man was arguing and boasting that he knew many and various tricks. Another among the bystanders said: 'I know how to play a trick which will make whomsoever I like pull off his breeches.' The first man – the boaster, being without breeches – said: 'You won't make me pull off mine, and I bet you a pair of hose on it.' He who proposed the game, having accepted the offer, produced breeches and drew them across the face of him who bet the pair of hose and won the bet. (trans. Richter 290)]

In a facetia such as this one in which the actions are connected to a physical practical joke, the joke itself is best understood if visualized, given that its comical effect hinges primarily on action, which occurs in steps that culminate in the final gesture. Sequentially and quickly, it alternates between the bystander and the boaster. Moreover, there is a dialogue which the listener must process while visualizing the boaster without breeches and the bystander who, upon hearing the boaster's statement, produces a pair of breeches and then tosses them at the boaster in order to fool him. Visualization follows each move and enables the reader to understand the nature of the physical joke.

The importance of action in facetiae is also tied to the effect of retaliation, an essential feature of this genre. Indeed, retaliation often motivates, and is the force of, witty replies. Typically, it is manifest when one character feels stung by another's comment or physical gesture and reacts (i.e., retaliates) with a more effective and biting response in order to save face. The above facetia describing a friend's decision to no longer frequent an old friend is an excellent example of wit used in the manner of retaliation. Leonardo's amusing tale about an encounter between a painter and a priest also demonstrates the efficacy of retaliation as both a response and an action:

Facezia. Andando un prete per la sua parrocchia il sabato santo, dando, com'è usanza, l'acqua benedetta per le case, capitò nella stanza d'un pittore, dove spargendo essa acqua sopra alcuna sua pittura, esso pittore, voltosi indrieto alquanto scruciato, disse, perchè facessi tale spargimento sopra le sue pitture. Allora il prete disse essere così usanza, e ch'era suo debito il fare così, e che faceva bene, e chi fa bene debbe aspettare bene e meglio, che così promettea

Dio, e che d'ogni bene, che si faceva in terra, se n'andrebbe di sopra per ogni un cento. Allora il pittore, aspettato ch'elli uscissi fori, se li fece di sopra alla finestra, e gittò un gran secchione d'acqua addosso a esso prete, dicendo: 'Ecco che di sopra ti viene per ogni un cento, come tu dicesti che accaderebbe nel bene, che mi facevi colla tua acqua santa, colla quale m'hai guasto mezze le mie pitture'. (ed. Vecce 135)

[A priest, making the rounds of his parish on Easter Eve, and sprinkling holy water in the houses as is customary, came to a painter's room, where he sprinkled the water on some of his pictures. The painter turned round, somewhat angered, and asked him why this sprinkling had been bestowed on his pictures; then said the priest that it was the custom and his duty to do so, and that he was doing good; and that he who did good might look for good in return, and indeed, for better, since God had promised that every good deed that was done on earth should be rewarded a hundredfold from above. Then the painter, waiting till he went out, went to an upper window and flung a large pail of water on the priest's back, saying: 'Here is the reward a hundredfold from above, which you said would come from the good you had done me with your holy water, by which you have damaged half my pictures.' (trans. Richter 287)]

Here, retaliation is manifest in the tit-for-tat revenge by the painter on the priest. That is, the painter uses down-to-earth common sense to counter the transcendental wisdom given by the priest to justify his actions. The entire episode in this facetia suggests that human beings can draw on their common sense in the face of abstract notions that are sometimes accepted as the truth without any questions. In this regard, the painter's actions reinforce the concreteness and the quick-wittedness typical of Quattrocento facetiae. His retaliatory act towards the priest is highly effective because it is a literal interpretation of the priest's justification for sprinkling the paintings with holy water and ruining them. Consequently, the priest cannot defend himself with a wittier reply because he has been outsmarted with his own words. Any verbal response by the priest would be seen as an admission of guilt and defeat. Perhaps an apology would be in order as it would at least signal the priest's good sense of humour and his awareness that he got what he deserved. In this facetia, the painter's retaliation represents a logical response to the priest's absurd explanation. In addition to the

retaliatory effect, the success of this facetia is also dependent upon other factors: the quickness of the actions and replies; the tale offers sufficient description for the final act to have a comical effect; and wit displays itself at its best in the final action and ready reply by the painter.

Brief facetiae show how quick repartees can contribute to the rapidity and fragmentariness associated with this genre; they also underscore wit in the utterances of the dialogue. Such facetiae recall Pullini's clever descriptor "facezia-lampo" (78), which are rapid facetiae (quick as a flash of lightening, as Pullini's term suggests) consisting primarily of a final witty retort. In facetiae where wit is the focus point, the witty retort (i.e., the punch-line) trumps any other part of the tale and generates the highest comic effect. Thus, action is either barely relevant or at times totally absent. Earlier in this chapter, Leonardo's facetiae about the painter whose sons did not equal the quality of his paintings and about the man whose height was passed by a sword tied to his waist were cited because of their accurate demonstration of wit in the form of dialogue. Similar to those facetiae, the following shows how even a facetia comprised of two sentences can be entirely constructed around a witty retort. "Uno disse che in suo paese nasceva le più strane cose del mondo. L'altro rispose: 'Tu che vi se' nato, confermi ciò esser vero, per la stranezza della tua brutta presenza'" (ed. Vecce 134) ["A man said that in his country were the strangest things in the world. Another answered: 'You, who were born there, confirm this as true, by the strangeness of your ugly face'" (trans. Richter 290)]. In this facetia, as well as in the next one, the opening sentence serves merely to set the scene and create anticipation for a witty reply, thus preparing a crescendo effect that will culminate in the witty remark: "Facezia. Fu detto a uno che si levassi dal letto, perché già era levato il sole, e lui rispose: 'Se io avessi a fare tanto viaggio e

faccende quanto lui, ancora io sarei già levato, e però, avendo a fare sì poco camino, ancora non mi vo' levare”” (ed. Vecce 136) [“A man was desired to rise from his bed, because the sun was already risen. To which he replied: ‘If I had as far to go, and as much to do as he has, I should be risen by now; but having but a little way to go, I shall not rise yet”” (trans. Richter 291)]. Here, too, a witty remark constitutes the nucleus of the facetia. The opening sentence, which lists the basic facts needed to contextualize the final reply, enables the witty reply’s full comic value to come out. This technique, which is not only prevalent in the Quattrocento facetia but also reflective of the episodic nature of this genre, isolates an episode in order to represent its dominant humorous element.

With the appearance of Poggio’s *Liber* in the Quattrocento, the content of the facetia had become quite daring, thus making it arguably more interesting than other more formal aspects of the genre. Emulating Poggio’s humorous tales, many Renaissance writers of facetiae sought the immoral, lascivious, controversial, vulgar, and erotic. From a social and cultural perspective, the register of racy and provocative themes suggests a sense of freedom and of self-expression that writers enjoyed during this time. Indeed, the uncensored subject matter of Renaissance facetiae could be freely expressed in the healthy and unbiased environment of the period. No doubt, the taboo subjects in Renaissance facetiae reveal the self-awareness and self-confidence of the authors, thus recalling the self-assuredness (“disinvoltura umanistica”) that Ciccuto noted in the Italian Renaissance intellectuals. Self-awareness enabled writers to depict the truth that they observed in their environments while their self-confidence caused them to be daring and write controversial tales such as those with antitranscendental and anticlerical themes. In short, authors of facetiae boldly illustrated truths that to them seemed to be a natural and routine part of the world around them.

Leonardo, too, writes some facetiae on less-refined and less-restrained themes. Indeed, as has been shown, he writes about or makes covert references to flatulence, female genitalia, fornication, and vulgar gestures²²⁰ and words such as the above-mentioned “cazzo” and “coglioni.” At times, he even shows an inclination to be both daring and humorous in a critical sense. The previously-cited facetia about the priest who seduces a laundress is no doubt anticlerical since it is a veiled criticism of the hypocritical behaviour of clerics. The criticism directed at the priest is particularly harsh as it holds up the priest’s shameful vice for ridicule (Skinner 432).²²¹ The story about the priest who sprinkles holy water on the painter’s works also draws attention to the foolishness of clerics and satirizes the teachings that were often used to justify religious practices. Instead, Leonardo, just as in the *Bestiario* and *Favole*, would seem to encourage the use of common sense in the face of authoritative doctrines. Finally, the facetia examined above about the artisan’s visit to a gentleman of higher social status is seen as a criticism of the existing social hierarchical system and of the inequality among members of society. The following facetia may also be viewed as a critique of the social values of the society in which Leonardo lived:

Uno rimproverò a uno omo da bene che non era legittimo. Al quale esso rispose esser legittimo nelli ordini della spezie umana e nella legge di natura, ma che lui nell’una era bastardo, perch’egli avea più costume di bestia che d’omo, e nella legge delli omini non avea certezza d’esser legittimo” (ed. Vecce 137)

²²⁰ “La femmina nel passare uno tristo passo e fangoso. Tre verità. Ella nell’alzarsi colle mani i panni dirieto e dinanzi si tocca la potta e ’l culo e dice: ‘Questo è un tristo passo!’” (ed. Vecce 135) [“As a woman is about to walk over a wretched and muddy passage, in lifting her dress both in front and in the back, she touches her vulva and anus and pronounces three truths by saying: this is a wretched passage” (trans. Pedretti, *Commentary* 275: 1)].

²²¹ In his article, Skinner explains that, during the Renaissance, theorists supplied a definition of the ridiculous, along with examples, in order to better understand why it provoked laughter (418-25). The ridiculous was artificial or exaggerated behaviours, and the most loathsome examples were the vices of avarice, hypocrisy, and vanity. Thus, Leonardo’s facetia about the priest and the laundress reflects the longstanding tradition of viewing contemptible behaviours such as the hypocrisy of priests as laughable by other human beings who felt a sense of superiority at the expense of another’s weakness. This tradition began with Aristotle’s statement in his *Poetics* about human vice causing derisive laughter by those who witnessed such behaviour in others.

[One was reproaching an honest man with being illegitimate. To this the man replied that he was legitimate according to the provisions of the human species and the law of nature; but that he [the accuser] was a bastard according to the latter, because he had the habits of a beast rather than those of a man, while according to human law his legitimacy was not certain (trans. Pedretti, *Commentary* 276: 1)]

That Leonardo was an illegitimate son of the notary ser Piero da Vinci²²² should not be overlooked in the reading of this facetia, for it suggests the artist's personal offence at prejudices against illegitimate children that existed during his lifetime. Leonardo's awareness of – and possible sensitivity to – his particular status in society enables him to criticize what he most likely believed to be unjust and untrue. The laughter caused by this facetia brings to mind Robert Grudin's observation about Renaissance laughter: "Laughter was a civilized response to paradoxes and injustices that might otherwise have made life painful. It gave vent to uncomfortable feelings and in so doing eased them" (199). Leonardo might have used the laughter caused by this facetia to overcome a psychological barrier linked to his social status. Here, humour is also a subtle form of aggression and ridicule directed at those who have shown offence and disrespect towards persons of lesser status. Leonardo, however, demonstrates the characteristic self-confidence and self-actualization characterizing Renaissance man in the boldness he displays in composing a facetia which denounces this sort of discrimination. Recognizing that those who are "legitimate" can be less worthy than those who are "illegitimate" according to society's standards, the content of this facetia recalls Leonardo's famous self-deprecating description of himself as "omo senza lettere."

Although many erotically-charged themes were inherited from the tales by Boccaccio, they are taken to more daring levels in the Quattrocento facetia. Indeed, the

²²² Leonardo was born out of wedlock to ser Piero d'Antonio and Caterina, a peasant woman. Though illegitimate, Leonardo was ser Piero's first child, and the exact date and time of his birth were noted by his paternal grandfather.

Renaissance facetia displays an impressive range of erotic terminology, much of which derives from Poggio's tales, in which there are explicit descriptions of the sexual act in addition to an imaginative repertoire of erotic allegorical expressions. The following is a sample of suggestive allegory and euphemisms in Poggio's collection: "Priapeam supellectilem formosam" ["the beautiful Priapean tool"] (62)²²³ and "Pacialis" ["the Peacemaker"] (209) to denote the phallus; "mentula" (67) and "latiore vulvum" ["a broad channel"] (180) to denote the female sexual organ; "matrimonii usus" ["the exercise of the matrimonial function"] (112); "vigiesque ea nocte mulierem cognovit" ["in one night, had twenty transactions with her"] (174); "quo facto, ulcus apertum esse dixit, et saniem emisisse" ["'The abscess has burst,' said he, 'and discharged its matter'"] (195); "Vir, ad navigandum plenis ad id impensa opera veils paratus," ["The husband had prepared for the cruise, and was carrying a press of sail"] (231); "'Mea uxor,' inquit, 'haec tua curia amplior est numero gregis mei'" ["'Wife dear, your fold is too large for my flock'"] (272). There are many stories in which Poggio did not use such creative metaphors but, instead, chose to describe sexual intercourse with shocking candour and coarseness. The *Liber* abounds with facetiae about sex and lustful desire among husbands, wives, adulterers, priests, and virgins, with Poggio showing much originality and cleverness in his representation of a subject that was considered taboo or dishonourable by many during his lifetime. The erotic element in Poggio's facetiae is an unprecedented display of the boldness typical of facetiae writers during the Italian Renaissance.

Leonardo, too, shows some ingenuity in devising erotically-charged tales. In fact, in some examples, his play on words is quite clever. To begin with, he uses a creative metaphor in the facetia about the priest and the laundress. Here, the erotic setting is set in motion when

²²³ The numbers refer to the number of the facetia.

the laundress, after the priest inquires, explains that her feet are red and swollen “perché *ella aveva sotto il foco*” (emphasis mine) [“it was the result of *the fire she had burning below*” (emphasis mine)]. This seemingly innocent comment ignites the priest’s ardent desire and his proposition “che ’n cortesia li dovessi un poco *accendere quella candela*” (emphasis mine) [“begged her to be so kind as *to light that candle for him*” (emphasis mine)] so that superficially he might lessen her burning but in reality subdue his own passion. In another facetia, Leonardo uses the analogy of a jousting match to represent the sexual act: “Uno, vedendo una femmina parata a tener tavola in giostra, guardò il tavolaccio e gridò vedendo la sua lancia: ‘Oimè, quest’è troppo piccolo lavorante a sì gran bottega’” (ed. Vecce 139) [“A man, seeing a woman ready to hold up the target for a jousting-match, exclaimed, looking at the shield, and considering his spear: ‘Alack! this is too small a workman for so great a business’” (trans. Richter 291)]. Leonardo creates an imaginative interplay between the implied and actual meanings of the phrase “tener tavola in giostra” [“target for a jousting-match”] and the nouns “il tavolaccio” [“the shield”] and “la lancia” [“the spear”]. Sexual intercourse is metaphorically expressed with the terms associated with a jousting match in which the female genitalia represent the target (“il tavolaccio”) and the male sexual organ the spear (“la lancia”) that must pierce the target. The man’s final remark is his admission that he does not possess the “proper equipment” for the “challenge” awaiting him.

The content of the Quattrocento facetia owes much of its variety and appeal to its protagonists, who, according to Pullini, represent the wide array of human types: “un documento della varia umanità” (47). In the *Facezie*, there is indeed an awareness of human variety; and it is reinforced by Leonardo’s use of generic descriptors for characters, whereby he simply denotes his protagonists through gender pronouns (“uno” or “una”), profession, or

other general designations.²²⁴ Leonardo's technique does not imply that there are no stock characters in the *Facezie*, or in other facetiae collections for that matter, since the peasant is still generally foolish and the priest hypocritical in his words and deeds; yet, there is no strong evidence of any attempt to discriminate against a particular individual or group of persons. On the contrary, Leonardo demonstrates a flexible attitude in his *Facezie*; that is, he suggests that human flaws are common to all, and his generic protagonists reinforce this point. Indeed, the fact that he rarely cites known individuals in his facetiae or attaches any incident to one person underscores the universal dimension suggested in his *Facezie*. Unlike Poggio, who frequently uses well-known individuals in his *Liber*, only a few examples exist in which Leonardo might be referring to real people. For example, a facetia discussed earlier names Ludovico Sforza in reference to a tale originally written by Carbone.

With respect to actions and witty replies, which occupy the foreground, the characters of these facetiae were usually relegated to second place; their individuality, in fact, was rarely important in facetiae or even fully or explicitly described. In reality, a protagonist in a single facetia is only one among many in a collection of fragmented writings that, in turn, each feature their own protagonists. Quite appropriately, Pullini describes a protagonist in Quattrocento facetiae as “una semplice macchietta” (76) [“a simple caricature”]. A character, therefore, is ephemeral because it does not transcend the confines of the facetia in which it is found and holds little meaning beyond the tale itself. Leonardo's prevalent use of the nonspecific “uno” or “una” to denote a character reinforces the idea that, in his facetiae, protagonists simply appear and disappear like insignificant “oddities.” In the narrative structure of the facetia, a character is simply a tool for augmenting the comical effect of the

²²⁴ Specific examples include: uno vecchio, un giovane, un suo conoscente, la femmina, uno infermo, un pittore, un ladro, uno povero omo, un poeta, il frate minore, and uno signore. A reference to Leonardo's technique of generic protagonists and other examples of these was made earlier.

anecdote or stressing a critical point of view. In some cases Leonardo simply used “uno” or “una;” in others he adopted a more specific designation in order for the facetia to be more biting in its criticism. The latter point is relevant in the facetiae in which Leonardo expresses an anticlerical stance. Thus, except in the facetiae in which an incident is attached to an historical personage or group of people, the protagonists are not memorable because they do not hold as much comical value as the actions that they perform or the witty replies that they utter. The protagonists in the *Facezie* are not interconnected except for their shared role in enhancing the comical effect of the individual facetia. In the instance in which a specific character reference is made, it is simply episodic and has no bearing on the other protagonists in the collection.

The Italian biographer Paolo Giovio (1483-1552) composed an unpublished short biography of Leonardo which would later serve Vasari for his own life account of the artist. It is believed that Giovio knew Leonardo and had occasion to meet him in Rome between 1513 and 1515, when both were in the city. Written around 1527, Giovio’s biography *Leonardi Vincii vita* offers details of Leonardo’s painting techniques as well as a description of his affable character and elegant appearance: “Fuit ingenio valde comi, nitido, liberali, vultu autem longe venustissimo, et cum elegantiae omnis delitiarumque maxime theatralium mirificus inventor ac arbiter esset, ad lyramque scite caneret, cunctis per omnem aetatem principibus mire placuit” (qtd. in Vecce, *Leonardo* 357).²²⁵ Leonardo’s renown for his refined presence would later be remembered in Vasari’s description of the artist in *Le vite*. In his biography, Vasari praises Leonardo as a man and an artist, writing that he was a talented

²²⁵ [“He had a character which was very amiable, impressive and generous, and he had by far the most beautiful appearance. He was a splendid critic and inventor of all things elegant and delightful, especially in theatrical displays. He sang to his own accompaniment on the lyre, and he was on an excellent footing with all the princes of his time” (trans. Milton Kooistra)].

and delightful individual who showed beauty, grace, and virtue in all that he did. He even praised him as a gift bestowed on humanity by God. Vasari's account of Leonardo begins with an encomium to this effect:

Grandissimi doni si veggono piovere da gli influssi celesti ne' corpi umani molte volte naturalmente; e sopra naturali talvolta strabocchevolmente accozzarsi in un corpo solo bellezza, grazia e virtù, in una maniera che dovunque si volge quel tale, ciascuna sua azione è tanto divina, che lasciandosi dietro tutti gli altri uomini, manifestamente si fa conoscere per cosa (come ella è) largita da Dio, e non acquistata per arte umana. Questo lo videro gli uomini in Lionardo da Vinci, nel quale oltra la bellezza del corpo, non lodata mai a bastanza, era la grazia più che infinita in qualunque sua azione[.] (Bellosi, and Rossi 545)²²⁶

It was earlier recalled that Vasari also informs us that Leonardo was a gifted speaker and witty conversationalist – “Era tanto piacevole nella conversazione che tirava a sé gli animi delle genti” (546)²²⁷ – and emphasizes Ludovico Sforza's admiration for Leonardo's spontaneous reciting of poetry and his conversation as an oral entertainer in the duke's court: “oltra ciò fu il migliore dicitore di rime a l'improviso del tempo suo. Sentendo il duca i ragionamenti tanto mirabili di Lionardo, talmente s'innamorò de le sue virtù, che era cosa incredibile” (550).²²⁸ From this anecdotal evidence, it is clear that Leonardo had flair as an eloquent and captivating speaker. But could these qualities also be a reflection of his virtues and skills as a raconteur of comic tales? Indeed, it is not unreasonable to presume that the artist had natural storytelling ability as well. Such an assumption is not merely speculative,

²²⁶ [“The heavens often rain down the richest gifts on human beings, naturally, but sometimes with lavish abundance bestow upon a single individual beauty, grace and ability, so that, whatever he does, every action is so divine that he distances all other men, and clearly displays how his genius is the gift of God and not an acquirement of human art. Men saw this in Lionardo da Vinci, whose personal beauty could not be exaggerated, whose every movement was grace itself and whose abilities were so extraordinary that he could readily solve every difficulty” (Hinds 156)].

²²⁷ [“His charming conversation won all hearts” (157)].

²²⁸ [“Besides this, he was the best reciter of improvised rhymes of his time. The duke, captivated by Lionardo's conversation and genius, conceived an extraordinary affection for him” (160-61)].

for it connects both Giovio's and Vasari's accounts to the prevailing belief held by Leonardo scholars that the *Favole* and *Facezie* were composed for recital at Ludovico's court.

The art of telling jokes orally is an important theoretical component in the tradition of *facetiae* with the appearance of Pontano's *De sermone* (1509) and Castiglione's *Il libro del cortegiano* (1528).²²⁹ Both Renaissance treatises examine *facetiae* from a theoretical perspective that is premised on the notion that the use of humour can be taught as a social asset in cultured and civil interactions.²³⁰ Pontano speaks about the social function of humour in conversation between *ingenui homines* ("cultured and civil individuals") (1.3.2).²³¹ His discussion revolves around the explanation of his innovative theories of joking and the elaboration of classical theories of humour. Castiglione's *excursus* on the laughable is slightly more practical than Pontano's because it focuses more on imparting rules of decorum for the use of pleasantries by the ideal Renaissance courtier.²³² Despite their differences in emphasis, Pontano and Castiglione treat *facetiae* within a wide context that includes other determining factors (e.g., audience, place, time) that create an atmosphere of courtesy and pleasure.²³³ Their attitude towards joking recalls the notions of Aristotle and

²²⁹ Though Castiglione wrote after Leonardo composed his *facetiae*, it is clear that the Italian Renaissance engaged in discussion and argument on the topic of humour.

²³⁰ Pontano treats *facetiae* in Books 3 to 6 while Castiglione in chapters forty-one to ninety-five in Book 2.

²³¹ "Sed nos hac in parte de ea, quae oratoria sive vis facultasque sive ars dicitur, nihil omnino loquimur, verum de oratione tantum ipsa communi, quaque homines adeundis amicis, communicandis negotiis in quotidianis praecipue utuntur sermonibus, in conventibus, consessionibus, congressionibus familiaribusque ac civilibus consuetudinibus. Qua e re alia quadam hi ratione commendantur quam qui oratores dicuntur atque eloquentes" ["But we say nothing at all in this part about the things which are called oratory or force, faculty or art, but only of our common oration, which men especially use in their daily conversations, meetings, assemblies, gatherings and familiar and civil customs when approaching their friends and doing business. These men are therefore commended for the same reason as those who are said to be eloquent orators" (trans. Milton Kooistra)].

²³² Addressing messer Federico, signor Prefetto states: "siate contento d'insegnarci come abbiamo ad usar le facezie delle quali avete or fatta menzione, e mostrarci l'arte che s'appartiene a tutta questa sorte di parlar piacevole per indurre riso e festa con gentil modo, perché in vero a me pare che importi assai e molto si convenga al cortegiano" (Longo 182).

²³³ Quondam argues that both Pontano and Castiglione wrote treatises on civility to assert the stability and force of culture against the debilitating political situation of Cinquecento Italy: "I grandi libri (di Pontano, Castiglione e Guazzo) sulla moderna forma del vivere e sulla conversazione sono, dunque, l'esito di un attraversamento

Cicero, both of whom expressed the need for restraint in the use of jokes since laughter was provoked by the ridiculous, ugliness, and deformity (this definition of the cause of laughter originated in chapter five of Aristotle's *Poetics*). In *De oratore*, for instance, Cicero stated that jesting was not to be used in an unbecoming manner or to be greatly offensive (*non turpiter*).²³⁴ His main point was that “pur mettendo in comunicazione con la *turpitudine* e la *deformitas*, [le *facezie*] si trasmettano in un modo di *presentazione degno*” (Ferroni 70; emphasis mine). In other words, the individual who uses humour still needs to maintain a level of dignity in treating low subject matters such as those treated in *facetiae*. Like their Roman predecessor, Pontano and Castiglione too showed interest in a “base” literary genre such as the *facetia*, but they were keen to control its use in cultured environments. Keeping in mind Giovio's and Vasari's biographies of Leonardo and some of Pontano's and Castiglione's key theoretical points on humour,²³⁵ this concluding section proposes that Leonardo, as a writer of humorous tales, might have complied with some of the indispensable requirements for good conduct in humorous circumstances outlined in *De sermone* and in *Il libro del cortegiano*. Indeed, both Italian humanists construct an archetype with clear demarcated limits for a specific social environment. In humorous circumstances, they both recommend social rules for which humour is to be controlled. Does Leonardo correspond to the *homo facetus* (witty man) advocated by both Pontano and Castiglione? Where would Leonardo's place be within the ideal social parameters delineated by the two

sofferto sulle possibili, e positive, vie di uscita sulla base dell'autonoma forza e dell'indipendente potere dell'esperienza culturale, nei suoi stessi modelli di perfezione classicistica” (lv).

²³⁴ The statement in which Cicero says this reads as follows: “Locus autem, et regio quasi ridiculi (nam id proxime quaeritur) turpitudine et deformitate quadam continentur: haec enim ridentur vel sola, vel maxime, quae notant et designant turpitudinem aliquam non turpiter” (2.58; Sutton 372) [“Then the field or province, so to speak, of the laughable (this being our next problem), is restricted to that why may be described as unseemly or ugly; for the chief, if not the only, objects of laughter are those sayings which remark upon and point out something unseemly in no unseemly manner” (373)].

²³⁵ Coincidentally, the main theories of Pontano and Castiglione are the main theories on *facetiae* in Europe in the Renaissance.

theorists? Leonardo probably composed his *facetiae* in order to recite them at court; if this hypothesis is connected to the descriptions of him provided by Giovio and Vasari,²³⁶ it may not be difficult to envision Leonardo as fitting the description of Pontano's and Castiglione's Renaissance ideal of the *homo facetus*.

De sermone differs from other early modern *facetiae* collections because the *facetiae* in this work are contextualized within a large theoretical framework that is meant to enhance their meanings. Unlike Poggio's texts, Pontano's *facetiae* were not narrated for the sake of the story. Pontano believed that a *facetia* was not merely humorous in itself, but that in order to have its complete comical effect, it relied, instead, on external elements such as the occasion, the audience and, more important, the skill and virtue of the speaker: "The enjoyment of a good story becomes, to him [Pontano], a complex aesthetic experience whose elements he does not only find in the story itself, but in the concrete situation" (Luck 115). Pontano's modern idea of *facetia* and the place of this literary genre in pleasant conversation instigate his invention of *facetudo*, a social virtue that will enhance the narration of these comic anecdotes. For *facetiae* to be successful in an urbane manner,²³⁷ *facetudo* and *facetiae* had to be interdependent. In his *De sermone*, therefore, Pontano prescribes rules for the good practice of blending dignified manners (*facetudo*) and humour (*facetiae*) in the informal gatherings of learned men and women.

According to Pontano, when *facetudo* is displayed in conversation, its positive effects create a relaxing and affable atmosphere for all interlocutors: "in congressionibus collucutionibusque domesticis, familiaribus item ac popularibus in sermonibus, verba cum

²³⁶ As noted earlier, some scholars such as Vecce and Kemp believe that Leonardo's *facetiae* could be linked to his paintings. The sixteenth-century painter Lomazzo made the same connection in his *Trattato dell'arte della pittura, scoltura et architettura*.

²³⁷ Pontano maintained that even a bad joke could be successful if told by a skilled raconteur.

iocunditate facerent cumque audientium voluptate ac recreatione” (1.8.1).²³⁸ While *facetudo* is the social virtue (and skill) par excellence, it is only one of the main three that complete Pontano’s notion of the *vir facetus*; the other two are *urbanitas* (the use of courteousness) and *veracitas* (the virtue of telling the truth).²³⁹ Furthermore, the *vir facetus* must, at all times, use good judgment and demonstrate a sense of measure in his use of jesting in conversations with others. Such self-control is maintained through the universal virtue of *mediocritas* (moderation), which is a moderate stance between the two extremes of buffoonery and austerity and is the principle that enables the *vir facetus* to avoid vice. The telling of facetiae or joke-infused tales, therefore, entails more than the simple act of narrating a story with humorous content, for a facetia is no longer regarded only as amusing in itself, since it also reflects the wit and pleasing qualities of the person who is narrating the tale.

The cultivation of Pontano’s *facetudo* was an important step in the formation of the courtier.²⁴⁰ That said, *Il libro del cortegiano* is more practical than *De sermone*, resembling a manual for courtiership. Moreover, Castiglione does not necessarily speak of facetia as being a reflection of virtue (as does Pontano) but as simply another tool for the Renaissance courtier to employ in order to make a positive impression on his public. As previously mentioned, Castiglione classifies facetiae into three categories: “festività” or “urbanità;” “detti” or “arguzie;” and “burle.” In the first, which includes long and continuous narratives, he discusses the importance of grace (“tanto bona grazia;” Longo 183) that the courtier

²³⁸ [“in his meetings and domestic conversations, likewise in his personal and public conversations/addresses, he spoke with charm and to the delight and joy of his listeners” (trans. Milton Kooistra)].

²³⁹ Pontano devotes Books 3-6 to the discussion of *facetudo*; Book 1 deals with *urbanitas* and Book 2 with *veracitas*.

²⁴⁰ Though Castiglione does not mention his predecessor by name, *Il libro del cortegiano* is influenced by the ethical and aesthetic model originally proposed by Pontano (Quondam liv).

should demonstrate and the effect this should have on his audience. The second category includes short witticisms in which there is an unexpected punch-line; the most effective of these are those witticisms that not only deceive the audience but also the victim of the witty retort (called “fuor d’opinione;” 204). Indeed, Castiglione’s emphasis on opinion is “another reminder of the type of environment in which the courtier’s construction of a social image is based on impressions and opinions” (Falvo 133). The element of deception is justified when it is used to enhance the courtier’s image. The third category refers to practical jokes including some sort of action (“qualche operazione;” 191), thus involving a theatrical component: “un élément de théâtre” (Weber 75). Even so the representation of action in “burle” should be controlled to preserve the courtier’s dignity and charm in the eyes of his audience. Just as it was for Pontano, the principle of *mediocritas* is important for Castiglione as well, though Castiglione does not use this term specifically but speaks instead of “affettazione” [“extreme and excessive behaviour”] to indicate what the courtier must avoid. In *Il libro del cortegiano*, the quality of “gratia” [“grace”] is the implementation of *mediocritas*. Alongside the technical explanations of each category, Castiglione reiterates the need for decorum and seeming effortlessness (“sprezzatura”) by the courtier who uses humour.

Grace and virtue are important components in Pontano’s and Castiglione’s ideas about the use of humour: while Pontano introduces his concept of *facetudo* as a moral virtue that determines an equilibrium of humour with urbanity, Castiglione believes grace is a necessary aesthetic display that the courtier should always impress upon his audience. The importance that both Renaissance authors place on individual grace and virtue in interpersonal interactions recalls Vasari’s praise of Leonardo’s visible attributes “bellezza,

grazia e virtù” and Giovio’s description of the artist as “ingenio valde comi, nitido, liberali, vultu autem longe venustissimo.” These qualities no doubt enabled Leonardo to impress his audience and captivate his patron (as Vasari notes). The anecdotal evidence supplied to us by the two Italian biographers creates a mental image of Leonardo that corresponds to the aesthetic experience that Pontano and Castiglione envision in their ideal environment of civil discourse.

Indeed, the biographies written by Giovio and Vasari reveal Leonardo’s distinguished public presence as well as his ability to create a pleasant and harmonious environment for whomever his listeners may be. In the present study, these biographical details are significant because they mirror the ideal social conduct that Pontano and Castiglione imagined in the humorous contexts upon which they theorized in their respective treatises. Despite the fact that neither Giovio nor Vasari make explicit reference to Leonardo’s use of humour in discourse, their biographical accounts may be suggestive enough of the fact that the artist would have been able to deploy the necessary range of oratorical skills in humorous circumstances as imagined by Pontano and Castiglione. Can it not be presumed that his positive effects as a skillful conversationalist and oral court entertainer would have been transferable in situations in which he had to demonstrate polite wit and narrate pleasantries to arouse laughter in others? Leonardo’s poised and polished external behaviour would seem to emulate the social rules stipulated by Pontano and Castiglione. Or perhaps Leonardo was sensitive to and aware of his audience, as Castiglione’s ideal courtier was to be (“ma in tutti i modi s’ha da considerar la disposizion degli animi degli auditori,” Longo 233), simply for the purpose of projecting a pleasing and honourable image of himself. Neither Vasari nor Giovio suggest any exaggerated or unseemly behaviour in the artist but, rather, underscore

the effortless balance and poise in his speech and delivery. Thus, the ideal of *mediocritas*, if one is to go by Vasari's and Giovio's biographies, is also manifest in the grace and virtue that Leonardo revealed in his discourse and mannerisms. Perhaps Leonardo did not even need to aim for *mediocritas* in order to gain the favour of his audience, for he already possessed this virtue naturally, as Vasari notes in the statement "ciascuna sua azzione è tanto divina." Leonardo's conduct indeed appears effortless and nothing short of tempered and delightful. Moreover, Vasari states that Leonardo "manifestamente si fa conoscere per cosa (come ella è) *largita da Dio e non acquistata per arte umana*" (emphasis mine). This assertion and the italicized phrase in particular suggest that the artist's gifts were a natural gift bestowed to him by God and not learned through the study of rules. Perhaps, then, Leonardo had already met Pontano's and Castiglione's criteria for social decorum and rhetoric in humorous situations given that he knew them instinctively.

iv. Leonardo's *Facezie* as an Expression of Renaissance Italian Attitudes towards Humour

As already stated, the facetia acquired a life of its own during the Italian Renaissance, breaking with its sister genres, the *exemplum* and the novella. The flourishing enjoyed by the facetia was in part due to the attitude towards the laughable in the Renaissance. Now, jokes were not necessarily cloaked in an unambiguous moral context, as was common in the *exemplum*, or framed within social conventions, as in the novella. They were recounted simply for the sake of amusement. This shift in perspective towards the comic signals somewhat of a cultural rupture between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. By no means does it suggest that medieval society did not laugh at jokes or appreciate humour, for there

were many contexts in which the primary goal was to cause laughter.²⁴¹ Nor, for that matter, does it imply that the Renaissance did not blend morality with humour. On the contrary, Leonardo's *Facezie* will show that humour can, in fact, express serious moral meanings. In the Middle Ages, however, humour did not enjoy the same openness as it did in most of Italian Renaissance society, in which the didactic overtones or closed literary frames directing (and in some respects controlling) medieval humorous writings were now a thing of the past. Humour was now pursued for purely recreational purposes because it was believed to be a privilege to be exercised by human beings. This belief is reflected in Petrarca's *De remediis utriusque Fortune*: "[God] dedit rationem dedit orationem dedit lachrymas dedit risus" (2.93; qtd. Bowen, *Enter Rabelais* 20).²⁴² Laughter was not a trivial pursuit, but a natural human impulse. Along the same lines, Poggio, in the preface to his *Liber*, underscores the need for laughter as a form of consolation in life on earth: "modo scriptorem ne culpent, qui *ad levationem animi haec et ad ingenii exercitium scripsit*" (6; emphasis mine).²⁴³ Indeed, the grounds for Poggio's success stem not only from the originality and creativity of his *facetiae* but also from his attempt to revive the classical tradition of the *facetia* as a genre that can be used to elevate one's spirits and stimulate one's intellect: "Those who imitated ancient humour are therefore often careful to say that laughter repairs the hard-working body and spirit, that an acid-dipped pen can serve as a doctor's scalpel" (Prescott 284).

The belief that laughter was natural to human beings did not originate in the Italian

²⁴¹ The tales from Boccaccio's *Decameron*, for example, are intentionally framed within an environment in which there is a need and desire for laughter and recreation. Sacchetti's stories from *Trecentonovelle* had the double function of instructing and amusing.

²⁴² ["He (God) gave him reason, gave him speech, gave him tears and laughter" (Rawski 228)].

²⁴³ ["my only request is that they (i.e., Poggio's readers) should not condemn *an author who has written but with a view to relaxation and the culture of his mind*" (5-6; emphasis mine)].

Renaissance. Human laughter, together with its impact on everyday life, was already a topic of interest in classical antiquity. As far back as can be traced, Aristotle was the first to propose that laughter is a uniquely human need that separates human beings from other species (*On Parts of Animals* 3.10); he also stated that amusement such as laughter was essential for a balanced life (*Nicomachean Ethics* 4.8). Embedded in a rhetorical context, these ideas are reiterated in *De oratore* by Cicero, who writes that laughter is a natural human response and that jokes are a source of relaxation. For both writers, therefore, laughter was seen to have a necessary function for human beings and could enrich one's life.

Thus, the ancient notions of laughter were revived in the Italian Renaissance, at both a theoretical and practical level. Pontano, in his theory of humour, asserts that laughter is a necessary distraction from life's routines and a natural relief from *negotia* ["serious pursuits"] (*De sermone* 1.6.1). One's life revolves around daily responsibilities; thus, it is only natural for people to seek release from serious endeavours. Years later, Castiglione echoes Pontano's opinion in *Il libro del cortegiano* maintaining that "il riso esilara l'animo e dà piacere, né lascia che in quel punto l'omo si ricordi delle noiose molestie, delle quali la vita nostra è piena" (2.45; Longo 188). Laughter enriches human life, for it offers necessary respite from everyday affairs, and elevates the spirit.²⁴⁴ On a more practical level, these positive effects of laughter in everyday life manifested themselves more literally in the *facetiae* written to be read or heard, as in the case of Leonardo's *facetiae*. The writers of *facetiae* viewed humorous tales as a convenient and pleasant way to enjoy a good laugh, while at the same time affirming the value of laughter. This attitude has already been shown in Poggio, who, in the preface to his *Liber*, expressed the need to offset everyday labour with

²⁴⁴ Though articulated alongside theoretical pronouncements, the practical and therapeutic benefits of laughing and joking were by no means discounted by Pontano and Castiglione in their respective works.

some abandon and laughter. Leonardo, too, may be included among those who wrote facetiae that prioritized humour and asserted the comical value of a joke; for example, his brief facetia about a man's ugliness as reflecting the strangeness of his country is not only an example of human verbal wit, but also a simple way to incite laughter. It can be enjoyed by the person reading or hearing it for its simple humour and for the positive effects deriving from the laughter. Leonardo's facetia about the man who did not see the need to rise from bed before sunrise is yet another example of a joke that is told simply to incite laughter. The same could be said about the facetia about the man who believed that his friend blew wind so that he would not lose his way in the dark. Here, there is an element of silliness that cannot help but naturally cause one to laugh. Unlike other Leonardo facetiae such as the one about the priest and the laundress, these facetiae are not meant to draw attention to an object of ridicule or to criticize harshly a particular human behaviour but, rather, to stress the spontaneity of humour in everyday life. Indeed, their success hinges entirely on their comical value. In Leonardo's facetiae and in those in complete anthologies such as Poggio's *Liber*, humour was at the forefront; humorous tales were not necessarily set against a social, moral, or theoretical background, but could stand independently for their comic worth and function. In the Italian Renaissance, facetiae were just one means of expression of a desire for recreation and pleasure in one's life; they also underscored the acceptance and the necessity of manifesting the frivolous side of being human.

Renaissance facetiae expressed a candid humour that both facetiae writers and collectors appreciated. Seen in this light, humour displayed the lightness and frivolity by which human life could be defined and lived. Indeed, it could be taken merely at face value as a convenient way to cause laughter and a necessary diversion in life. This significance of

humour is true in so many respects; however, it is important to recall that the facetia also satirizes the foolishness of human behaviour. Keeping this in mind, one is led to wonder whether the humour in facetiae is necessarily innocuous. For the frequency with which facetiae display human folly and weaknesses suggests that those who wrote such tales were also commenting seriously on the human condition while disguising their commentary as something amusing and nonchalant.

Leonardo's *Facezie* are comprised of tales manifesting glimpses into the society in which he lived. Mostly, they display the less pleasant side of human beings: their immorality, falseness, hypocrisy, foolishness, to name just a few. They are, therefore, a truthful manifestation of human behaviour. Indeed, like many of the investigations he conducted in his lifetime, Leonardo might have enjoyed writing facetiae precisely because it was a writing activity that enabled him to gain access to the mechanisms that operate beneath the surface of the phenomena he witnessed. That is, through the facetia genre, Leonardo was specifically able to expose the underlying emotions that sometimes motivate human behaviour and the comic spectacle (i.e., human life) resulting from such behaviour. In true facetia style, many of Leonardo's facetiae are anti-clerical, sexually immoral, crude, and unethical; yet, all laughter aside, they are a bare and accurate exposition of the full range of qualities that lie within and define human beings. Like the other manuscript items flanking the facetiae, Leonardo wrote humorous tales in such a way as to reveal a truthful side of human nature; in this case, the truth concerns human foibles. Leonardo's impulse to investigate the world around him no doubt facilitated his recognition of weaknesses inherent in his fellow men. His investigative nature is demonstrated in his *Facezie* as it is in nearly all his endeavours.

Leonardo might have been drawn to the facetia because it is a literary genre that does not rely on a premeditated and preconceived system of morality or psychology but, rather, on a detached observer who falls outside such a system. Facetiae writers apply careful observation and common sense to the structure of their writings, for their main objective is to illustrate things as they really are. For Leonardo, therefore, the direct approach of the facetia and this genre's inclination to represent human society concretely without recourse to speculation such as transcendental knowledge were features that no doubt attracted him. Leonardo's fondness for a pragmatic approach to grasp the true nature of things is manifest in the *Bestiario* and *Favole*, both of which were intentionally stripped of the excessive abstract and allegorical overtones which generally characterize these two genres. It would seem that his preference for concrete expression in literary texts persists in his *Facezie* as well.

Leonardo's *Facezie* show reality through the physical manifestation of human affairs (i.e., human behaviour). In these texts, humour, a prominent aspect of both Leonardo's collection and the facetia genre, is used to convey the full impact of these realities. Despite the lightness sometimes attributed to literary genres employing humour, the use of humour in literature may be interpreted as a reliable vehicle through which to understand something as significant as human nature. Mikhail Bakhtin, for one, suggests that during the Renaissance,

[l]aughter [had] a deep philosophical meaning, it is one of the essential forms of the truth concerning the world as a whole, concerning history and man; it is a peculiar point of view relative to the world; the world is seen anew, no less (and perhaps more) profoundly than when seen from the serious standpoint. Therefore, laughter is just as admissible in great literature, posing universal problems, as seriousness. Certain essential aspects of the world are accessible only to laughter. (66)

Regardless of Leonardo's practical reasons for composing facetiae, the laughter deriving from his writings reveals an individual with a philosophical mindset. In the *Facezie*, laughter is connected to Leonardo's perennial observation of the world around him; his profound awareness of the natural human propensity to weakness; his understanding of what is right and wrong human conduct leading to the common goal of a better human race; his ability to embrace the full range of human behaviour; and his propensity to understand the human world through materialistic, rather than spiritual, means. All these characteristics, merged and displayed in a humorous context, enable laughter to assume "a deep philosophical meaning" that brings one closer to a truth about the human race. The laughter in the *Facezie* is, as Bakhtin states, "one of the essential forms of the truth concerning the world as a whole." Much like the *Bestiario* and the *Favole*, the *Facezie* are written exposés of human behaviour. And with the emphasis being clearly on the embarrassing truths about human beings, each facetia was written with the intent to arouse laughter in order to underscore a specific perspective about human behaviour; in this case, the lens focuses on human flaws. Laughter is the catalyst through which the reader or listener associates the comic action in the facetia with its opposite, which represents the particular aspect of the world that laughter makes "accessible." In facetiae, the aim of laughter is to ridicule the foolish conduct of others by underscoring it in the narrative; this laughter is triggered by a subconscious knowledge of its counterpart, virtuous conduct. This idea recalls the early theories of Aristotle and Cicero that laughter in one person is provoked by another's errors and weaknesses.

The dominant Renaissance concept of laughter was connected to the ancient notion that the source of the laughable was something that aroused scorn in the person laughing.

Most Renaissance thinkers agreed that there was joy in laughter, but many times laughter was attached to this unconscious state of derision. According to Quentin Skinner this paradoxical element of joy and scorn at the moment of laughter could imply only two things about the person laughing: 1) recognition of a vice or weakness in oneself or in another; or 2) the development of a sense of superiority towards the person being laughed at (424). Both implications could apply to the study of Leonardo's *facetiae*. Leonardo clearly recognized vice in the human race, as an examination of three of his literary collections has demonstrated thus far, and could produce situations mocking these human weaknesses. Moreover, his ability to arouse laughter at the expense of human weaknesses reinforces his intellectual perceptions and his strong sense of awareness. Though it cannot be said with certainty whether Leonardo harboured feelings of superiority toward his fellow men, it may be worth exploring the superiority theory further in order to draw some general conclusions as to how the laughter generated by *facetiae* might have indicated a sense of self-evaluation and self.

The chief proponent of the superiority theory, first hinted at by classical theories of humour, was the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), who believed that, in a laughable situation, laughter was a moment of "self-glory" experienced by the person laughing. Self-glory, as described by David Hector Monro, need not be arrogance; it can be a sense of self-knowledge or self-awareness opposing the self-ignorance displayed by the person who is the object of laughter and ridicule: "It is a sudden access of self-esteem that causes us to burst into laughter: not a steady sense of superiority" (84). This feeling of "superiority" surfaces because the people laughing experience a moment of elevation for being aware of having overcome a weakness that the person being laughed at clearly does

not possess; or for believing that they would not behave similarly in the given circumstances. Laughter, not self-pity or compassion, is the emotion of choice in these situations because the person laughing has consciously risen above the vice that is ridiculed. Leonardo's facetia about the greedy merchant who takes for granted the generosity of two friars illustrates the way in which the dynamic between self-knowledge and self-ignorance operates:

Usano i frati minori, a certi tempi, alcune loro quaresime, nelle quali essi non mangiano carne ne' lor conventi; ma in viaggio, perchè essi vivano di limosine, hanno licenzia di mangiare ciò che è posto loro innanzi. Onde, abbattendosi in detti viaggi una coppia d'essi frati a un'osteria in compagnia d'un certo me<r>cantuolo, il quale, essendo a una medesima mensa, alla quale non fu portato, per la povertà dell'ostieri, altro che un pollastro cotto, onde esso mercantuolo, vedendo questo essere poco per lui, si volse a essi frati, e disse: "Se io ho ben di ricordo, voi non mangiate in tali di ne' vostri conventi d'alcuna maniera di carne". Alle quali parole i frati furono costretti, per la lor regola, senza alt<r>e gavillazioni, a dire ciò essere la verità: onde il mercantetto ebbe il suo desiderio; e così si mangiò essa pollastra, e i frati feciono il meglio poterono. Ora, dopo tale desinare, questi commensari si partirono tutti e tre di compagnia; e dopo essendo tutti e tre a piedi, i frati per povertà e l'altro per avarizia, fu necessario, per l'uso della compagnia, che uno de' frati, essendo discalzi, passassi sopra i sua omeri esso mercantuolo: on<de> datoli il frate a serbo i zoccoli, si caricò di tale omo. Onde accadde che, trovandosi esso frate in mezzo al fiume, esso ancora si ricordò de la sua regola; e fermatosi, a uso di San Cristofaro, alzò la testa inverso quello che l'aggravava, e disse: "Dimmi un poco, hai tu nessun dinari addosso?". "Ben sai", rispose questo, "come credete voi che mia pari mercatante andassi altrimenti attorno?". "Oimè!", disse il frate, "la nostra regola vieta che noi non possiàn portare danari addosso". E subito lo gittò nell'acqua. La qual cosa, conosciuta dal mercatante facetamente la già fatta ingiuria esser vendicata, con piacevole riso, pacificamente, mezzo arrossito per vergogna, la vendetta sopportò. (ed. Vecce 135-36)

[Franciscan begging friars are wont, at certain times, to keep fasts, when they do not eat meat in their convents. But on journeys, as they live on charity, they have licence to eat whatever is set before them. Now a couple of these friars on their travels stopped at an inn, in company with a certain merchant, and sat down with him at the same table, where, from the poverty of the inn, nothing was served to them but a small roast chicken. The merchant, seeing this to be but little even for himself, turned to the friars and said: 'If my memory serves me, you do not eat any kind of flesh in your convents at this season.' At these words the friars were compelled by their rule to admit, without cavil, that this was the truth; so the merchant had his wish and ate the

chicken, and the friars did the best they could. After dinner the messmates departed, all three together, and after traveling some distance they came to a river of some width and depth. All three being on foot – the friars by reason of their poverty, and the other from avarice – it was necessary by the custom of company that one of the friars, being barefoot, should carry the merchant on his shoulders: so having given his wooden shoes into his keeping, he took up his man. But it so happened that when the friar had got to the middle of the river, he again remembered a rule of his order, and stopping short, he looked up, like Saint Christopher, to the burden on his back and said: ‘Tell me, have you any money about you?’ – ‘You know I have,’ answered the other, ‘How do you suppose that a merchant like me should go about otherwise?’ ‘Alack!’ cried the friar, ‘our rules forbid us to carry any money on our persons,’ and forthwith he dropped him into the water, which the merchant perceived was a facetious way of being revenged on the indignity he had done them; so, with a smiling face, and blushing somewhat with shame, he peaceably endured the revenge. (trans. Richter 288-89)]

Up until the final action, in which one of the friars drops the merchant into the water, there is a clear opposing force or resistance between self-knowledge and self-ignorance, represented by the two friars and the merchant, respectively. Though the merchant is aware of his greed (when he sees that the chicken is too small to be shared), he is clearly represented in contrast to the friars, who, instead, act virtuously with the merchant. The self-knowledge of the friars suggests that a process of self-evaluation has occurred in terms of differentiating between human vice and virtue; indeed, it is their self-evaluation that enables them to shed vices such as greed. With respect to the merchant, their self-knowledge also renders them more highly developed human beings. The merchant, however, displays self-ignorance due to his incapacity to alter his behaviour; that is, until it is pointed out by the friar who drops him in the water. Indeed, the revenge on him by the friar, once again, shifts the dynamic between self-knowledge and self-ignorance because the merchant is forced to accept the consequences of his greed. At the end, the merchant is the object of ridicule, while at the same time, he laughs at his own self-ignorance. Though the facetia does not offer an ending in which the merchant definitively changes his ways, it certainly suggests that the merchant,

in laughing at his own behaviour and very graciously accepting the deserved revenge (“con piacevole riso, pacificamente, mezzo arrossito per vergogna, la vendetta sopportò”) [“with a smiling face, and blushing somewhat with shame, he peaceably endured the revenge”], has experienced an instant of awareness and rising above his greed.

The dynamic between self-knowledge and self-ignorance, highlighted in Hobbes’s theory of superiority, is manifest in this facetia. But what does it suggest when it is removed from the narrative and assessed in relation to Leonardo, who, after all, authored the facetia and chose the merchant’s greed as the object of ridicule in his tale? That is, what might Leonardo be revealing about himself in relation to those human beings who, like the merchant, displayed the inability to self-evaluate? When writing facetiae, Leonardo was intentionally drawing attention to human weaknesses in order to incite laughter about them. His ability to produce witty and humorous tales about the human condition invokes an image of a human being who astutely observed the human spectacle and deemed it somewhat of a comedy. Not only does this suggest that Leonardo was a highly reflective individual, but also that he was a typical example of the self-confident Renaissance man; that is, an individual who believed that self-knowledge was a pre-cursor to exercising one’s full potential in this life. And knowledge about the human condition is self-knowledge. This sense of awareness about being human was not uncommon in the Italian Renaissance. The steady interest in what the human being was capable of discovering (e.g., the expeditions to the New World) and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola’s philosophy that man was the principal agent between the earth and God are evidence that during the Renaissance people nurtured a strong sense of self. Because human foibles are at the heart of facetiae, Leonardo demonstrates that self-confidence includes acknowledging and, in some respects, embracing all aspects of being

human. To be able to laugh at human beings through humorous means such as facetiae could be equated with a healthy level of self-esteem, for laughter is a positive response to the whole of being human.

Because it has been suggested that Leonardo's literary writings also express his disillusionment regarding the human condition, the feeling of "superiority" from laughter can also represent "an antidote to an uncomfortable awareness of these [human] vices" (Grudin 201). Indeed, Leonardo's acceptance of human flaws does not necessarily equal approval of them. As Grudin observes, human weaknesses are softened by laughter, which simply becomes acceptance without surrender (203). Grudin's idea of acceptance without surrender is particularly pertinent here, for it suggests the existence of a moral buffer between acceptance and approval. In Leonardo's facetiae, it could be said that this approach ("acceptance without surrender") is applied to his exposé of human behaviour. Though Leonardo does not openly criticize any of the negative behaviours shown in his facetiae, he no doubt harboured moral objections toward some human weaknesses. According to Skinner, the vices most derided in the Renaissance were said to be hypocrisy and vaingloriousness (432), both of which are fully exhibited in the *Facezie* as well as in the *Favole*. Such an attitude is also an expression of self-confidence when seen from the vantage point of Hobbes's theory of superiority. Self-esteem implies a completed process of self-evaluation, which suggests that there is knowledge about certain behaviours and, specifically, about those that are less moral and desirable than others. Leonardo might have tolerated human weaknesses by creating occasions in which he could laugh at them, but he did not necessarily give moral approval of them or even indulge in negative conduct himself. While Leonardo may be laughing at human weaknesses, including some of his own, he may also believe that,

as a self-confident Renaissance man, he was in the position to critically comment upon immoral conduct. A person who is self-confident celebrates everything that is human but, at the same time, stands above certain human issues and develops a strong sense of self for his or her ability to choose to live according to morally superior human values. Whether Leonardo's position is disillusioned or aloof cannot be known for certain. Because of this, the idiosyncrasies of the nature of the laughter in his *facetiae* come into question. Is Leonardo admitting to faults of his own and thus laughing *with* his contemporaries? Or has he dissociated himself from the weaknesses targeted in his *facetiae* and literally laughs *at* his fellow human beings? The next chapter on Leonardo's *Profezia* indicates that Leonardo might have believed himself to possess knowledge of an upright moral code by which human beings could live (such a moral law was discussed in relation to the *Bestiario* and *Favole*). More important, the *Profezia* will show how Leonardo could express his disapproval of human immorality by replacing laughter in literature with an ironic edge. Thus, what is represented with some levity and possibly observed with detachment in the *Facezie* becomes pure disenchantment on Leonardo's part in the *Profezia*.

Chapter 4 The *Profezia*

i. Preliminaries to Leonardo's *Profezia*

Another genre that Leonardo tried his hand at was prophecy. Indeed, he wrote just over 170 prophecies, dating mostly from the period 1497 to 1499, with some also composed in the years 1502-03. They were written during his final years under the patronage of Ludovico Sforza²⁴⁵ and his second period in Florence (1500-06). The title of this literary collection is in the singular, reflecting a note written by Leonardo in the codex *Atlanticus*: “Profezia di Lionardo da Vinci.”²⁴⁶ Vecce believes that Leonardo wrote the title in the singular because he might have intended to create a cohesive work with the texts meant to be read consecutively in order to suggest a single great prophetic vision (“Leonardo e il gioco” 300). Right at the outset, it is important to note that, despite their title, the texts comprising the *Profezia* are actually riddles due to their outward question-reply structure (Jolles 103).²⁴⁷ However, out of respect for the original designation given by Leonardo, in this study these fragmented writings will be referred to as prophecies. As with the three literary collections studied thus far, the *Profezia* texts are comprised of fragments scattered throughout the notebooks. Beginning with the earliest, the following list will indicate the number and manuscript location of Leonardo's prophetic texts: forty-one are in manuscript *I* on four successive folios (63r-66v); seventy-eight, the largest group, are arranged in seven columns on the recto and verso of a single folio (370) in the codex *Atlanticus* and also include the

²⁴⁵ Leonardo left Milan in December 1499.

²⁴⁶ This is different from the plural forms used in the titles *Favole* and *Facezie*, which refer to the individual texts in the entire collection. The *Bestiario* is in the singular form because it is traditionally written as such to denote an entire collection, whereas the *Profezia*, were it following logic, should have been titled *Profezie*.

²⁴⁷ “Il existe une deuxième forme constituée par question et réponse: c’est la Devinette.” More will be said about this in the section “Leonardo's Prophecies as Riddles.”

fragment titled *Pronostico*; twelve longer prophecies are also found in the codex *Atlanticus* (f.393r) and appear adjacent to a plan outlining how these writings are to be organized; and a cluster of fifteen are in the codex *Arundel*. As the above description suggests, most of the *Profezia* was drafted in cohesive units. Those prophecies not included in the above-listed groups are found in the *Forster II*, *K*, *L*, *W* and *Madrid I, II*. Among others, these prophecies include reelaborations of earlier prophetic texts, the prophecy written in the form of a *terzina*,²⁴⁸ and two that Leonardo uses in his later codex on the flight of birds, *Sul volo*, to represent his flying machine.²⁴⁹

The note in the codex *Atlanticus* projecting a structure for the prophecies suggests that, at some point, Leonardo might have intended to organize his texts based upon an apparent system that would provide a logical order to the collection.²⁵⁰ He might have envisioned these writings as part of a larger and more systematic project, or he might simply have planned to recite the prophecies in the intended order. The former suggestion is supported by the fact that many of Leonardo's prophecies were written within spatial proximity of one another. While it is true that this is insufficient evidence to confirm an intention to publish these writings as a complete collection, it should not be discounted as a first step towards a plan for an eventual publication by the author. As has been mentioned,

²⁴⁸ "I' son colui che nacqui inanzi al padre, / la terza parte delli omini uccisi, / po' tornai nel ventre alla mia madre" (ed. Vecce 125) ["I am he who was born before his father. The third part of mankind I killed. And then I went back to my mother's womb" (trans. Pedretti, *Commentary* 279: 2).] According to Pedretti, the answer to this riddle is Cain.

²⁴⁹ "Del monte che tiene il nome del grande uccello piglierà il volo il famoso uccello ch'empierà il mondo di sua gran fama" (ed. Vecce 128) ["From the mountain which takes its name from the great bird, the famous bird will take its flight, which will fill the world with its great renown" (trans. McCurdy 441: 2)]; and "Piglierà il primo volo il grande uccello sopra del dosso del suo magno Cecero, e empiendo l'universo di stupore, empiendo di sua fama tutte le scritture, e groria eterna al nido dove nacque" (ed. Vecce 128) ["The great bird will take its flight upon the back of the great swan, filling the whole world with amazement and filling all records with its fame; and it will bring eternal glory to the nest where it was born" (trans. McCurdy 441: 2)].

²⁵⁰ On the other hand, for the *Bestiario*, *Favole*, and *Facezie*, for which there is no substantive evidence of an attempt to gather writings into a cohesive collection, scholars can only speculate upon Leonardo's intentions to create a complete collection of writings.

Leonardo intended to publish several things, but was notorious for leaving his projects unfinished and his ideas not completely developed, much to the chagrin of his patrons and posterity.²⁵¹ To return to the discussion of the order for the prophecies, Leonardo probably intended to organize his prophetic texts according to themes, with those bearing philosophical nuances reserved for the end:

Divisione della profezia. Prima delle cose degli animali razionali. Seconda delli irrazionali. Terza delle piante. Quarta delle cirimonie, quinta de' costumi. Sesta delli casi overo editti over quistioni. Settima de' casi che non possono stare in natura, come dire di quella cosa quanto più ne levi più cresce;²⁵² e riserva i gran casi inverso il fine, e deboli dal principio, e mostra prima e mali e poi le punizioni. Ottava delle cose filosofiche. (ed. Vecce 123)

[The division of the prophecies. First, of things relating to reasoning animals; secondly, of irrational creatures; thirdly of plants; fourthly, of ceremonies; fifthly, of manners; sixthly, of cases or edicts or disputes; seventhly, of cases that are contrary to nature, as, for instance, of those things which, the more is taken from them, the more they grow. And reserve the great matters till the end, and the small matters give at the beginning. And first show the evils and then the punishments, of philosophical things. (trans. Richter 292)]

Leonardo conceived of a thematic arrangement whereby he would group the prophecies according to issues addressed in order of increasing significance and seriousness (“e riserva i gran casi inverso il fine, e deboli dal principio”). Moreover, his plan shows an attempt to cover multiple aspects of reality: not only is Leonardo interested in human life and society, but in plants and animals as well. This should not come as a surprise given Leonardo’s fascination with nature and his curiosity about all animate and inanimate objects. In fact, the items listed in his plan do not deviate from those covered in his other literary collections in which his written observations, together with their corresponding philosophy, were extended

²⁵¹ Leonardo might have had many ideas for his prophecies (and for other writings) and even taken the initiative to implement some, but, on the basis of the evidence that has reached us today, scholars are left to draw only tentative conclusions regarding his intentions.

²⁵² Here, Leonardo is most likely referring to his prophecy about the ditch, which reads as follows: “Saran molti occupati in esercizio a levar di quella cosa, che tanto cresce, quanto se ne leva, e quanto più vi se ne pone, più diminuisce” (ed. Vecce 113) [“Many will be busied in taking away from a thing, which will grow in proportion as it is diminished” (trans. Richter 294)].

to all participants in the universe. As already mentioned, the word “profezia” (in “Divisione della profezia”) in its singular form is a telling choice for a title. Unfortunately, Leonardo did not adhere to his proposed division. Though not as significant as the arrangement cited above, there is also a similar note found among the group of seventy-eight prophecies that was probably written earlier. It similarly suggests an idea about organizing the prophecies, albeit one that is less-developed than the former (Vecce, “Leonardo e il gioco” 297). It is a fragment with the heading “Pronostico” [“Conjecture”], found in the top right corner on the recto of the folio, and is written in the imperative as an editorial note to himself: “Metti per ordine e mesi e le cirimonie che s’usano, e così fa’ del giorno e della notte” (ed. Vecce 111) [“Arrange in order the months and the ceremonies which are performed, and do this for the day and for the night” (trans. McCurdy 500: 2)]. The note has generated less interest and speculation among scholars, perhaps because the prophecies surrounding the note do not reflect this plan. In particular, anthologists of Leonardo’s literary writings have drawn on the more elaborate plan to organize their rendering of the prophecies.

Because Leonardo did not leave much in the way of finished written works, any evidence suggesting an attempt to produce a seemingly comprehensive work is far too great a temptation for scholars to resist envisioning what a publication by Leonardo might have looked like. As a consequence, the above “Divisione della profezia” has prompted many anthologists to publish the prophecies in the order that he appears to have intended. Their anthologies, therefore, begin with those prophecies describing “reasoning animals” and end with those of greater philosophical import. Not all scholars, however, have applied this methodology in their editions. Brizio and Vecce reproduced the *Profezia* chronologically, thus reflecting the order in which the prophecies are originally found in the manuscripts.

Although not related to the ordering of the prophecies, there is another note by the author that may throw light on the purpose of the texts. Immediately following the prophecy “Della fossa” [“Of a ditch”]²⁵³ Leonardo includes a note in parentheses about the way in which the text was read: “[D]illa in forma di frenesia o farnetico, d’insania di cervello” (ed. Vecce 113) [“Tell it in a frenzy or crazy way, as if out of madness” (trans. Pedretti, *Commentary* 279: 2). Clearly, this note refers to the delivery style and reinforces the theory that the *Profezia*, like the three literary collections studied thus far, were composed primarily for oral recitation. Moreover, as Ernst Gombrich argues, it underscores Leonardo’s condemnation and ridicule of those contemporaries who, in his lifetime, made careers from pronouncing prophecies (5). The parenthetical instruction, together with other texts in the *Profezia*, could be interpreted as Leonardo’s parody of those professional seers who vainly believed that they could substantiate their claims without the support of observation and experience. In particular, it seems to mock the frenzied and delirious manner in which these prophecies were most likely delivered in local piazzas (Rusconi 211).²⁵⁴ Gombrich’s observation is supported by the well-known fact that Leonardo often criticized magicians, astrologers, and necromancers for basing their knowledge and foresight upon supernatural causes rather than upon demonstrable facts. The artist criticizes their ways in comments written in his notebooks; his criticism is also suggested in the following prophecy: “E molti fecen bottega con inganni e miraculi finti, ingannando la stolta moltitudine, e se nessun si scopria cognoscitore de’ loro inganni, essi gli puniano” (ed. Vecce 127) [“And many have made a trade in deceits and feigned miracles, cozening the foolish herd, and if no one showed

²⁵³ This prophecy was already found in Luca Pacioli’s *De viribus quantitatis*.

²⁵⁴ See Roberto Rusconi’s *Predicazione e vita religiosa nella società italiana: da Carlo Magno alla Controriforma* (1981), a collection of sources documenting prophets and prophecies in the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

himself cognisant of their deceits they would impose them upon all” (trans. McCurdy 510: 2)]. Clearly, Leonardo believed himself to be above the false “sciences” advanced by such impostors.

While the written sources and influences for the *Bestiario*, *Favole*, and *Facezie* were easily singled out among Leonardo’s inventory of books, thereby facilitating parallels with other texts and writers, these are not readily recognizable for the *Profezia*. Leonardo no doubt consulted books not listed in the inventory, but the lack of evidence for easily identifiable sources for the *Profezia* supports Solmi’s claim that this is a collection of mostly original writings. Indeed, there do not appear to be obvious signs of direct borrowing from other written sources; that said, it should not be forgotten that Leonardo drew from subject matter (e.g., “Del seminare” [“Of Sowing Seed”]; “Delle sola delle scarpe che son di bue” [“Of the Soles of Shoes, which are made from the Ox”]; and “Dell’ombra che si move con l’uomo” [“Of a Man’s Shadow which moves with him”]) that was used in popular riddles well before he composed his prophecies. Leonardo’s two book lists itemize some works that might have played a role in determining the overall tone and imagery in the *Profezia*: 1) “Bibbia” [“the Bible”], believed to be *Bibbia volgare* (Venice, 1471); 2) “Salmi” [“Psalms”];²⁵⁵ 3) “Prediche” [“Sermons”], which could refer to the sermons of Saint Bernardino of Siena or even Girolamo Savonarola; 4) “Opera di san Bernardino da Siena” [“the work of Saint Bernardino of Siena”]; 5) “Sogni di Daniello” [“the dreams of Daniel”], for which Vecce suggests *E sogni di Daniel profeta* (Florence, no date specified); and 6) “Libro dell’Amadio” [“the book of Amedeo”], believed to be *Vita e conversazione angelica del beato Amadio Ispano* (Milan, 1486), a book on the life of Amedeo Mendez da Silva (1420-82), a Portuguese Franciscan, rather than a reference to the *Apocalypsis nova* (written

²⁵⁵ Both items are found on the list in the codex *Atlanticus*.

between 1472 and 1482), an unpublished book purported to have been written by da Silva that circulated in manuscript form.²⁵⁶ All the items listed above either refer to prophetic or apocalyptic works (or to works containing prophecies or apocalypses) or were composed by historical or fictitious prophets or visionaries from Leonardo's past and present. Knowledge of the above works would have exposed Leonardo to models from which he could have derived imagery and language with which to fashion his own prophetic texts.

A meaningful parallel could be drawn between Leonardo's prophecy on dreaming, "Del sognare," and the Biblical narrative about Daniel's dream if, as Vecce has suggested, the item listed in the inventory of books as "Sogni di Daniello" is in fact *E sogni di Daniel profeta* and refers to the dream interpretation by Daniel in the Old Testament. Regrettably, Vecce does not elaborate upon his suggestion, other than to provide a possible book title. In his later work "Leonardo e il gioco," in which he discusses the *Profezia*, he briefly mentions in a footnote that riddle dreams from the Bible are connected mostly to the tales of Joseph and Daniel (293). While Vecce draws attention to a very important influence on Leonardo's prophecies (the Judaic tradition), he fails to connect his comment to a specific example from the *Profezia*.²⁵⁷ In the Book of Daniel, Daniel interprets the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon as a foretelling of the destruction of all human kingdoms by divine means (2.1-49). According to the Biblical narrative, the Jewish prophet announces that the statue in the king's dream represents the end of four empires on earth and the establishment of the kingdom of God. Daniel's description of the fourth (and final) kingdom on earth is one of

²⁵⁶ The last four items are from the list in the *Madrid II* codex.

²⁵⁷ Marinoni believes the item is in reference to a work *Il sogno di Daniello* (Bologna, 1491; Florence, 1495), which is a vernacular translation of *Somniorum expositio*, but does not say whether it has anything to do with the Biblical prophet Daniel.

chaos, intermarriage, and instability; it is similar to the scenario described by Leonardo in his prophecy titled – perhaps not coincidentally – “Del sognare.”

*Del sognare.*²⁵⁸ Alli omini parrà vedere nel cielo nove ruine, parrà in quello levarsi a volo e di quello fuggire con paura le fiamme che di lui discendano, sentiran parlare li animali di qualunque sorte il linguaggio umano, scorreranno immediate colla lor persona in diverse parte del mondo senza moto, vedranno nelle tenebre grandissimi splendori. O meraviglia delle umane spezie! Qual frenesia t’ha sì condotto? Parlerai cogli animali di qualunque spezie, e quelli con teco, in linguaggio umano, vedrati cadere di grande alture senza tuo danno, i torrenti t’ accompagneranno e mister<n>t e col lor rapido corso, usera<i> car<nalmente c>on madre e sorelle... <parl>erai colli a<nimali>... an di s<cienza>... animi... le penne. (ed. Vecce 124)²⁵⁹

[Of Dreaming. Men will seem to see new destructions in the sky. The flames that fall from it will seem to rise in it and to fly from it with terror. They will hear animals of every kind speak in human language. They will instantaneously run in person in various parts of the world, without movement. They will see the greatest splendour in the midst of darkness. O! marvel of the human race! What frenzy has led you thus! You will speak with animals of every species and they with you in human speech. You will see yourself fall from great heights without any harm, and torrents will accompany you, and will mingle in their rapid course.... (You will have intercourse with your mother and your sisters....)²⁶⁰ (trans. Richter 293)]

Similar to Daniel’s dream interpretation, Leonardo’s dream prophecy describes a humanity that has lost its sense of reason with beasts and humans sharing a language (“sentiran parlare li animali di qualunque sorte il linguaggio umano”) [“animals of every kind speak in human language”] and kin engaging in incestuous relations (“userai carnalmente con madre e sorelle”) [“you will have intercourse with your mother and your sisters”]. Moreover, the destruction befalling the human race comes from an unseen source from above (a divine hand as Daniel foretold?). Though the inference may be tenuous, it could also be said that the mention of language and speech shared by both humans and animals recalls the famous tale

²⁵⁸ All the solutions are in italics because Vecce italicized them in his anthology.

²⁵⁹ The last lines of this prophecy are detached from the regular text because only fragments of it are visible at either side of a tear in the manuscript folio.

²⁶⁰ The line “You will have intercourse with your mother and your sisters” was later added and translated by Pedretti (*Commentary* 279: 2).

of the Tower of Babel and thus calls to mind King Nebuchadnezzar from the Biblical account because he ruled the region of Babylon, of which Babel was a part. Could it be that Leonardo's dream prophecy is a sort of paraphrase of the Biblical episode from the Old Testament?

The dream prophecy is found among the twelve prophecies on folio 393r, on whose verso the artist composed a fictional letter to a governor of Syria ("locotenente del sacro Soldano di Babilonia") ["lieutenant of the sacred sultan of Babylon"] titled "Al Diodario di Soria." The parallel between Leonardo's prophecy and the Biblical episode discussed above points to the influence of the culture of the East on the artist's thought and work.²⁶¹ The fact that this prophecy is within spatial proximity of a letter addressed to an Eastern potentate reinforces the idea that lore from the East might have had some bearing on Leonardo's dream prophecy. Perhaps the artist imagined that much about the future of humanity could be understood thanks to knowledge from the East (e.g., the Judaic tradition). The following prophecy, not found on the same folio as the dream text but contained in the *Profezia*, suggests that Leonardo might have believed this to be true: "*De' villani in camicia che lavorano. Verrà tenebre di verso l'oriente, le quali con tanta oscurità tigneranno il cielo che copre l'Italia*" (ed. Vecce 111) ["Of Peasants who work in shirts. Shadows will come from the east which will blacken with great darkness in the sky that covers Italy" (trans. Richter 311)]. As in Daniel's dream analysis, Leonardo seems to be describing yet another ominous end that would seem to have its origins in the East.

For possible sources of, and influences on, the *Profezia* scholars have looked beyond the two book lists and made comparisons with both the classics and Leonardo's contemporaries. Caramello believes that the tone in the *Profezia* most reflects that of the

²⁶¹ See Franco Bontempi's *Leonardo da Vinci e la tradizione ebraica* (1998).

Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 535-c. 475 BC), a pre-Socratic Greek philosopher who wrote philosophical texts using a cryptic and enigmatic style that likened them to riddles and in them expressed his contempt for humankind. Caramello detects a comparable expression of disapproval in Leonardo's *Profezia*. His observation is not unreasonable as an analysis of many texts in this collection does reveal Leonardo's sense of pessimism regarding the behaviour of his fellow human beings. Most Leonardo scholars have mentioned the prophecy "Del pigliare de' pidocchi" ["Of catching Lice"] as the riddle that, according to some classical writers, drove Homer mad: "E saran molti cacciatori d'animali che quanto più ne piglieranno manco n'aranno, e così, de converse, più n'aran quanto men ne piglieranno" (ed. Vecce 114) ["And many will be hunters of animals, which, the fewer there are the more will be taken; and conversely, the more there are, the fewer will be taken" (trans. Richter 294)].²⁶² This is the infamous Homer riddle for lice: "What we caught we threw away; what we didn't catch we kept" (Bryant 27). The works of Leonardo's contemporaries might also have influenced the general style and structure of his prophecies. Luca Pacioli's *De viribus quantitatis* (written between 1496 and 1508), divided into three parts, contains a section titled "Documenti morali utilissimi commo proverbi" in which he collects many Latin and vernacular riddles taken mostly from the popular tradition, but also from Antiquity (including the famous riddle of the Sphinx). The riddles in this part of Pacioli's work might have intrigued Leonardo and inspired him to compose similar texts. Indeed, there is some overlapping in both collections. The prophecy "Della fossa" (footnoted above) is also found

²⁶² This passage is better translated as "There will be many hunters of animals who, the more they will catch the less they will have, and so, conversely, the less they will catch the more they will have."

in *De viribus quantitatis*,²⁶³ while, according to Vecce, some of Leonardo's prophecies alluding to obscenities show affinities with some of those by Pacioli.²⁶⁴ Leonardo and the Tuscan mathematician and friar Pacioli (1446/7-1517) were close friends and collaborators on many projects, especially in the years in which both men were employed in Milan and Pacioli began to write his treatise on mathematics and magic. Leonardo, therefore, would have been familiar with the content of Pacioli's work.

Conversely, Leonardo's adoption of certain subject matters and the delivery style of his prophecies might also have been familiar among his contemporaries and friends at the ducal court in Milan. Donato Bramante (1444-1514), who was employed as court architect for Ludovico from 1476 to 1499, composed a sonnet whose first two verses ("Usciran fuor da le lor tombe oscure / ossa di morti alla novella festa")²⁶⁵ are highly reminiscent of Leonardo's prophecy on dice: "Vederassi l'ossa de' morti, con veloce moto, trattare la

²⁶³ Pacioli's prophecy on the ditch reads as follows: "147. Dimme che cosa <è> quella che mentre più le levi tanto più cresci, et quanto manco ne levi sminuisci. Dirai el foro che se fa con lo crivello, che quanto più legno levi et quello foro cresci, et quanto manco si sminuisci" (Pierani 409).

²⁶⁴ Vecce observes that the following three prophecies echo those of Pacioli: 1) "*La salsiccia ch'entra nelle budella*. Molti si faran casa delle <bude>lle e abiteranno nelle lor propie" (ed. Vecce 114) ["*Sausages which are put into entrails*. Many will make homes for themselves in entrails and live in their own entrails" (trans. Nichols 9); 2) "*Le lingue de' porci e vitelle nelle budella*. O cosa spurca, che si vedrà l'uno animale aver la lingua in culo all'altro!" (114) ["Of the Tongues of Pigs and Calves in Sausage-skins. Oh! how foul a thing, that we should see the tongue of one animal in the guts of another." (trans. Richter 294)]; 3) "*De' crivelli fatti di pelle d'animali*. Vedrassi il cibo degli animali passar dentro alle lor pelli per ogni parte salvo che per la bocca e penetrare dall'opposita parte insino alla piana terra." (114) ["Of Sieves made of the Hair of Animals. We shall see the food of animals pass through their skin every way excepting through their mouths, and penetrate from the outside downwards to the ground" (trans. Richter 295)]. Some examples from Pacioli are the following: "Dimme che cosa è quella che mangia per lo corpo, cioè a la bocca in lo corpo, et caca per li reni. Dirai la palla, che'l corpo piglia la steca et di sopra per la schina la rende et getta" (Pierani 389); "Dime che cosa <è> quella che sempre va forando et tirase el budello derieto. Dirai l'ago che sempre cuscendo fora, et tira el filo drietto" (393); "Dimme che cosa <è> quella che ha gli ochi nel culo. Dirai le fave, perché le hanno el cul nero" (393); "Dimme che vol dire: 'corpo sopra corpo, e mani sotto el culo, et carne fresca in buco'. Dirai la donna che lacta el fanciulo al pecto: li tiene le mani sotto al culo che non caschi; el suo corpo sopra al suo et la popa, carne fresca, nel bucco, cioè nella bocca. Ideo, etc." (397).

²⁶⁵ The entire sonnet reads as follows: "Usciran fuor da le lor tombe oscure, / Ossa di morti à la novella festa; / Figli di quei, che con lor lanze in resta; / Voltar la terra con lor spalle dure, / Mostrando con lor segni le aventure; / Et alle casse d'or' fia la tempesta, / Si che la turba cupida è molesta, / Convien che gli bestemmij, e gli spergiuri; / Fin che barba di carne, e bocca di osso, / A' sventurati gli commandarà, / Ch'ognun si faccia in veste d'occa un fosso, / Allor corpo senz'alma chiamerà, / Gli spiriti con vesti bianche indosso, / Et chiaschedun il coiro volterà, / Et dolcemente canterà, / Laudando Iddio che n'hà vivi lasciati, / Di poi verrà colui che n'hà creati" (Kiang 196).

fortuna del suo motore. *I dadi*” (ed. Vecce 108) [“The bones of the dead will be seen by their rapid movement to govern the fortunes of their mover. By Dice” (trans. Richter 305)]. A further insightful observation by Vecce suggests that Bramante was inspired more by the form of Leonardo’s prophecies than by their subject matter of the prophecy per se (“Leonardo e il gioco” 309-10). Vecce notes that Bramante’s opening verse (“Usciran fuor da le lor tombe oscure”) echoes the incipit with the future tense of the verb *uscire* often used in Leonardo’s prophecies: for example, “*Uscirà dalla terra animali vestiti di tenebre*” [“Animals will come forth from the earth in gloomy vesture”], “*Usciranno li omini delle sepulture*” [“Men will come out of their graves”], and “*Uscirà dalle cavernose spelonche*” [“Out of cavernous pits a thing shall come forth”]. Bramante’s sonnet was published for the first time in Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo’s *Trattato dell’arte della pittura, scoltura et architettura* (1584) and referred to as “enimma de i dadi” (284).²⁶⁶ Most likely, Bramante composed the poem and others like it for courtly amusement, as did Leonardo. Solmi even suggests that Leonardo, composing his riddles in prose, and Bramante, composing his in verse, engaged in friendly competition (109). The desire to please and impress their audience might have been at the heart of the rivalry between the two artists.

Even though prophetic pronouncements were widespread at the time when Leonardo was composing his own prophecies, the *Profezia*, as a genre, is a creative literary invention by Leonardo written in response to the demands emanating from the immediate context at Ludovico’s court (Vecce, “Leonardo e il gioco” 287). Traditionally, the Sforza family invited magicians and astrologers to participate in courtly activity with their fortunetelling games and premonitions. Not surprisingly, the Archivio di Stato in Milan houses many documents

²⁶⁶ See Dawson Kiang’s “The ‘Enigma of the Dice’ A Bramante Sonnet published by Lomazzo” (1991) for an interpretation of Bramante’s sonnet.

on prophecy and astrology originating in the Sforza court. After the premature death of Ludovico's wife Beatrice d'Este in 1497, an occurrence which darkened the mood at the duke's court, there was greater interest in the art of magic and astrology as well as a return to religious rituals. The turn of events in Ludovico's court also coincided with an uncertain political future – brought upon by the 1494 invasion by the French King Charles VIII – for his Milanese dynasty and for the Italian peninsula. Moreover, the dawn of the new century saw its share of prophets make apocalyptic predictions for the future.²⁶⁷ Leonardo's prophecies were written primarily between 1497 and 1499 and no doubt reflected the feelings of apprehension and political and moral uncertainty regarding the future of both Milan and Italy.²⁶⁸

Vecce's observation also draws attention to the unique form and essence of the prophecies, which result primarily from the fact that the texts do not reflect *stricto sensu* what they claim to be. It has already been noted that, even though Leonardo titles these writings *Profezia* and uses the future tense in them to reinforce the idea that they reveal imminent events, it is quite obvious that, upon a first reading, they are *indovinelli* ("riddles"), for they describe a puzzling situation as a problem to be solved and are then followed by the solution (i.e., an explanation of the puzzle). The following example should illustrate this point: "Vedrassi forme e figure d'omini o d'animali che seguiranno essi animali e omini dovunque fuggiranno: e tal fia il moto dell'un quant'è dell'altro, ma parrà cosa mirabile delle varie grandezze in che essi si trasmutano" (ed. Vecce 115) ["Shapes and figures of men and

²⁶⁷ Savonarola represented the highest expression of prophecy and prophetism in Italy during this time. See Donald Weinstein's *Savonarola and Florence: Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance* (1970); and Roberto Ridolfi's *Vita di Girolamo Savonarola* (1952). For an account of the Savonarolan movement: John Gagné's translation of Stefano Dall'Aglio's *Savonarola and Savonarolism* (2010); and Lorenzo Polizzotto's *The Elect Nation: The Savonarolan Movement in Florence 1494-1545* (1994).

²⁶⁸ This idea will be discussed in greater detail in the concluding section "The *Profezia* as Prophecy: Meaning and Context."

animals will be seen following these animals and men wherever they flee. And exactly as the one moves the other moves; but what seems so wonderful is the variety of height they assume” (trans. Richter 299)]. In most of his prophecies, the solution is included, either following the text or preceding it by way of a title; in this example, it precedes the text: “Dell’ombra che si move coll’omo” [“A man’s shadow”]. The method used by Leonardo in almost all his prophecies – that is, to describe an everyday situation or object enigmatically and to enlighten a listener with a solution – adheres to the basic conventions of the riddle genre: “they [riddles] are always associated with the transition from the state of obscurity to the state of enlightenment” (Borystawski 12). Thus, the texts included in the *Profezia* are ambiguous not only in their literary form but in their intention as well. Is Leonardo manipulating a literary genre to reflect a socio-political context or has he created a collection of hybrid literary forms? This question will be answered in later sections of this chapter.

The *Profezia* cannot easily be connected to an established literary tradition in the way that was possible with the *Bestiario*, *Favole*, and *Facezie*. In his study on riddles in Italy, Michele De Filippis states that “Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) did not write any real riddles, but many of his ‘Prophecies’ possess true enigmatic qualities” (4). Along the same lines, Mark Bryant has more recently observed that Leonardo wrote “enigmatic pronouncements” (35). Even scholars who have devoted much time to studying the artist have not connected the *Profezia* with a specific literary tradition as they have with the other three literary collections.²⁶⁹ Rather, the ambiguity surrounding the form of these writings seems to have inspired other associations. Particularly compelling is Vecce’s suggestion that current social and political circumstances might have influenced Leonardo when he was

²⁶⁹ It should be clarified that the connection they allude to normally only consists of a quick reference to a literary tradition. The present study, instead, develops the links between Leonardo’s literary collections and their respective genre traditions.

writing his prophecies. Leonardo, therefore, fused aspects from the riddle genre and from the current tendency towards oral prophesying to create a unique form of literature. While the riddle provided a model for the structure of the *Profezia*, the actual unstable socio-political climate of Leonardo's times informed their apocalyptic, futuristic and prophetic tone and content.²⁷⁰ Furthermore, because these prophecies were written after the *Bestiario*, *Favole*, and *Facezie*, Ponte concludes that this collection is a reflection of a more mature and cynical Leonardo (91). Leonardo might indeed have selected the title *Profezia* not only to parody the “prophets” of his time, but also to present his own prognosis about the ironic and hopelessly irreparable moral behaviour and socio-political situations he observed around him at that time. While it is possible to read single prophecies and treat them as puzzles to be solved, Leonardo's literary collection assumes fuller meaning if it is interpreted as a holistic – and, at the same time, disillusioned – expression of Leonardo's single vision of the human race. This idea is also reflected in the title *Profezia*, as Vecce noted, which suggests that all the parts of this collection belong to a whole system and are meant to represent a single vision and idea.

Leonardo's cynicism is a pervasive element in his prophecies and bares itself by way of irony. Most of the *Profezia*, in fact, is a representation of paradoxes inherent in human life. While some examples are expressed briefly and casually such as the one on swords and spears: “L'umane opere fien cagione di lor morte. *Le spade e lance*” (ed. Vecce 108) [“The works of men's hands will occasion their death. Swords and spears” (trans. Richter 305)].²⁷¹

²⁷⁰ For a more detailed treatment of prophecy and prophesying in late fifteenth-century Italy, the following studies are useful: Ottavia Niccoli's *Profeti e popolo nell'Italia del Rinascimento* (1987); Roberto Rusconi's *Predicazione e vita religiosa nella società italiana: da Carlo Magno alla controriforma* (1981) and *L'attesa della fine* (1979); and the section “Temi mistici e profetici alla fine del Quattrocento” in Cesare Vasoli's *Studi sulla cultura del Rinascimento* (1968) and *L'attesa dell'età nuova* (1962).

²⁷¹ To be fair, this prophecy may be a draft of another one which elaborates upon the same subject in a slightly later manuscript: “*Delle spade e lance, che per sé mai nociano a nessuno. Chi per sé è mansueto e senza alcuna offensione, si farà spaventevole e feroce mediante le triste compagnie, e torrà la vita crudelissimamente a molte genti, e più n'ucciderebbe, se corpi sanz'anima, usciti dalle spilonche, non li difendessino. Cioè le corazze di*

Others such as “*De’ battuti e scoreggiati*. Li omini si nasconderanno sotto le scorze delle iscorticate erbe, e quivi, gridando, si daran martiri, con battimenti di membra a se medesimi” (ed. Vecce 113) [“Of Flagellants. Men will hide themselves under the bark of trees,²⁷² and, screaming, they will make themselves martyrs²⁷³ by striking their own limbs” (trans. Richter 297)] are articulated more judiciously, using, in this case, more forceful vocabulary and phrases (“gridando, si daran martiri, con battimenti di membra a se medesimi”) [“screaming, they will make themselves martyrs by striking their own limbs”]. In the former example, Leonardo condemns war while in the latter he criticizes the religious rituals performed by flagellants. In both cases, he is manifesting the paradoxes of human life by exposing these activities in all their absurdity. Criticism is also invoked in the prophecy on the masses for the dead: “*Del dì de’ morti*. E quanti fien quelli che piangeranno i loro antichi morti, portando lumi a quelli!” (ed. Vecce 121) [“Of All Souls’ Day. How many will they be who will bewail their deceased forefathers, carrying lights to them” (trans. Richter 301)].

Situations and actions that seem logical and to which society is accustomed are, in truth, rather absurd and cruel according to the descriptions given by the artist. Finally, Leonardo satirizes the accepted Christian notion that human life and achievement are subservient to life after death: “*De li uffizi funerali e procissioni e lumi e campane e compagnia*. Agli omini sarà fatti grandissimi onori e pompe senza lor saputa” (ed. Vecce 125) [“Of Funeral Rites, and Processions, and Lights, and Bells, and Followers. The greatest honours and ceremonies will be paid to men, without their knowledge” (trans. Richter 294)]. Indeed, it is difficult not

ferro” (ed. Vecce 118) [Of Swords and Spears which of themselves never hurt any one. One who by himself is gentle and void of all offence will become terrible and fierce by being in bad company, and will most cruelly take the life of many men, and would kill many more if it were not hindered by bodies having no soul, that have come out of pits, that is, cuirasses of iron” (trans. Richter 297).] Here, Leonardo is more explicit in his condemnation of war.

²⁷² This is better translated as “under the skin of stripped grasses.”

²⁷³ This is better translated as “they will inflict pain upon themselves.”

to see the illogical nature behind an action that bestows great honour and ceremony to a person who can no longer acknowledge such praise. Might this prophecy be meant to celebrate human life on earth? Certainly, it calls attention to the paradox that lies in the practice of extolling those who have accomplished great things when they are no longer able to enjoy the fruits of their labour.²⁷⁴

Leonardo seems to reserve the most vehemence for the abhorrent acts committed by human beings. In particular, he is hostile to man's ill-treatment and killing of animals: "*Delle cose che si mangiano, che prima s'uccidano*. Sarà morto da loro il lor nutritore, e fragellato con dispietata morte" (ed. Vecce 116) ["Of things which are eaten and which first are killed. Those who nourish them will be killed by them and afflicted by merciless deaths" (trans. Richter 298)]. Here is another example: "*Delle pecore, vacche, capre e simili*. A innumerabili saran tolti e loro piccoli figlioli, e quelli scannati e crudelissimamente squartati" (ed. Vecce 124) ["Of Sheep, Cows, Goats, and the like. Endless multitudes of these will have their little children taken from them, ripped open and flayed, and most barbarously quartered" (trans. Richter 292)]. Human cruelty is a recurring motif in the *Profezia* and is most vividly illustrated in "Della crudeltà dell'omo" ["Of the Cruelty of Man"]. Not only does this prophecy revile human cruelty, but it dramatizes human behaviour as bestial and mad. From this prophecy, the future does not bode well for the human race, as the persistent use of the future tense indicates. It is not only its cruelty towards other living beings, but also its immoral behaviour that will give rise to a tragic end for the human race:

Vedrassi animali sopra della terra, i quali sempre combatteranno infra loro e con danni grandissimi e spesso morte di ciascuna della parte. Questi non aran termine nelle lor malignità; per le fiere membra di questi verranno a terra gran

²⁷⁴ The criticism of religious practices detected in these prophecies has been noted by other Leonardo scholars. However, the present study has independently elaborated upon it to underscore which aspects in the text render the prophecy critical of certain religious rituals.

parte delli alberi delle gran selve dell'universo; e poi ch'e' saran pasciuti, il nutrimento de' lor desideri sarà di dar morte e affanno e fatiche e paure e fuga a qualunque cosa animata. E per la loro ismisurata superbia questi si vorranno levare inverso il cielo, ma la soperchia gravezza delle lor membra gli terrà in basso. Nulla cosa resterà sopra la terra, o sotto la terra e l'acqua, che non sia perseguitata, rimossa e guasta; e quella dell'un paese rimossa nell'altro; e 'l corpo di questi si farà sepoltura e transito di tutti i già da lor morti corpi animati. O mondo, come non t'apri, e precipita nell'alte fessure de' tua gran baratri e spelonche, e non mostrare più al cielo sì crudele e dispietato monstro! (ed. Vecce 120)

[Animals will be seen on the earth who will always be fighting against each other with the greatest loss and frequent deaths on each side. And there will be no end to their malice; by their strong limbs we shall see a great portion of the trees of the vast forests laid low throughout the universe; and when they are filled with food, the satisfaction of their desires will be to deal death and grief and labour and fears and flight to every living thing; and from their immoderate pride they will desire to rise towards heaven, but the excessive weight of their limbs will keep them down. Nothing will remain on earth, or under the earth, or in the waters, which will not be persecuted, disturbed, and spoiled, and those of one country removed into another. And their bodies will become the tomb and means of transit of all the living bodies they have killed. O earth, why dost thou not open and engulf them in the fissures of thy vast abyss and caverns, and no longer display in the sight of heaven so cruel and horrible a monster? (trans. Richter 302)]

Leonardo evokes an image that does not offer any hope for salvation despite desperate efforts by humanity to save itself: “E per la loro ismisurata superbia questi si vorranno levare inverso il cielo, ma la soperchia gravezza delle lor membra gli terrà in basso” [“and from their immoderate pride they will destre to rise towards heaven, but the excessive weight of their limbs will keep them down”]. Human materialism and immorality, conveyed in “la soperchia gravezza delle lor membra” [“the excessive weight of their limbs”], are impediments to moral and spiritual elevation (“gli terrà in basso”) [“will keep them down”]. Human beings, therefore, have condemned themselves to an earthly hell. Leonardo's depiction describes human life on earth as immoral, ruthless, and cowardly, making it quite clear that the human race will receive a sentence commensurate with its moral corruption.

There are other prophecies conveying a similar message. Vecce, in fact, identifies three others in addition to the one cited above – “De’ metalli” [“Of Metals”], “Della dote delle fanciulle” [“Of Dowries for Maidens”], and “Del navigare” [“Of Sailing Ships”]²⁷⁵ – as being not only the longest among the *Profezia* but also as expressing the harshest criticism about the current state of humanity: “appaiono portatrici di messaggi diversi dalla pura e semplice parodia” (“Leonardo e il gioco” 298). The tone in these four prophecies, moving beyond the simple parodying of local prophets, reflects the degree to which human cruelty and folly manifest themselves in everyday situations and in human life in general. Much like a prophet, Leonardo announces the retribution for this human behaviour.

Leonardo often expresses his contempt for humankind using exaggeration for rhetorical effect. This technique is particularly apparent when, in single prophecies, he describes menacing images only to shock the reader or listener with a commonplace object or activity as the solution. The following prophecy, for example, evokes a disturbing image: “*Le lingue de’ porci e vitelle nelle budella. O cosa spurca, che si vedrà l’uno animale aver la lingua in culo all’altro!*” (ed. Vecce 114) [“Of the Tongues of Pigs and Calves in Sausage-skins.”²⁷⁶ Oh! how foul a thing, that we should see the tongue of one animal in the guts²⁷⁷ of another” (trans. Richter 294)]. Seen in this light, sausages assume a different property from the one with which they are normally associated in everyday life. Leonardo’s exaggerated description no doubt shocks his readers, causing a shift from one mental experience to another. The prophecy about the tedious chore of making a bed also invokes alarm upon a first reading: “*De’ battere il letto per rifarlo. Verranno li omini in tanta ingratitudine, che chi darà loro albergo senza alcun prezzo, sarà carico di bastonate in modo che gran parte delle*

²⁷⁵ This is better translated as “Of Sailing.”

²⁷⁶ The Italian “budella” is literally “entrails,” but the idea is that animal entrails are put into sausages.

²⁷⁷ This is better translated as “ass.”

interiora si spiccheranno dal loco loro e s'andranno rivoltando pel suo corpo" (ed. Vecce 116) ["Of beating Beds to renew²⁷⁸ them. Men will be seen so deeply ungrateful that they will turn upon that which has harboured them, without any price;²⁷⁹ they will so load it with blows that a great part of its inside will come out of its place, and will be turned over and over in its body" (trans. Richter 298)]. The shock derives from the fact that Leonardo gives the impression that ungrateful men will brutally beat those who have provided comfort ("chi darà loro albergo senza alcun prezzo, sarà carico di bastonate") ["that which has harboured them, without any price; they will so load it with blows"], while, in truth, he tricks the listener with the relative pronoun "chi" ("who") in order to humanize an inanimate object such as a bed. Richter does not capture this nuance as he uses the English "that which," which can only refer to an inanimate object, as opposed to "who," which, instead, refers to an animate being. The above examples display Leonardo's vivid imagination, not to mention his microscopic view of reality. From a rhetorical standpoint, they are intentionally overstated in order to trick listeners (much in the way of riddle conventions), while from a philosophical perspective they may be meant to condemn the indifference with which human beings kill animals or carry out daily tasks. Exaggeration also emphasizes Leonardo's inherent belief that all things (i.e., every object, action, circumstance) play an integral role in earthly existence and should, therefore, be treated with care and respect. The tragic end described in "Della crudeltà dell'omo" may perhaps act as a reminder that human beings should modify their behaviours, however insignificant and inconsequential they may appear. In the *Profezia*, Leonardo condemns not only common human vices – greed, vanity, arrogance – but also incessant disrespect for every entity that provides human beings with wellbeing and

²⁷⁸ This is better translated as "remake."

²⁷⁹ This is better translated as "without charge."

nourishment. It seems that Leonardo would have one believe that the overall failure of the human race lies in its inability to acknowledge and be grateful for every part of the world that sustains it.

The above allusions to a tragic end for humankind recall Gombrich's interpretation of the parallels he sees between the *Profezia* and Leonardo's imaginary letter "Al Diodario di Soria" (written in 1508 in the codex *Atlanticus*, and addressed to a fictional governor of Syria),²⁸⁰ and his series of flood writings "I diluvii" (composed in 1513-15 and found in the codex *Atlanticus* and in manuscripts A, G, and W). The former is a fictionalized account of a mission assigned to Leonardo in Armenia wherein he describes "Monte Tauro," a mountain in the Levant,²⁸¹ and the disastrous effects of a recent flood on the community living at the base of the mountain, while the latter describes the devastation caused by heavy rainstorms and the despair of the people affected by the flooding. According to Gombrich, "I diluvii," the letter, and the *Profezia* can be linked for two reasons: 1) they describe ruinous effects inflicted on human beings; and 2) their tone is unmistakably apocalyptic (24). In all three writings, therefore, Leonardo appears to prophesy an ominous future for humankind.

In particular, the parallels between the *Profezia* and the letter are such that Gombrich believes that both writings were meant to coexist in a single fictional work. First, proximity in the manuscripts supports this theory: the recto of f.393 in the codex *Atlanticus* contains the group of twelve prophecies with the "Divisione della profezia," while the verso includes the letter "Al Diodario di Soria" with the detailed description of the Taurus Mountains ("Monte

²⁸⁰ Richter believed that this letter was evidence of a journey to the East taken by Leonardo; he eventually abandoned this claim and agreed that the letter was the fruit of Leonardo's rich imagination.

²⁸¹ "e verrò a denotare la vera figura di Taurus monte, il qual è quello ch'è causatore di sì stupenda e dannosa maraviglia, la quale serve alla espedizione del nostro proposito" (ed. Vecce 169) ["and I will go on to describe the true form of the Taurus Mountain which is the cause of this stupendous and harmful marvel, and which will serve to advance us in our purpose" (trans. Richter 320)].

Tauro”), and the unexpected turn of events caused by the flooding. Moreover, both the recto and verso of the folio include sketches of the Taurus Mountains,²⁸² including, on the recto, a geographical map of the region. This has led Gombrich to wonder whether the writings and drawings were meant for an illustrated literary work (20). Indeed, the writings and sketches found on both sides of the folio could be parts of a larger whole – perhaps of a project comprising complementary fantastical and foreign elements (of the Orient) such as those described in the letter and prophecies. To further support his hypothesis, the letter is preceded by the “Divisione del libro” index which lists fifteen points that, presumably, are to be covered in a “book” about a natural disaster in the area where Leonardo has been assigned to work.²⁸³ It should be recalled that the twelve prophecies, on the recto, were written alongside the “Divisione della profezia.” Among the fifteen points in the “Divisione del libro,” Leonardo develops only those concerned with the physical description of the Taurus Mountains and the damage caused by strong westerly winds, falling snow from atop the mountain, and a sudden surge of water that submerged the town. This should not come as a surprise given Leonardo’s fascination with providing details regarding natural processes.

²⁸² A geographical region in Turkey.

²⁸³ “Divisione del libro. La predica e persuasione di fede. La subita inondazione insino al fine suo. La ruina della città. La morte del popolo e ’l suo pianto e disperazione. La caccia del predicatore e la sua liberazione e benivolenzia. Descrizione della causa di tal ruina del monte. Il danno ch’ella fece. Ruine di neve. Trovata del profeta. La profezia sua. Allagamento delle parte bassa di Erminia occidentale, li scolamenti delle quali erano per la tagliata di monte Tauro. Come il novo profeta mostra di cre<dere> questa ruina è fatta al suo proposito. Descrizione del monte Tauro e del fiume Eufrates. Perché il monte risplende nella sua cima la metà o ’l terzo della note, e pare una cometa a quelli di ponente dopo la sera, e innanzi di a quelli di levante. Perché essa cometa par di variabile figura, in modo che ora è tondo, or lungo, e or diviso in due o tre parti, e ora unita, e quando si perde, e quando si rivede” (ed. Vecce 168) [“The Divisions of the Book. Sermon and conversion to the faith. The sudden inundation, to its end. The destruction of the city. The death of the people and their despair. The hunt for the preacher, his release and benevolence. Description of the cause of this fall of the mountain. The mischief it did. Destruction by snow. The finding of the prophet. His prophecy. The inundation of the lower portion of Eastern Armenia, the draining of which was effected by the cutting through the Taurus Mountains. How the new prophet showed that this destruction had happened as he had foretold. Description of the Taurus Mountains and the river Euphrates. Why the mountain shines at the top, from half to a third of the night, and looks like a comet to the inhabitants of the West after the sunset, and before day to those of the East. Why this comet appears of variable forms, so that it is now round and now long, and now again divided into two or three parts, and now in one piece, and when it is lost and when to be seen again” (trans. Richter 319-20)].

What is more, the three items *not* elaborated upon in any of the surviving Leonardo manuscripts would further reinforce an analogy with the *Profezia*. They read as follows: “Trovata del profeta” [“The finding of the prophet”], “La profezia sua” [“His prophecy”], and “Come il novo profeta mostra di credere, questa ruina è fatta al suo proposito” [“How the new prophet showed that this destruction had happened as he had foretold”]. The only reference that Leonardo makes to these items can be found in a corresponding letter, believed to be the continuation of the one in question, on another folio (573v) in the codex *Atlanticus*. Following the physical description of the Taurus Mountains, this part of the letter tells of the harm, injury and ruin brought on the community. There is disorder and fear among the people; the town is submerged in water, and there are uprooted trees, particles of sand and mud flying about, and pieces of plants and trees strewn throughout the air. The victims of this calamity are terrified and desperate and better off dead (“che avàm d’averè²⁸⁴ invidia a’ morti” [ed. Vecce 171]) [“that we have been envious of the dead” (trans. Richter 322)], according to Leonardo. This part of the letter, however, is a prelude to a greater and less merciful natural disaster. Indeed, Leonardo ends the passage with a warning that the destruction is minor in comparison to that which has already been foretold: “Ora vedi come ci troviàno, e <tu>tti questi mali son niente a comparazione di quelli che ’n brieve tempo *ci è promesso*” (my emphasis) [“Now you see the state we are in. And all these evils are as nothing compared with those which *are promised to us* shortly” (323; my emphasis)].²⁸⁵ This final sentence seems to refer to a previous prophecy about the ruin of the city by a natural

²⁸⁴ This verb is in the first person plural because Leonardo imagines himself among these people. Indeed, the letter is written in the first person singular because it is a fictionalized account of Leonardo’s assignment in the East.

²⁸⁵ Originally, Leonardo had written a similar sentence only two lines later as if to stress the severity of what he had just announced: “E tutto questo è niente a comparazione del male che di novo è promesso” (ed. Vecce 171). He later deletes this sentence.

disaster. Vecce seems to think so, for he inserts “dal profeta” at the end of “ci è promesso” to emphasize the idea of a pre-announced prophecy;²⁸⁶ Vecce can only speculate as to the identity of the prophet. As is evident in his notebooks, Leonardo’s methodology involved, for the most part, the composition of scattered pieces to be later included in a complete project. Similarly, the *Profezia* and letter “Al Diodario di Soria” are comprised of parts that, once studied individually and then constructed with others to create a possible cohesive reality, point towards a greater goal to conceive a work containing a “prophecy” based on observed facts of nature’s effect on the human world and vice versa.

The text titled “I diluvii” describes the tragedy awaiting humankind that, in varying degrees, is also manifest in the *Profezia* and letter “Al Diodario di Soria.” While the texts of the *Profezia* represent seemingly trivial human acts that can equally inform human fate, and the letter alludes to a greater natural calamity, the flood writings depict a universal end culminating in a flood of Biblical proportions. In essence, the relationship between the three writings is constituted by their interdependence. They suggest a sequential narration of episodes leading to a single – and final – vision (i.e., the deadly flood). In particular, there are two parts in the category of the flood writings – titled “Descrizione del diluvio” (ed. Vecce 175) [“Description of the deluge” (trans. Richter 355: 1)] and “Diluvio e sua dimostrazione in pittura” (177)²⁸⁷ [“Of the deluge and how to represent it in a picture”²⁸⁸ (352: 1)] – that emphasize their interrelatedness. In the former, Leonardo delights in

²⁸⁶ Vecce inserts “dal profeta” in a footnote.

²⁸⁷ The other flood writings have these titles: “Come si de’ figurare una fortuna” (172) [“How to represent a tempest” (351: 1)], “Dubitazione” (173) [“Doubts” (my translation)], and “Figurazion del diluvio” (174) [“To represent the deluge” (352: 1)]. Two of these works do not have a descriptive title but still belong to this group of writings because they treat the same subject. Leonardo also writes a “Divisioni” (179) [“The Divisions” (354: 1)] that, in effect, is a list of points that would be part of a flood scene; he may have written this for a scene he wished to depict in a painting.

²⁸⁸ This is better translated as “painting.”

describing the threatening movements of water instigated by a storm²⁸⁹ while the latter depicts a frenzied scene of the people – dead and alive – affected by this natural disaster. These two flood writings are infused with a sense of finality and could be seen as the culmination of what Leonardo alludes to in the *Profezia* and the letter “Al Diodario di Soria.” Indeed, he paints a merciless picture of a natural calamity that foretells the fate awaiting humankind and against which the victims (i.e., human beings) are helpless. The storm has submerged the entire community under water and ripped families apart, killed children and animals, and even led some to take their own lives. Despite the compassion that such a scene might arouse in the reader, Leonardo, in “Diluvio e sua dimostrazione in pittura” [“Of the deluge and how to represent it in a picture”], seems to express an opposing sentiment: “Altri, non bastando loro il chiuder li occhi, ma colle propie mani ponen<do> quelle l’una sopra dell’altra, più se li coprivano, per non vedere il crudele strazio fatto della umana spezie dall’ira di Dio” (ed. Vecce 177-78) [“Others were not content with shutting their eyes, but laid one over the other to cover them the closer that they might not see the cruel slaughter of the human race by the wrath of God” (trans. Richter 353: 1)]. While the scene may seem cruel, the natural disaster has been inflicted upon the people by God as a just punishment for their actions. And because God is just, the agony and terror experienced by the victims is not without good reason.

The thread uniting the *Profezia*, the letter “Al Diodario di Soria,” and “I diluvii” raises other questions regarding the apocalyptic tone in the writings. What does it reveal about Leonardo’s time? About Leonardo’s moral attitude? These questions will be considered more carefully in the concluding pages of the final section of this chapter. While

²⁸⁹ We may recall Leonardo’s fascination with the movement of water. His manuscripts, in fact, are often interspersed with written descriptions of the ebb and flow of water as well as many sketches showing the spiralling effect of water flow.

it is true that Leonardo might never have intended to merge the above writings into a single work, although the evidence examined does suggest that he did, he certainly did contemplate the present condition of his society and entertained ideas regarding the future of humanity, whether in a literary work or in a painting. In doing so, Leonardo, as in many of his artistic undertakings, draws from his advanced understanding of the physical world (e.g., the movement and force of water) and combines this knowledge with his human experience. Human beings and nature are inextricably linked; it is the classic analogy of the correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm which we have already seen in other writings by him. Leonardo was convinced that, in everyday activities, human beings should be mindful of their relationship to nature and knowledgeable about the greater forces of nature, against which they are powerless. Thus, the abuse shown towards nature – depicted in the *Profezia* – and all that it provides human beings will inevitably have catastrophic repercussions. The *Profezia* texts reveal Leonardo's contempt for his contemporaries and their behaviour and the justice that he believes they deserve. His descriptions of scenes of humanity's end inflicted by flood and disaster are wounds visited upon the human race by humans themselves. The links detected by Gombrich between the *Profezia*, "Al Diodario di Soria" and "I diluvii" have provided further insight into this literary collection and are worth investigating in the final section of the present chapter in order to draw conclusions regarding Leonardo's ethical views. Indeed, "I diluvii" and the letter "Al Diodario di Soria" not only supplement the *Profezia*, but they also reinforce the moral implications associated with this literary collection. But before analysing Leonardo's texts further it is important to trace the history of the riddle, a genre into which Leonardo's prophetic writings may be inscribed.

ii. The History of the Riddle²⁹⁰

Evidence of the earliest riddle is believed to date back to Babylonian times and comes to us by way of the following inscription on an ancient tablet: “Who becomes pregnant without conceiving? Who becomes fat without eating?”²⁹¹ (Bryant 11). The riddle has its origins in folklore as a spoken form based on analogies that expressed primitive human contact with and understanding of the world. Before being written down, many riddles were used in deciding verbal battles of wit between two opponents. Sometimes these displays of wit were humorous forms of recreation;²⁹² other times, however, the stakes were far greater – the prize usually being a woman’s hand in marriage and the penalty for losing could be death. The dire circumstances wherein solvers could lose their lives were common in famous legends such as the riddle of the Sphinx²⁹³ or the story of Apollonius of Tyre.²⁹⁴ Eventually, these and similar tales containing riddles were widely circulated and often rewritten and reused in literary texts as “framework stories” (Taylor, *The Literary Riddle* 41) within a greater narrative.

Indeed, popular oral riddles were preserved in written works and deliberately elaborated and modernized by writers, with the result that a distinction was made between

²⁹⁰ This overview of the riddle history will not include the Italian tradition, which will, instead, be reviewed in a separate heading in the same section.

²⁹¹ The answer to this riddle is clouds.

²⁹² Giovan Francesco Straparola’s *Piacevoli notti* (1550 and 1553) presents riddles within a context of entertainment. Indeed, many examples of humorous and scurrilous riddles appear in the fourteenth century and later.

²⁹³ According to legend, the Sphinx sat outside the city of Thebes in Greece and asked passer-bys to solve a riddle. If they were unable to solve the riddle, the Sphinx killed them. Oedipus solved the riddle when he arrived at Thebes, and the Sphinx destroyed herself. The famous riddle to solve is as follows: “What is it that goes on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon and three legs in the evening?” (Bryant 18). To which the answer is man, who crawls on all four as a baby, who walks on both feet as an adult, and walks with a cane as an old man.

²⁹⁴ Apollonius, the subject of this short novella, is hunted and persecuted after he reveals King Antiochus’s incestuous relationship with his daughter. The incest riddle with which the king tests Apollonius is meant to prevent anybody else, including Apollonius, from marrying his daughter.

the two forms: the oral (and more popular) and the literary riddle.²⁹⁵ Old and new riddles could be found in religious texts (e.g., the Bible, the Koran), in great literary works (e.g., Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Cervantes's *Galatea*), and in anthologies of riddles. At least until the eighteenth century, riddles embellished texts, thickened plots, and were a source of intellectual pursuit and leisure for those who simply enjoyed the challenge of solving enigmatic puzzles.

From its early beginnings to as late as the seventeenth century, a consistent element of the art of riddling was the wisdom and mental acuity attributed to those who composed and solved riddles. In certain cultures and environments, riddling was a demonstration of one's quick-wittedness and worldly knowledge. Because the riddle is comprised entirely of metaphors describing two unrelated objects or notions, its structure implies a deep understanding of the parts of the world and of their analogous natures and significations. The riddle evidences human beings' contact and relationship with nature and is a culminating expression of their experience and "observation of analogies in nature" (Bryant 9), that is, their conception of what they see and their perception of how it works. It has already been demonstrated, and will be shown in greater detail in later sections of this chapter, how Leonardo's prophecies typify this underlying impetus of the riddle to marry seemingly different parts in order to reveal just how closely and profoundly all things are intertwined and inherently analogous.

²⁹⁵ It is difficult to determine whether a riddle was originally oral or literary because there is much borrowing and lending in this genre. An oral riddle, for example, may have descended from an earlier literary tradition while a literary riddle may have incorporated elements originally found in a popular riddle. Indeed, there is much overlapping of material between the two forms. In general, the oral riddle uses colloquial language and everyday objects as objects of inquiry. Though it has existed at all levels of society at all times, it is particularly prevalent in less developed cultures. Most oral riddles become literary riddles when they are written down. On the other hand, the literary riddle treats more abstract themes, and its style is more ornate and polished than that of the oral riddle, with the creative process being more important than the solution itself. The true literary riddle is deliberately crafted around the written form with proper metres, rhyme schemes, and fully worked out metaphors (see Taylor, *The Literary Riddle* 1-10; Bryant 11-21).

a. The Ancient Riddle

Though instances of riddling occur in the Sanskrit²⁹⁶ and Norse²⁹⁷ literary traditions, the most prevalent examples are found in classical Greece and Rome, where there was much fondness for exhibiting one's sagacity and mental sharpness. In Greece, in particular, the riddle was an inherent part of the culture, especially in the form of contests of wit. Indeed, the battles of wits in the stories of Glaukos,²⁹⁸ the oldest Greek riddle, and of Oedipus with the famous riddle of the Sphinx can be found throughout Greek literature. Many other such traditional enigmas are included in Book 14 of the *Greek Anthology*. The pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus is believed to have uttered riddles. As already mentioned, Homer is said to have gone mad because he could not solve the riddle about lice. Leonardo includes this riddle in his *Profezia*,²⁹⁹ a testament to the historical component in his collection. In his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (written perhaps in the first half of the third century AD), Diogenes Laertius (third century) profiles the enigmatographer Cleobulus (c. 600 BC), who is said to have written over 3,000 lines of songs and riddles. Riddles also peppered Greek literary works such as Aristophanes's *Wasps* (422 BC) and Athenaeus's *Deipnosophistae*³⁰⁰ (written in Rome in the early third century AD). Theories surrounding the riddle were also advanced. Plato mentions riddling in *The Republic* (c. 380 BC) and cites the children's riddle about the eunuch (Book 5.479). More important, Aristotle makes the first scholarly attempt

²⁹⁶ Book 1 of the Sanskrit text *Rig-veda* contains riddles in the form of a hymn with cosmological solutions. This riddle hymn is believed to be the oldest example of a Sanskrit riddle (dating back to c. 1000 BC).

²⁹⁷ A typical contest of wits occurs between King Heidrek and Gestumblindi in the legendary *Hervarar Saga* (thirteenth century).

²⁹⁸ Glaukos, the son of Minos, King of Crete, fell into a vat of honey while playing and perished. When his father could not find him, he approached his soothsayers to inquire about the whereabouts of his son. In true oracular style, the seers propounded a riddle whose solution would save the boy. Polyidos, one of the seers, solved the riddle and restored the boy to life. Minos then forced Polyidos to tell Glaukos the secret of his resurrection. Polyidos eventually did so but was so enraged at this, that he spat into the boy's mouth so that the secret would be erased from his memory.

²⁹⁹ See above for full riddle.

³⁰⁰ This has been translated as *The Banquet of the Learned* or *Philosophers at Dinner* or *The Gastronomers*.

to define riddles and their role in literature in his *Rhetoric*. He describes riddles as metaphors meant to provide further insights into texts, on condition that the reader is willing to decipher them. Finally, Aristotle's pupil Clearchus of Soli (fl. in first half of fourth century BC) wrote *On Riddles*, an entire treatise on the art of riddling. Greeks also indulged in the pastime of riddling during Agrionia, a religious festival celebrated annually in honour of Dionysus Agrionius. During this feast, riddles were recited to amuse, not unlike the courtly entertainment for which Leonardo composed his prophecies.

In Rome, Cicero is said to have penned enigmas, and this should not come as a surprise given his taste for wit and astuteness. Riddles also appear in literary works by some Roman authors: in the third of Virgil's *Eclogues* (composed between c. 42 and 39 BC), which closes with two riddles in a singing match between the two shepherds Menalcas and Damoetas; in Petronius's *Satyricon* (probably written around AD 61); in *The Dinner of the Seven Wise Men*³⁰¹ by Plutarch; in Book 12 of Aulus Gellius's *Noctes Atticae*; and in Apuleius's lost work *Liber ludicorum et gryphorum*. Riddles were also enjoyed as entertainment at the Roman feast of Saturnalia.³⁰²

The Judaeo-Christian tradition also produced riddles that spread throughout the Western world. It has already been noted that a possible influence on Leonardo's dream prophecy is the dream analysis in chapter 2 of the Book of Daniel. Vecce lists Leonardo's riddle on flax, also from the Judaic tradition, as having its origins in a riddle proposed by the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon of Israel: "*Del lino che fa la carta de' cenci. Sarà reverita e onorata e con reverenzia e amore ascoltato li sua precetti, di chi prima fu splezzato, straziato e martorizzato da molte e diverse battiture*" (ed. Vecce 112-13) ["Of flax which

³⁰¹ The essay is in Book 2 of Plutarch's larger work *Moralia*, which was composed first, while writing the *Lives* occupied much of the last two decades of Plutarch's life (c. AD 46-120).

³⁰² Indeed, riddling was very common at this time of the year.

works the cure of rags. That which was at first despised, cast out, and rent by many and various blows, will be respected and honoured, and its precepts will be listened to with reverence and love” (trans. Richter 297)]. On her visit to the king, the queen tested his wisdom by proposing he solve riddles. Were he to guess them correctly, she would deem him a wise man; if not, he would be like all the rest. The solution to one of the riddles is flax: “A storm-wind rushes through their tops: It cries loudly and bitterly: ‘Its head is like a rush.’ It is praiseworthy for the free: Shameworthy for the poor: Honourable for the dead: Disgraceful for the poor: Joyous for the birds: Grievous for the fish” (Silberman 73). Though Vecce identifies the Leonardo prophecy as being reminiscent of the queen’s proposed riddle to the king (perhaps only in reference to the solution?), Leonardo’s other prophecy on flax is closer to the body of the ancient riddle:

Il lino è dedicato a morte e curruzione de’ mortali. A morte pe’ lacci e reti delli uccelli, animali e pesci. A curruzione per le tele line, dove s’involgano i morti, che si sotterrano, i quali si corrompano in tali tele. E ancora esso lino non si spicca dal suo festuco, se esso non comincia a macerarsi e corrompersi, e questo è quello colla quale si debbe incoronare e ornare li uffizi funerali.
(ed. Vecce 126)

[Flax is dedicated to death, and to the corruption of mortals. To death, by being used for snares and nets for birds, animals, and fish; to corruption, by the flaxen sheets in which the dead are wrapped when they are buried, who become corrupt in these winding-sheets. And again, this flax does not separate its fibre till it has begun to steep and putrefy, and this is the flower with which garlands and decorations for funerals should be made. (trans. Richter 311)]

In the Judaic tradition, King Solomon was perhaps the greatest Biblical enigmatographer with the most well-known instances of riddling occurring between him and the Queen of Sheba. There are many examples of riddles in the Old Testament, including, in the Proverbs, a suggestion that riddling is the mark of wisdom and knowledge of God: “A wise *man* will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels:

To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings”³⁰³ (1.5-6; 410). Indeed, prophets such as Daniel and Moses were said to have been chosen by God because of their ability to interpret enigmas and other obscure sayings. Riddles can also be found in the Talmud (dream riddles in particular) and in the Revelation of St John (the only riddle in the Christian New Testament). The riddle in the Old Testament’s Book of Judges proposed by the Hebrew Samson to the Philistines at his wedding is also quite well-known: “Out of the eater came forth food, and out of the strong came forth sweetness” (14.14). Because the answer required special information known only to Samson, the Philistines could not solve the riddle without asking Samson’s new bride Delilah, who begged her husband for the solution and then related it to the Philistines.³⁰⁴

b. The Literary Riddle in the Middle Ages

The father of modern literary riddling is known as Symphosius (of uncertain date).³⁰⁵ One hundred hexameter enigmas in Latin were copied and collected in a work under the title *Symphosii aenigmata* (believed to have been written in the fourth or fifth century) with subjects including everyday objects and animals (many insects) and some abstract themes such as the dream. These enigmatic forms, written for recitation at Saturnalia, were particularly popular among Anglo-Latin riddlers in the seventh and eighth centuries and continued to be used as models for subsequent riddle authors up to the Renaissance.

Symphosius also maintained his influence on other writers of the continent of Europe: on the

³⁰³ The words “dark sayings” refers to a form that is intelligible only by the wise and discerning because they speak of deep and mysterious subjects.

³⁰⁴ The solution was a honeycomb in the carcass of a dead lion. It referred to an earlier incident in which Samson killed a lion whose carcass was later swarmed by bees that produced honey.

³⁰⁵ It is not known whether this is his real name or a pseudonym. Some early scholars believed Symphosius to be Lactantius, but that theory was later disproven.

anonymous composer of the Berne riddles in the seventh century; on the Belgians Egbert of Liège, who wrote *Fecunda ratis* in the tenth century, and a monk named Arnulf, in his *Delicie cleri*, written between 1054 and 1056.

The anonymous composer of the sixty-two Berne riddles, discovered in a manuscript in a monastery in Bobbio, near Genoa, represents the first Latin riddler after Symphosius. His folk-themed riddles are believed to have been composed in the seventh century and were circulated in the Middle Ages under the name of Tullius. The content of these riddles shows much familiarity with the northern Italian landscape and so Taylor considers him to be the first medieval riddler of Italy (*The Literary Riddle* 59).

The beginning of the modern literary riddle in the Western world (brought about by the appearance of Symphosius's riddles) coincided with the invasion of the Saxons and Norse into England in the fifth century AD. These invading peoples imported tales and sagas that also gave rise to an Anglo-Saxon tradition of riddling independent from the existing literature of this period. Indeed, this tradition would later evolve into a formidable Anglo-Latin school of riddle-masters who showed much interest in classical erudition and were to have much influence upon later compilers of riddles, both in Latin and in the vernacular.

In the seventh and eighth centuries, St. Aldhelm (c. 640-709), Abbot of Malmesbury and Bishop of Sherborn, was the most prominent riddle-master after Symphosius. He composed one hundred riddles, also in hexameters, and included them in his treatise on prosody titled *Epistola ad Acircium* (685 and 705). Though the themes in Aldhelm's riddles are akin to those of Symphosius, they are unique because of their Christian and classical mythological allusions. St. Aldhelm was followed by many theological dignitaries who composed riddles for amusement. Tatwine published forty hexameter riddles before he died

in July 734; Abbot Eusebius of Wearmouth (d.747) wrote sixty hexameter riddles which were published with Tatwine's forty to complete a 'century' after the fashion of Symphosius; the bishop Winfrid, later known as Boniface, penned twenty pithy enigmas; and the Venerable Bede (673-735) wrote some riddles collected in his *Flores*. The last major enigmatographer of the Anglo-Latin tradition of this period was Dr Claretus of Bohemia, who composed 150 folk-themed enigmas in the fourteenth century.

Hebrew riddling flourished in Spain between the tenth and the end of the fifteenth centuries. An accepted and regular form of entertainment, the art of riddling was the mark of a wise and learned individual. Hebrew literature of this period abounds with examples of enigmas. The greatest composer of Hebrew riddles was Jehudah Halevi (c.1086-1141), whose riddles are contained in his *Cuzari* (or *Al-Khazari*). The medieval Judaic tradition contributed many riddles similar to the ones attributed to the Queen of Sheba (e.g., the flax riddle) to popular culture.

Alongside those composed in Latin, riddles in the vernacular were also plentiful and widespread in the Middle Ages. The late Greek romance of Apollonius of Tyre and King Antiochus was especially popular at this time at all levels of society. The Anglo-Saxon *Exeter Book* (probably written in the late tenth century by multiple authors) is the most famous medieval source-book for vernacular riddles, with ninety-six riddles of differing lengths (from fifteen to 108 lines) and with both folk-oriented and literary themes. Between the tenth and twelfth centuries Arabic riddling flourished, with particular attention given to the Arabic *Maqamat* (in English, the *Assemblies*) by the celebrated Abu Muhammad Al-Qasim Al-Hariri (1054-1122). The *Assemblies* is a great literary work of Arabic lore that

includes several chapters with riddles. Examples of riddles from Oriental literature reached Western Europe through the tales in the *Arabian Nights*.³⁰⁶

Though Leonardo's prophecies were not composed until the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, there are certainly some broad similarities between his prophecies and the riddles in some of the above collections. Most notably, the correspondences are found in the repertoire of subjects. Both the riddlers mentioned above and Leonardo describe natural phenomena, domestic objects, daily chores, obscenities, music, and weapons. When they are different, it is because they are tied to a particular culture, thus reinforcing the relation between riddle and custom³⁰⁷ Without doubt, the universality of certain subjects in the riddle genre reinforces the extent of transmission and borrowing across geographical boundaries in the riddle genre. Despite the use of similar subjects, it is the qualities of the objects that the author wishes to emphasize that provide the unique tone and convey the personal message of a collection. To cite an example, Symphosius's riddle on the unborn chick ("14. Pullis in ovo. Mira tibi referam nostrae primordia vitae: / Nondum natus eram, nec eram iam matris in alvo; / Iam posito partu natum me nemo videbat." [Raymond Theodore Ohl 46])³⁰⁸ celebrates the origin of life, whereas Leonardo's prophecy with the same solution is meant to underscore humanity's indifference to life: "*Dell'ova ch'essendo mangiate non possan fare e pulcini. O quanti fien quegli ai quali sarà proibito il nascere!* (ed. Vecce 117)" ["Of Eggs which being eaten cannot form Chickens. Oh! how many will they be that never come to birth!" (trans. Richter 299)]. As already mentioned, Leonardo's pessimism is a pervasive

³⁰⁶ The story of Turandot, which includes the riddling contest for Turandot's hand in marriage, was originally Persian, but circulated widely making its way to modern Italy and Germany. For example, it was rewritten by Carlo Gozzi (1720-1806) to fit his commedia dell'arte play *Turandot* (1762).

³⁰⁷ Regarding this, Agop Hacikyan's observation is pertinent: "In the literature of almost every nation is a vast storehouse of both *volks-* and *kunsträsel*, reflecting not only a literary form, but the folklore, social evolution and behaviour of the entire nation" (5).

³⁰⁸ "14. Embryo Chick. I shall tell you the wondrous beginning of my life: Not yet was I born, nor was I still in my mother's womb; though already brought to birth, no one saw me born" (Ohl 47).

element in his *Profezia* and certainly sets him apart in the tradition of the riddle genre.

Leonardo's prophecies often describe their subjects in such a way as to question human ethics. No doubt his ingenious fusion of the riddle form with prophecy plays a role in this distinction.

c. The Riddle in Italy from the early Middle Ages to the Renaissance

The first written riddle in the Italian vernacular appears at the end of the eighth or beginning of the ninth century and was discovered by Luigi Schiaparelli in 1924 in a manuscript housed at the Biblioteca Capitolare of Verona. Known as the "Indovinello veronese," the riddle – considered to be the first example of vernacular writing in the history of Italian literature – is comprised of four short verses and is a conflation of Latin and Venetian dialect: "se pareba boves, alba patralia araba, / albo versorio teneba, et negro semen seminaba" (qtd. in Luperini 33). The solution is as follows: the oxen ("boves") are the fingers; the white meadow ("alba patralia"), the paper; the white plow ("albo versorio"), the white goose feather; the black seed ("negro semen"), the ink. The copyist is manipulating the different levels of meaning that can be interpreted from the context. Versions of the "Indovinello veronese" appeared in popular writings in different parts of Italy, including Sicily, the Marche, and northern Italian regions. It was even adapted for the poem "Il piccolo aratore" by the Italian poet and scholar Giovanni Pascoli (1855-1912). The riddle also gained popularity beyond the borders of Italy and was imitated and translated into languages such as English, French, Hungarian, Modern Greek, and even Lithuanian. The "Indovinello veronese" is considered the first example of vernacular writing in the history of Italian literature.

The *trobar clus* (or “closed form”), an obscure poetic style used by Troubadours in the Provençal tradition and by poets belonging to the Sicilian School and from the Tuscan region, often included riddles within the poems themselves. Indeed, the poems adhering to this form were typically appreciated only by an elite few who were able to discern the hidden messages. Love poets of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries used wordplay, puns, antitheses, and other clever written clues embedded in their poetry to conceal their feelings of love, not to mention the true identity of the women whom they were addressing – since most were extramarital lovers. While it was sometimes possible to decode the names of love objects, such techniques, for the most part, lent these poetic works a cryptic quality. From the Tuscan poetic tradition, Guittone d’Arezzo (1230/35-1294) in particular exploited the *trobar clus* form and was renowned for his obscure poetry and double entendres.

On occasion, even the three great poets of the Trecento – Dante, Petrarca, and Boccaccio – used enigmatic forms in their works. Dante included acrostics in parts of his *Divine Comedy* (Purgatory 12.25-63), and embedded secret messages in its verses. Petrarca’s obsessive play on the words *Laura* and *lauro* throughout the *Canzoniere* also gives an enigmatic quality to his poems. Boccaccio included a number of acrostics in his unfinished allegorical poem *Amorosa visione* while word games, riddles, and allegories are found in his other works such as the *Ninfale d’Ameto*, *Ninfale fiesolano*, and the *Decameron* (6.10).

In the Quattro- and Cinquecento, individuals who used enigmatic forms were mostly “enigmisti d’occasione” (Rossi 230), with the only notable exceptions being Giovan Francesco Straparola³⁰⁹ and Giulio Cesare Croce (1550-1609), two Italian riddlers who were both celebrated and imitated in Italy and abroad. Unlike in other European states, the riddle

³⁰⁹ Straparola’s exact dates are not known. He was born in Caravaggio at the end of the fifteenth century and died after 1557.

in Italy was known for being particularly light-hearted and risqué and reflected a bold and liberal sense of being by those composing it.³¹⁰ Though he was born after Leonardo's lifetime, Tommaso Stigliani (1573-1651), for example, wrote many outrageous riddles which he published in his *Rime* (1605) that, even today, are censored. Though Stigliani was more extreme than most, this tolerance and open-mindedness was not limited to a few unskilled and unlearned riddle writers, but was characteristic of many important figures from Leonardo's lifetime such as Poliziano, Sannazaro, Ariosto, Bembo, and Aretino. In Cinquecento culture riddling became a common social pastime ("giochi di società") among members of the princely courts and the social elites. As mentioned in the Introduction, the "giochi ingenuosi" ["clever games"] to which Castiglione refers in *Il libro del cortegiano* are evidence that the type of word games produced by Leonardo were commonly used in the courts at that time. As many scholars have conjectured, Leonardo's *Profezia*, as well as his rebuses,³¹¹ were mostly created at the time of the artist's residence in Milan for the primary aim of entertaining at the ducal court. His rebuses are similar to the word plays described by Paolo Giovio in his *Ragionamento di monsignor Paolo Giovio sopra i motti e i disegni d'arme e d'amore che comunemente chiamano Imprese* (printed posthumously in 1556), a dialogue with Lodovico Domenichi in which Giovio discusses *imprese* (emblems cleverly combining words and images to represent a family name and its attributes) and prescribes rules for such puzzles.

The poet known as Burchiello³¹² (1400-48) composed some sonnets that resemble riddles. Not coincidentally, Leonardo listed a 1475 edition of Burchiello's *Sonetti* among his inventory of books. Poliziano is most celebrated for his enigmatic epitaph, originally an

³¹⁰ This is quite reminiscent of the facetiae that were produced in Italy during this time.

³¹¹ These will be described below.

³¹² His real name was Domenico di Giovanni.

epigram in the *Greek Anthology*: “Hoc est sepulchrum, intus cadaver non habens, / hoc est cadaver, et sepulchrum extra non habens, / sed est idem cadaver, et sepulchrum idem,”³¹³ while Jacopo Sannazaro (1458-1530) included two riddles (“la jena ridens” and “l’araba fenice”) in his *Ecloghe*. Later, the poets known as “poeti maccheronici” Michele di Bartolomeo (more commonly known as Tifi Odasi), Marin Sanudo (1466-1535), and Teofilo Folengo (1496-1544) all composed poems that had embedded within them cryptic word games.

Though not historically noted as poets or writers, the architect Bramante composed riddles in verse (cited earlier); the mathematician Pacioli included prose riddles in his *De viribus quantitatis* and, of course, so too did Leonardo in some of his notebooks. It has already been noted that the opening verses of Bramante’s sonnet on dice echoes Leonardo’s prophecy on the same subject. Regarding the subjects treated, there is certainly some overlap in the respective works of Pacioli and Leonardo. They also have a structural element in common as they both reveal the solutions to the riddles within the riddles themselves. Thus, the element of suspense is absent and their riddles are not very effective since part of the intrigue of riddling is the mental exercise required to solve the puzzle. In relation to the production of enigmatic puzzles, Leonardo also composed a series of rebuses that are found on seven folios³¹⁴ in the Windsor Library. A term coined in the sixteenth century,³¹⁵ the rebus is a visual puzzle whose solution is guessed through a sequential combination of pictures representing words or parts of words. Leonardo interspersed his rebuses with short

³¹³ [“This is the tomb that has no corpse within; this is the corpse that has no tomb without, but the corpse and the tomb are the same” (trans. Milton Kooistra)]. It is believed that Poliziano was envisioning a tomb inscription for the tragic mythological Greek figure Niobe, the queen of Thebes who was turned to stone from the pain and weeping caused by the loss of all her 12 children.

³¹⁴ 12692, 12693, 12694, 12695, 12696, 12697, and 12699.

³¹⁵ The term *rebus* comes from the French *rébus*, dating from 1512. This particular type of puzzle was very popular in the sixteenth century, especially in France, and is related to other such forms as the emblem and device.

words, syllables, or musical notes (this was used as a mnemonic device to complete the phonetic part of a solution).³¹⁶ For example, while the solutions to some rebuses are single words as in [ferro di cavallo] + *ci* = *feroci*, others represent full sentences as in *che po* + [osso] + [note *fa re*] + [sella] + [mani intrecciate] + [mina] + [mitra] + *el* + [cuore] = *Che posso fare se la femina mi trae 'l core?* ["What am I to do if she steals my heart?" (my translation)]. Although some literary value may still be assigned to the rebus, and to other genres like it, overall, it differs from the true troping riddle because it plays with language and takes pleasure in creating schematic forms as a substitute for conventional language.³¹⁷

The Cinquecento also witnessed the appearance of riddle collections by some authors whose identity is still somewhat shrouded in mystery. The first among these is *Sonetti giocosi da interpretare, sopra diverse cose comunemente note* (which appeared in 1538 in Siena) by Il Resoluto, the pseudonym of Angiolo Cenni, a poet member of the "Congrega dei Rozzi."³¹⁸ Il Resoluto was most famous for his riddles, so much so that his collection continued to be reprinted even in the eighteenth century. Through his collection he exerted much influence on riddling because of his solid technique that saw him move away from simple word plays such as puns and antinomies towards a consolidation of two distinct forms of *diploismo*, a basic technique enabling the riddle to describe an apparent subject conforming to the given descriptions, but, in reality, concealing a real subject constituting the

³¹⁶ Leonardo's rebuses have been reproduced in Marinoni's *I rebus di Leonardo da Vinci: raccolti e interpretati* (1954), which also includes the essay "Una virtù spirituale." Marinoni not only discusses Leonardo's rebuses, but he also transcribes their solutions, and lists the images occurring in each rebus and the number of times each appears.

³¹⁷ See Cook 146-48 and 152-59.

³¹⁸ The poets who were part of the "Congrega dei Rozzi" were often referred to as "I Rozzi" and included, for example, Lorenzo Fucci, Antonio di Maria Francesco, Ascanio Cacciaconti, and Alessandro di Donato. All members went by their more common pseudonyms. The "Congrega" was founded in October 1531 by simple artisans including Il Resoluto and fifteen other colleagues, and its aim was to compose and recite pastoral comedies and rustic eclogues (hence, the name *rozzi*). In 1603, the "Congrega" was instituted as an "Accademia," opening its doors to poets who, now no longer humble artisans, were rather learned writers.

solution of the riddle. Thus, while some riddles, the less offensive ones, were based simply on contradiction and ambiguity of definitions, the more scurrilous ones were fully worked out double entendres.

In the culture of the Renaissance court too there was an interest in riddles and similar word games, but the solutions to the enigmas were elevated to reflect the sophisticated environment in which the members of the court spent their time. As was mentioned, both Leonardo and Bramante composed riddles with abstract solutions for their court audience. In his *Il libro del cortegiano*, Castiglione mentions that word games were also played at the court of Urbino, and, in chapter 9, Book 1, relates an incident in which such a game was played and the guests were presented with a riddling sonnet and asked to guess the meaning of the S-shaped pendant on the forehead of the signora Duchessa, the mistress of the court and one of the female interlocutors in the treatise. Pietro Bembo (1470-1547) enjoyed writing riddles and is believed to have penned seven riddle couplets in 1507 for a specific occasion at the court in Urbino; they are found in an unpublished work bearing the title *Motti*. An interest in riddling is also exhibited in a long work about bells titled *Capitolo* that is attributed to Giovio.³¹⁹ These riddles tend to describe things that, on the surface, seem innocent but are, in reality, obscene. This tendency is a sign of the enjoyment and laughter that pervaded Cinquecento society and culture. Others in the service of great Italian Renaissance princes who penned riddles are Ludovico Ariosto (1474-1533), who included some riddles in his *Satire* and in Canto 7 of the *Orlando furioso*, and Pietro Aretino (1492-1556), who inserted a riddle in the third day of his *Ragionamenti* (1534-36).

³¹⁹ The attribution is made by Vittorio Cian who discovered the *Capitolo* by an anonymous sixteenth-century author in the Biblioteca Comunale of Como.

iii. Leonardo's Prophecies as Riddles

A working definition of the riddle³²⁰ was first given by Aristotle in his *Poetics*: “the very idea of a riddle is to describe a given object by means of a string of absurdities, a thing that cannot of course be done by any combination of the proper terms, but can be done if you combine the corresponding metaphors” (22.1458a; Hutton 69). The essence of the riddle eludes the listener to the extent that whatever the riddle may be describing is understood as being removed from an existing and perceived reality. Subsequent definitions for the riddle have not deviated greatly from Aristotle's and have, in fact, retained the idea that the riddle is an expression of figurative language (“metaphors”) because it draws parallels between two entirely different objects. And because it endeavours to perplex the listener (bewilderment is, in fact, a specific effect caused by enigmatic writings such as the riddle), it cannot use recognized and usual words to describe this object and, thus, must communicate metaphorically. The rhetorical tool of metaphor enables the riddler to distance the described object from a familiar reality and deceive the reader or listener by exploiting the resemblance to another unrelated object. Eleanor Cook calls this a “closed or hidden simile” (32) wherein the riddle conceals a likeness between two different objects;³²¹ Cook believes that the riddle tropes in this way. The solution that is to be guessed by the riddlee is the element that completes the riddle and provides the literal counterpart to this figurative component. Indeed, a riddle is no longer a riddle when there is no mystery to be solved. The interplay between riddle description and reply accounts for the riddle's underlying dual structure. Though the

³²⁰ The definition of riddle provided here describes the riddle in its original oral form. Other species of riddle (e.g., the literary riddle, the neck-riddle, which describes those riddles whose unsolved answers resulted in punishment or worse) imitate the true riddle, while only differing in subject matter, length, and style. At the core, all riddles use the technique to describe a single object in an unfamiliar way. Leonardo's prophecies are more reminiscent of literary riddles, and, thus, aspects of the literary riddle will be discussed later in this section.

³²¹ This is in contrast to the simile which explicitly asserts the likeness between two differing objects.

riddle is shrouded in obscurity and ambiguity because it uses figurative language to describe its object, it is offset by clarity when the correct solution is offered, as Borystawski, quoted above, observed.

At the core of Leonardo's prophecies there is no doubt an effort to create perplexity through metaphoric language and the unlikely associations between objects. It should be noted, however, that this confused state is not relevant for the reader – as opposed to the listener – of the *Profezia* because almost all the solutions either immediately precede or follow the written texts. There is no element of suspense or obscurity when the texts are read in their entirety. There is metaphor in the prophecy in which Leonardo compares the opening of an oven (“Il forno”) to that of the human mouth: “E que’ che si imboccheranno per l’altrui mani fia lor tolto il cibo di bocca” (ed. Vecce 110) [“And those which will have their food in their mouths will be deprived of it by the hands of others” (trans. Richter 306)]. Here, the metaphor is not particularly difficult to understand given the rather obvious physical affinity between the opening of an oven and the human mouth; thus, the analogy in this prophecy is somewhat elementary. The prophecy, “De’ libri che insegnano precetti” [“Of Books which teach Precepts”], might be seen as slightly more inventive and challenging for the solver: “I corpi sanz’anima ci daranno con lor sentenzie precetti utili al ben morire” (ed. Vecce 113) [“Bodies without souls will, by their statements, give us precepts by which to die well” (trans. Richter 297)]. Indeed, the subject matter here is more abstract – and thus more demanding for the listener – than the more concrete solution in the above example. The subject of the sentence “i corpi sanz’anima” [“bodies without souls”] is a metaphor for the parchment from animals used to write on.

It is the variation in tone in the text of the *Profezia* that sometimes yields more unlikely metaphors from the ones identified above, thus creating more complexity in the collection. The tone is more dramatic and the metaphors become more elaborate and, thus, more complex when, for example, Leonardo employs exaggeration in his riddles. As mentioned earlier, Leonardo shocks his readers or listeners with seemingly alarming scenarios only to surprise them with otherwise innocent and mundane solutions. In addition to the examples cited above about disturbing animal scenes, the prophecy on scabies demonstrates Leonardo's tendency to exaggerate: "Verrà alli omini tal crudele malattia, che colle propie unghie si stracceranno le loro carni. Sarà la rognà" (ed. Vecce 107) ["Men will have such cruel maladies that they will tear their flesh with their own nails. The Itch³²²," (trans. Richter 304)]. Evocative phrases such as "crudele malattia" ["cruel maladies"] and "si stracceranno le loro carni" ["tear the flesh"] only heighten the shock effect. The scene described in the following prophecy is particularly suggestive: "Sentirassi le dolente grida, le alte strida, le rau<ch>e e infioate voce di quel che fieno con tormento ispogliati al fine lasciati ignudi e senza moto: e questo fia causa del motore che tutto volge" (ed. Vecce 111) ["Dismal cries will be heard loud, shrieking with anguish, and the hoarse and smothered tones of those who will be despoiled, and at last left naked and motionless; and this by reason of the mover, which makes everything turn round" (trans. Richter 295)]. To which the solution is "Il filatoio da seta" ["Silk-spinning"]. It is important to note that here, unlike the examples analyzed in the previous paragraph, Leonardo transforms an activity into a narrative scene, thereby using a technique that gives the *Profezia* an abstract quality. This will be discussed at a later point in the discussion; for now, it is sufficient to draw attention

³²² This is better translated as scabies.

to the way in which Leonardo has personified the simple act of silk-spinning in order to create a more complex and imaginative metaphor.

A loose categorization of themes in the *Profezia* will further reveal the complexity of metaphors produced by Leonardo while also revealing how the literary riddle relates to this collection. While the literary riddle still describes objects in terms intended to suggest something entirely different (in the way that true oral riddles do), it is lengthier and treats more abstract themes. Indeed, it is intentionally elaborated by writers and is more commonly characterized by rhetorical devices (e.g., antithesis), poetic schemas (e.g., rhyme), and conceptual depth (e.g., abstract themes).

To suggest that Leonardo's prophecies more closely recall literary riddles does not mean that there are no cases in which Leonardo uses commonplace and concrete subject matters, which are more characteristic of oral riddles, with a direct correlation between description and solution. Indeed, many such instances are to be found in his collection: "Cioè per nugoli" ["Clouds"], "La lanterna" ["Lantern"], "Della fossa" ["Ditch"], "Dell'ape" ["Bee"], "I calzolari" ["Shoe-menders"], and "De' danari e oro" ["Money and gold"]. Leonardo also writes riddles with universal themes, that is, he selects and describes subject matters that were commonly used in the oral tradition of the history of the riddle genre: "Del seminare" ["Of Sowing Seed"] and variations of this riddle as in "Le terre lavorate" ["Tilled land"] and "I lavoratori della terra" ["Husbandsmen tilling the Earth"], "Della fossa" ["Of the Ditch"], and "Dell'ombra che si move con l'omo" ["Of a Man's Shadow which moves with him"]. Moreover, Leonardo's prophecies share some of the characteristics of the popular oral riddle which tends to be brief and lacking in polish and ornamentations.

Despite these correspondences with the oral riddle form, more examples reveal the literary nature of Leonardo's prophecies, however modest their value as literary texts may be. Even when they describe everyday objects and activities, Leonardo's prophecies tend to be more conceptualized, their solutions being supplemented with qualifying clauses. Thus, the reply to "Le cose disunite s'uniranno e riceveranno in sé tal virtù che renderanno la persa memoria alli omini" (ed. Vecce 108) ["Things that are separate shall be united and acquire such virtue that they will restore to man his lost memory" (trans. Richter 305)] is not simply given as "Cioè i palpiti" ["that is, papyrus (sheets)"], but is qualified by the clause "che son fatti di peli disuniti e tengano memoria delle cose fatti delli omini" ["which are made of separate strips and have preserved the memory of the things and acts of men"]. Such clauses reinforce Leonardo's attention to detail, in addition to underscoring his ability to look beyond the surface for a more profound meaning. To be fair, they may also signal a work in progress whose solutions Leonardo intended to refine and simplify eventually.

In spite of the fact that in his *Paragone* Leonardo argued strongly for the superiority of painting (visual art) over poetry (written art), he could not deny the power of language. His manuscripts are evidence that, in some cases, he could not do without language at all to articulate and complete his ideas. What is more, his long vocabulary lists in Latin were an admission that he needed language to move beyond a basic level of understanding of things. The prophecies in which he describes language demonstrate that he recognized the versatility of language as both an impediment to human communication and a valued medium through which to attain and express the truth. The prophecy describing national languages shows how language contributes to incomprehension: "Verrà a tale la generazione umana che non s'intenderà il parlare l'uno dell'altro. Cioè un tedesco con un turco" (ed. Vecce 107) ["The

generation of men shall come to such a pass as not to understand each other's speech; that is, a German with a Turk" (trans. Richter 305)]. While the following prophecy represents parchment or vellum ("pelle delli animali") as a means to preserve the wisdom and sentiment of another human being: "*Delle pelle delli animali che tengano il senso del tatto che v'è su le scritture*. Quanto più si parlerà colle pelle, veste del sentimento, tanto più s'acquisterà sapienza" (ed. Vecce 109) ["Of the Skins of Animals which have the sense of Feeling what is in the Things written. The more you converse with skins covered with sentiments, the more wisdom will you acquire" (trans. Richter 306)]. Being an *omo senza lettere*, Leonardo was unusually fascinated with language. He experimented with it in diverse settings – scientific and literary – and came to recognize both its versatility and ambiguity. The following examples, in fact, show how Leonardo attempted to play with language and to test its potential in such a way that he would be able to convey certain truths.

Personification is a mode of expression frequently used by Leonardo to describe simple objects. This is seen in the following prophecy: "*Delle noci e ulive e ghiande e castagne e simili*. Molti figlioli da dispietate bastonate fien tolti delle proprie braccia delle lor madri e gittati in terra e poi lacerati" (ed. Vecce 124) ["Of Nuts, and Olives, and Acorns, and Chestnuts, and suchlike. Many offspring shall be snatched by cruel thrashing from the very arms of their mothers, and flung on the ground, and crushed" (trans. Richter 292)]. The analogy between nuts, olives, acorns, and chestnuts suspended from a tree branch to offspring ("figlioli") nestled in the arms of a mother ("le proprie braccia delle lor madri") is particularly telling. Not only does Leonardo effectively employ personification, but he also attempts to create a compelling simile in which he equates the natural world (the fruits of a tree) to a human relationship (the child of a mother). Another case in point is the prophecy on

silk-spinning cited earlier; here, Leonardo creates a scene with logical sequence and humanizes the elements involved in this action by attaching emotions to them, thus lending a narrative quality to the prophecy. Leonardo demonstrates quite well that the scene in a riddle, as Taylor observes, “often has suggestive connotations” (“The Riddle” 133). In both prophecies, Leonardo elevates his subjects to conceptual spheres and shows impressive artistic ingenuity in doing so. Finally, it should be recalled that, for his prophecies, Leonardo devised a list of sub-divisions where the eighth item was the lofty subject matter of philosophy (“Ottava delle cose filosofiche”). Should scholarly conjectures be correct, this list reflects the first steps for an eventual literary publication with deliberate themes to be illustrated and developed.

A cursory listing of some of the thematic categories in the *Profezia* reinforces the conceptual nature of this literary collection.³²³ Leonardo’s prophecies are descriptions of physical science, human vice and cruelty, the abuse of animals by humans, abstract nouns, and social and religious rituals, none of which is commonplace in the oral riddle tradition. The prophecies describing such subject matters show variation in figures of speech, demonstrate specialized knowledge, and lend an overall unique quality and vision to this literary collection.

In the *Profezia*, there is also a place for science, in particular for the physical sciences, as evidenced in the prophecy on the effects of rain: “*Delle piove che fan ch’ e fiumi intorbidati portan via le terre. Verrà di verso il cielo chi trasmuterà gran parte dell’ Africa, che si mostra a esso cielo in verso Europa, e quella di Europa inverso l’ Africa, e quelle delle provincie si mischieranno insieme con gran revoluzione*” (ed. Vecce 112) [“Of the Rains,

³²³It should be noted that in this discussion the themes are grouped in a manner not previously adopted by Leonardo scholars. The organization reflects the conceptual nature of Leonardo’s collection that is being argued here.

which, by making the Rivers muddy, wash away the Land. Something³²⁴ will fall from the sky which will transport a large part of Africa which lies under that sky towards Europe, and that of Europe towards Africa, and that of the Scythian countries³²⁵ will meet with tremendous revolutions” (trans. Richter 296)]. This prophecy is intriguing for the way in which Leonardo elaborates on a scientific process in order to symbolize a natural phenomenon common to all peoples in all nations. Moreover, it is an imaginative rendering of a geological phenomenon wherein a neutral term, “le terre,” assumes a specific configuration and subjective nature as “Europa” and “Africa.” Leonardo’s specialized knowledge of the physical sciences is also demonstrated in the prophecy about the earth’s longitudinal and latitudinal lines: “*Degli emisperi che sono infiniti e da infinite linie son divisi in modo che sempre ciascuno omo n’ha una d’esse linie infra l’uno piede e l’altro. Parleransi e toccheransi e abbracceransi li omini, stanti dall’uno all’altro emisperio, e <n>tenderansi i loro linguaggi*” (ed. Vecce 119) [“Of Hemispheres, which are infinite; and which are divided by an infinite Number of Lines, so that every Man always has one of these Lines between his Feet. Men standing in different hemispheres will converse and touch each other and embrace each other, and understand each other’s language” (trans. Richter 301)]. In the two examples, science is an endeavour showing affinities with the poetic and figurative language normally reserved for literary works. Both prophecies are a dynamic interplay of science and literature, demonstrating how Leonardo can exploit literary devices such as metaphor to illustrate a scientific process.

Antithesis sometimes appears in the *Profezia*; for example, in the description of a comb: “Molte volte la cosa disunita fia causa di grande unizione. *Cioè il pettine, fatto della*

³²⁴ This is better translated as “One” given that the relative pronoun following is “chi” (“who”) not “which,” as translated by Richter.

³²⁵ This is better translated as “provinces.”

disunita canna, unisce le file nella tela” (ed. Vecce 109) [“Very often a thing that is severed is the occasion of much union. That is, the comb made of split cane which unites the threads of cloth” (trans. Richter 305)]. This can be shown in the prophecy on carts and ships as well: “Vedrassi i morti portare i vivi in diverse parti. *I carri e navi*” (ed. Vecce 110) [“The dead will be seen carrying the living in various places. In Carts and Ships” (trans. Richter 306)]. In both examples, Leonardo describes an object using opposites and highlighting contrasting ideas: “la cosa *disunita* fia causa di grande *unizione*” [“a thing that is *severed* is the occasion of much *union*”] and “*i morti portare i vivi*” [“the *dead* will be seen carrying the *living*”]. While the effect of an antithetical statement may direct one’s attention to the contrasting elements in an everyday object such as a comb or a cart, it can also suggest the innate dualism in human reality which is founded upon contradictory principles and even reliant upon these for its existence. In the *Profezia*, antithesis seems to be a subtle expression of Leonardo’s ironic attitude towards human society. To be sure, irony is a rhetorical tool that exposes and reinforces the binary oppositions in human existence.

Leonardo’s irony is perhaps the most persuasive rhetorical element in the *Profezia*, as was noted at the beginning of the chapter,³²⁶ and it is especially reflective of his scepticism towards the human condition. Irony is a mode of expression dependent upon “a contrast between a reality and an appearance” (Haakon M. Chevalier; qtd. in D.C. Muecke 33) or “a contradiction between affirmation and denial” (Knox 38). It is this basic duality of irony that enables Leonardo to be critical of society in which he underscores the hidden reality of many deceiving appearances that were deemed to be good and rational. Indeed, many of the prophecies call attention to these sorts of contradictions and falsehood that Leonardo

³²⁶ Other Leonardo scholars (e.g., Fumagalli, Caramello, and Vecce among others) have noted in passing the irony in the *Profezia*. The present analysis elaborates upon their observations.

observed in his lifetime:³²⁷ “Tutte le cose che nel verno fien nascoste sotto la neve rimarranno scoperte e palese nella state. *Detta per la bugia che non pò stare occulta* (ed. Vecce 111) [“All those things which in winter are hidden under the snow, will be uncovered and laid bare in summer. For falsehood, which cannot remain hidden” (trans. Richter 310)]. Leonardo sees paradox in religious rituals such as the adoration of paintings and statues of saints: “*Delle pitture ne’ santi adorati. Parleranno li omini alli omini che non sentiranno; aran gli <occhi> aperti e non vedranno, parleranno a quelli e non fie lor risposto, chiederan grazie a chi arà orecchi e non ode, faran lume a chi è orbo, parlerai a’ sordi con gran <romo>re*” (ed. Vecce 115) [“Of Worshipping the Pictures of Saints. Men will speak to men who hear not; having their eyes open, they will not see; they will speak to these, and they will not be answered. They will implore favours of those who have ears and hear not; they will make light for the blind” (trans. Richter 295)]. Not only does Leonardo highlight the vain attempts to provide light for those who cannot see (“a chi è orbo”) and to speak to those who cannot hear (“a’ sordi”), but also the foolishness exhibited in ritualistic human behaviour in the name of religion. In general terms, the irony lies in the illogical nature of such an act; specifically, it speaks in opposition to the cult of idols. Leonardo also criticizes the sale of indulgences, a common practice in the Roman Catholic faith: “*De’ frati che spendendo parole ricevano di gran ricchezze e danno il paradiso. Vedrassi grandissima turba, i quali acquisteran grandissime ricchezze con prezzo d’invisibile monete. Le invisibile monete faran trionfare molti spenditori di quelle*” (ed. Vecce 121) [“Of Friars, who, spending nothing but Words, receive great Gifts and bestow Paradise. Invisible money will procure the triumph of many who will spend it” (trans. Richter 301)]. The common belief was that the religious surrender wealth and take oaths of poverty, returning to the fundamental principles

³²⁷ Other examples demonstrating Leonardo’s irony were noted above.

of Christianity especially propounded by St. Francis. Using irony, Leonardo reverses this to reveal the reality behind the appearance. The next prophecy also exhibits irony while underscoring an unpleasant truth about the way of life of friars: “*Delle chiese e abitazion de’ frati*. Assai saranno che lasceranno li esercizi e le fatiche, povertà di vita e di roba, e andranno abitare nelle ricchezze e trionfanti edifizii, mostrando questo esser il mezzo di farsi amico a Dio” (ed. Vecce 119) [“Of Churches and the Habitations of Friars. Many will there be who will give up work and labour and poverty of life and goods, and will go to live among wealth in splendid buildings, declaring that this is the way to make themselves acceptable to God”³²⁸ (trans. Richter 301)]. It is quite apparent that much of the disapproval expressed by Leonardo reflects that of many Italian church reformers, who began their attempt to reform the Catholic Church because of the above false practices criticized by the artist. Indeed, Leonardo shows himself quite adept at using effective modes of expression to make a bold statement about church and clergy customs. Under normal circumstances, such opinions would be polemical. Irony, however, enables him to be honest and controversial without implicating himself, all the while unveiling without revealing much about his own attitude, which, as Frye notes, is a technique generally connected with irony “[W]henever a reader is not sure what the author’s attitude is or what his own is supposed to be, we have irony with relatively little satire” (*Anatomy* 223). The final statement in this prophecy – “mostrando questo esser il mezzo di farsi amico di Dio” [“declaring that this is the way to make themselves acceptable to God”] – is particularly ironic because, through it, Leonardo is able to assume an innocent attitude towards the customs of friars. Obviously, the implied meaning differs from the literal statement in the prophecy. This is an example of irony as mockery, as described by Dilwyn Knox, for it enables Leonardo to alter the “emotional

³²⁸ This phrase is better translated as “to become a friend of God.”

tenor” of the final sentence (78) and rely on his audience to decode his literal statement and the true meaning behind it. Thus, the statement would be interpreted by readers and listeners as the opposite of truth, and therefore false, by readers and listeners. The implied meaning would be “mostrando questo esser il mezzo di *non* farsi amico di Dio” [“declaring that this is *not* the way to make themselves acceptable to God”] or “mostrando questo esser il mezzo di farsi *nemico* di Dio” [“declaring that this is the way to make themselves *unacceptable* to God”].³²⁹ Leonardo must have known that an accepted understanding of Christianity among his contemporaries was sufficient for his readers and listeners to know that Christian doctrine does not condone wealth and riches as a means to move closer to God.

Leonardo does not limit his examples of irony to religious rituals as the next prophecy on a common social tradition demonstrates: “Vederassi ai padri donare le lor figliole alla lussuria delli omini e premiarli e abbandonare ogni passata guardia. *Quando si maritano le putte*” (ed. Vecce 108) [“Fathers will be seen giving their daughters into the power of man and giving up all their former care in guarding them. When girls are married” (trans. Richter 305)]. Phrased as such, this accepted custom, which sees a father forfeit the care of his daughter in order to place her in the hands of an unknown man seems rather absurd and rather cruel. Perhaps Leonardo is expressing empathy for those young girls who were forced to submit to their father’s wishes in matters of matrimony. Expanding upon this theme in another prophecy, Leonardo now seems to have lessened the impact of irony somewhat by adopting a more direct form of expression.

Della dote delle fanciulle. E dove prima la gioventù femminile non si potea difendere dalla lussuria e rapina de’ maschi, né per guardie di parenti, né per fortezze di mura, verrà tempo che bisognerà che padri e parenti d’esse fanciulle paghin di gran pezzi chi voglia dormire con loro, ancora che esse sien ricche, nobili e bellissime. Certo e’ par qui che la natura voglia spegnere

³²⁹ Had Richter translated “amico di Dio” as “friend of God,” this would be “enemy of God.”

la umana spezie, come cosa inutile al mondo e guastatrice di tutte le cose create. (ed. Vecce 120)

[Of Dowries for Maidens. And whereas, at first, maidens could not be protected against the lust and violence of Men, neither by the watchfulness of parents nor by the strength of walls, the time will come when it will be necessary for the fathers and parents of those girls to pay a large price to whoever is willing to marry them, even if they are rich, noble, and most handsome. Certainly this seems as though nature wished to eradicate the human race as being useless to the world, and as spoiling all created things. (trans. Richter 302)]

This is one of the four prophecies mentioned earlier that Vecce identified as the most evocative of human corruption (“Leonardo e il gioco” 298). The irrational decision to surrender a daughter to “la lussuria e rapina de’ maschi” [“the lust and violence of men”] is further problematized by the fact that a parent must provide a gift (a dowry) for this “exchange,” even if the man to whom the daughter is betrothed may already be wealthy. The sense of absurdity in this “transaction” is reinforced by the phrase “paghin gran pezzi chi voglia dormire con loro” [“to pay a large price to whoever is willing to marry them”³³⁰], almost as if to insinuate that parents prostitute their own daughters and to stress the immoral nature of such an act. This is indeed ironic, but Leonardo, as Vecce aptly observes, “non gioca più, il riso, come l’ironia, è molto amaro: il registro profetico non è così nettamente separato da quello reale, perché reale è l’umanità corrotta, crudele, folle” (“Leonardo e il gioco” 299). It is as though Leonardo has chosen to part temporarily with rhetorical subtlety (i.e., irony) for more direct language and condemnation, allowing truth, which is normally concealed behind the rhetoric of irony, to reveal itself more fully. The final sentence in this prophecy reinforces this hypothesis: “Certo e’ par qui che la natura voglia spegnere la uman spezie, come cosa inutile al mondo e guastatrice di tutte le cose create” [“Certainly this seems as though nature wished to eradicate the human race as being useless to the world, and

³³⁰ This is better translated as “to sleep with them.”

as spoiling all created things”]. It is difficult to overlook the cosmic plea that Leonardo makes in this sentence and to not attempt to explain such an expression. Marriage appears to confuse Leonardo to the extent that he cannot help but draw attention to the fact that it seems that (“par qui che”) [“this seems as though”] nature is being somewhat negligent and enabling human beings to adopt customs that give rise to the corruption and degeneration of humanity. Is Leonardo suggesting that human beings, by way of their errant actions and standards, are the arbiters of their own ruin? Is he pressing a greater ironist than himself to provide an answer to the great riddle that is life so that he might understand the role that human beings should, instead, assume for their prosperity? Have human beings become indifferent to the human behaviours and customs such as marriage that speak ill of human ethical standards?

To attempt to answer these questions, it may be useful, now that single prophecies have been analyzed, to contextualize the corpus of Leonardo’s prophecies. The prophecy just examined, along with all Leonardo’s prophecies, seem to point inevitably towards an ominous future simply as their title *Profezia* indicates. A study of this literary collection as a holistic expression may help to explain Leonardo’s decision to give the title *Profezia* to a group of writings that otherwise share many conventions with the riddle genre.

iv. The *Profezia* as Prophecy: Meaning and Context

The texts included in the *Profezia* reveal Leonardo’s great interest in the human condition. While some examples are innocent and act as simple riddles meant to entertain, it is difficult to ignore those that speak volumes about problematic human behaviour. For it is the latter type of prophecy that determines the overall serious tone of the texts in the *Profezia* and is

the most rhetorically effective. Not only are human beings cruel to one another, but they also mistreat other living creatures, showing an overall disrespect for and indifference towards life and nature: “*Delle pecore, vacche, capre e simili. A innumerabili saran tolti e loro piccolo figlioli, e quelli scannati e crudelissimamente squartati*” (ed. Vecce 124) [“Of Sheep, Cows, Goats, and the like. Endless multitudes of these will have their little children taken from them, ripped open and flayed, and most barbarously quartered” (trans. Richter 292)]. Moreover, they are foolish in their pursuit of unattainable desires: “*Delli omini che, quanto più invecchiano, più si fanno avari, che avendoci a star poco doverebbon farsi liberali. Vedrassi a quelli che son giudicati di più sperienza e giudizio, quanto egli hanno men bisogno delle cose, con più avidità cercarle e riservare*” (ed. Vecce 113) [“Of men who, the older they grow, the more avaricious they become, whereas, having but little time to stay, they should become more liberal. We see those who are regarded as being most experienced and judicious, when they least need a thing, they seek and cherish it with more avidity” (trans. Richter 294)]. Leonardo has dissected the society of his day and depicted the sense of absurdity and immorality pervading it. He views the human condition for what it is and he envisions appropriate retribution for humanity. In the prophecies in which Leonardo adopts the discourse of irony, he shows great awareness of the discrepancy between actions and results, between appearance and reality. The image of Leonardo as an observer may enable us to advance hypotheses regarding Leonardo’s decision to group these individual texts under the title *Profezia* in the singular form.

This literary collection was composed mostly in the years closing the fifteenth century (1497-1500), when the prophetic and apocalyptic movement was particularly strong on the Italian peninsula, especially in Florence, where the Dominican friar Girolamo

Savonarola (1452-98) preached and prophesied for the sake of the moral renewal of the Italian population, in particular of the Florentines. Savonarola came to Florence from Ferrara in 1491 and, by 1494, he had already gathered a large following of Florentines who believed that he was the voice of God. He announced that he had received divine signs that Florence's current political woes were a consequence of its citizens' moral corruption and that the city had to reform itself before ushering in a new era in which Florence would assume the role of a new Jerusalem. It was not difficult to convince Florentines of this since Savonarola's stay in Florence – from 1491 to 1498 – coincided with a time in which Florentines witnessed much political drama in their city and thus were both politically and psychologically vulnerable: in 1492, the driving force behind much of the political stability, Lorenzo de' Medici (b. 1449) died, and in 1494, the Florentines rebelled against Medicean rule in favour of a return to republicanism.³³¹ These events, along with the approach of the French king, Charles VIII, on Florentine territory, had disastrous consequences for Florence and its citizens, leading many to look to Savonarola, who was seen as a leader who would restore Florentine civic pride and stability for their beloved city. By 1498, however, Savonarola's influence had diminished greatly: the Ferrarese friar began to fall out of favour with the Florentines not to mention that he was disliked by the Franciscans, by Medici sympathizers, and by the higher clergy. Moreover, Pope Alexander VI, always attacked by the friar in his sermons, forced the Florentines to arrest Savonarola. In May 1498, Savonarola was hanged and burned at the stake in Piazza della Signoria. While he was the most noted prophet of this time in Italy, he was not the only one preaching catastrophic and apocalyptic events for the

³³¹ Savonarola claimed the French army's descent into Florence was a punishment from God.

Italian people. The onset of the new century (the year 1500) also saw a rise in other prophets and preachers³³² and their respective prophecies of doom.

Leonardo probably did not take the prophecies of Savonarola or other prophets of his time too seriously, because he could not possibly have agreed with their method of reasoning, which usually entailed an interpretation of celestial signs or of hidden messages in the Scriptures that were only visible to the select few chosen as the supposed voice of God. He must have preferred instead a prognosis based on concrete evidence. In fact, the *Profezia* includes a prophecy that does not speak highly of the “science of prophecy:” “*De profezia. Tutti li strolagi saran castrati. Cioè i galletti* (ed. Vecce 121)” [“Of prophecy. All astrologers will be castrated, that is the cockerels (trans. Pedretti, *Commentary* 265: 2)].

Since Leonardo wrote his prophecies primarily for court amusement, his decision to structure them as riddles might have been influenced by the fact that this type of verbal puzzle was in vogue in courtly culture. The tone and themes of his prophecies, however, might have been affected by current events and context. Such a theory is not entirely unreasonable, for Leonardo, who lived in Milan, but spent his formative years in Florence and still had familial ties to the city,³³³ was no doubt aware of the events described above and had heard of Savonarola. Furthermore, while the dates of composition for the *Profezia* coincide with a turbulent time in Florence, they also overlap with an equally fateful period in Milan. In 1499 Leonardo was forced to flee Milan because King Louis XII, Charles VIII’s successor, conquered the city and imprisoned Ludovico Sforza, Leonardo’s patron of nearly twenty years. Not only did the French invasion affect Milan and Florence, but it also

³³² Prophetic pronouncements were made at all levels of society (learned and popular) and included prophets such as Giovanni Nesi, and Piero Bernardino. Even the well-known Platonists Ficino and Pico della Mirandola believed in mystical signs announcing a new age that see men and women following a universal philosophy of religion.

³³³ Leonardo’s father, in fact, still lived in Florence and did not die until 1504.

rendered much of the Italian peninsula vulnerable to further foreign attacks. During this time, there was an overall sense of doom and uncertainty regarding the future of Italy.

The political turmoil that coloured the Italian peninsula in the final two decades of the Quattrocento was taken by many (especially by prophets and preachers) as an occasion for a moral conversion. Not only did this period in Italian history witness many people, the masses and the intellectuals alike, anticipating a spiritually renewed era, which they hoped would bring greater harmony in human society, but also many prophets made the approaching rejuvenation the subject of their prophetic pronouncements: “L’esigenza che il mondo cristiano sia riscattato alla sua purezza originaria, che gli uomini vivano una nuova èra di Concordia e di pace, è certo il motivo più costante di tutte le profezie dotte e popolari” (Vasoli 181). In 1489 Savonarola, in fact, preached that it was God’s will to deliver destruction upon Italy before a moral reformation could occur on the peninsula. He also published this pronouncement in one of his most influential works *Compendio di rivelazioni* (1495): “innanzi a questa renovazione Dio darebbe un grande flagello a tutta la Italia” (Crucitti 9). Almost all the prophetic themes from the end of the Quattrocento were in response to this socio-political context and, although prophets and preachers imagined a new age arriving in different forms and manners, they all foretold of a new human destiny that would follow some catastrophic event (floods, war, fire). In his prophetic texts, Leonardo, too, captured the fervour and anxiety caused by the onslaught of socio-political events, even though he was also writing his prophecies for reasons of entertainment. In fact, he adopted many themes from oracular pronouncements made at the close of the fifteenth century. Not only does he continually use the future tense in nearly all his prophecies to create a vision of impending doom, but he also makes great use of apocalyptic language: exclamations (“O

quanti fien quelli che!” [“Oh! how many will they be who”], “O quanti grandi edifizii fieno ruinati” [“Oh! how many great buildings will be ruined”], “O quanti voti, o quanti morti, o quanta separazion d’amici e di parenti” [“Oh! how many vows! Oh! how many deaths! Oh! how many partings of friends and relations!”]); war and destruction (“ruine”); terrible sounds (“gran romori”); visions (e.g., the dream riddle); and Biblical references, as well as the speculations regarding the fate of humanity that the above events provoked in the collective conscience of the Italian population. In combining all these elements, he joins others in the general panic by offering a “moral” prognosis of his own regarding the future of humanity based on its present behaviour. The textual evidence presented thus far and the issues raised in the previous chapters have demonstrated that Leonardo, in addition to his immediate reasons and influences for writing his literary texts, also tends to assume a strong personal moral position. This is certainly true in the *Profezia* as well. Similarly, political events might also have simply been a pretext for Leonardo to denounce human corruption and vanity and to reinforce his pleas for a moral renewal of humanity.

The rhetoric of irony, adopted by Leonardo on several occasions, heightens the effect of the harsher and more direct criticisms in the collection, but also inevitably leads to a moral discourse, for it expresses the cynicism of an individual who is aware of the world’s complexities and ambiguities. Irony in the *Profezia* also functions as a rhetorical attempt to give shape to an “unidealized existence” (Frye, *Anatomy* 223), for the attempt itself is driven by an awareness that a reality that is morally superior to the current one can exist and be realized. Moreover, the prophecies described as exaggerated and sometimes macabre emphasize the moral climate:

Delli asini bastonati. O natura instaccurata, perché ti se’ fatta parziale,
facendoti ai tua figli d’alcuni pietosa e benigna madre, ad altri crudelissima e

dispietata matrigna? Io veggo i tua figlioli esser dati in altrui servitù senza mai benifizio alcuno, e in loco di remunerazione de' fatti benifizi, esser pagati di grandissimi martiri, e spender sempre la lor vita in benifizio del suo malefattore. (ed. Vecce 125)

[Of Asses that are beaten. O indifferent Nature! Wherefore art thou so partial, being to some of thy children a tender and benignant mother, and to others a most cruel and pitiless stepmother? I see thy children given up to slavery to others, without any sort of advantage, and instead of remuneration for the good they do, they are paid with the severest suffering, and spend their whole life in benefiting their oppressor. (trans. Richter 293)]

Though the ass was very commonly used to facilitate physical labour, Leonardo opts to highlight the cruel and unjust fate of this animal, exacerbated by Nature's cruelty and indifference.³³⁴ His description creates a scene of moral intensity, in particular through his invocation to nature and comparison of nature to a cruel stepmother rather than a gentle mother ("O natura instaccurata, perché ti se' fatta parziale, facendoti ai tua figli d'alcuni pietosa e benigna madre, ad altri crudelissima e dispietata matrigna?") ["Wherefore art thou so partial, being to some of thy children a tender and benignant mother, and to others a most cruel and pitiless stepmother?"]. Leonardo expresses definite convictions regarding the illtreatment of asses (which should be taken as his overall opinion towards animals) as his choice of words and phrases in this prophecy suggest: "servitù" ["slavery"], "esser pagati di grandissimi martiri" ["they are paid with the severest suffering"], and "in benifizio del suo malefattore" ["in benefiting their oppressor"]. Metaphorically, the prophecy may represent menial human labourers, who, like the ass, are often abused and shown much social injustice

³³⁴ Leonardo's sensitivity towards animals is briefly described by Vasari: "E non avendo egli, si può dir, nulla e poco lavorando, del continuo tenne servitori e cavalli, de' quali si diletto, e particolarmente di tutti gli altri animali, i quali con grandissimo amore e pazienza sopportava e governava. E mostrollo che spesso passando da i luoghi dove si vendevano uccelli, di sua mano cavandoli di gabbia e pagatogli a chi li vendeva il prezzo che n'era chiesto, li lasciava in aria e volo, restituendoli la perduta libertà" (Bellosi, and Rossi 546-47) ["His charming conversation won all hearts, and although he possessed nothing and worked little, he kept servants and horses of which he was very fond, and indeed he loved all animals, and trained them with great kindness and patience. Often, when passing places where birds were sold, he would let them out of their cages and pay the vendor the price asked" (Hinds 157).] It is also believed that Leonardo was a vegetarian.

by those who employ them. In both possible cases, Leonardo seems to be asking nature why the same moral laws are not applied to all living creatures, in particular when the harsh treatment, like the one above, is so evidently undeserved. Leonardo is underscoring the moral ambiguity pervading certain human actions and decisions, for it is unclear why some creatures are treated so poorly. Indeed, the many implicit and explicit prophecies in which questionable human behaviour is targeted constitute a moral commentary on the human condition.

Certainly, the prophecy analyzed above, as well as many others in the collection, present a moral dilemma in which Leonardo has – either directly or indirectly – assumed a moral stance. The sensitivity he displays in some of his prophecies is evidence that it is imperative to live according to moral laws, rather than in indifference and relativism in the face of ethics, and to measure human behaviour against inflexible moral standards. Because Leonardo invokes nature in the prophecy on the ass and does so in “Della dote delle fanciulle” [“Of Dowries for Maidens”],³³⁵ he may, once again, be adhering to the universal moral laws of *Necessità* discussed in the first two chapters of this study. Indeed, unlike Savonarola and perhaps many of the prophets active in Leonardo’s lifetime, Leonardo’s moral standards do not seem to be bound to any religious texts and teachings, or to a specific society, or to any political context for that matter.³³⁶ Much of the late fifteenth-century prophecy is reflected in Leonardo’s own prophecies, yet the artist’s appeal for moral renewal seems tied to a greater cosmic good. Leonardo, it may be deduced thus, is not motivated by politics and makes no such pretences, but simply seems driven to condemn immoral

³³⁵ “Certo e’ par qui che la natura voglia spegnere la umana spezie, come cosa inutile al mondo e guastatrice di tutte le cose create.” Please see above for the full text of the prophecy.

³³⁶ Some believe that Savonarola’s fate was sealed because his moral and spiritual messages were too closely intertwined with politics. He was openly critical of Pope Alexander VI Borgia who threatened sanctions against Florence unless Savonarola was silenced.

behaviour on the grounds that it is his duty as a human being to show moral responsibility for the greater good of humanity. Indeed, the *Profezia* are still very deeply evocative of Leonardo's personal beliefs and sensitivities and are intimately connected with his moral sense of what is right and wrong.

The fact that Leonardo framed his moral commentary within a prophetic context is not only reflective of the time in which he wrote his prophecies, but also of Leonardo's ability to manipulate conventions – be they literary or not – and exploit circumstances for his own means and messages. In this regard, it is tempting to return to the theory constructed by Gombrich that the *Profezia* might have been intended for a larger project including the “I diluvii” writings and the letter “Al Diodario di Soria.” Were these three separate bodies of texts combined to represent a single work, the sequential order of events described in each would culminate in a final vision reminiscent of an apocalyptic scene, a prognosis very much in the style of those of fifteenth-century prophecy and prophets. Moreover, the depiction of the final catastrophic vision described in “I diluvii” would suggest that the human behaviour described in the single texts of the *Profezia* leads to such an end, and that Leonardo himself has envisioned misfortune as an appropriate sentence for the actions of human beings. If human beings warrant such a tragic misfortunate end, Leonardo is measuring humanity against very high ethical standards.

The application of riddle conventions no doubt facilitates this expression by Leonardo. The nature of the riddle implies power over the solver because only the riddler knows the mystery concealed behind the riddle text. Motivated by cultural and socio-political contexts, as the substance of the *Profezia* was, Leonardo uses this enigmatic quality of the riddle to claim for himself the authority to predict an ominous future for human society and

to know which behaviour would contribute to such an end. Much like a prophet himself, he is privy to a greater truth that many are incapable of seeing but that enables him to see beyond the mundane and accepted customs in human society. In the case of the *Profezia*, he understands the immorality attached to certain human behaviours. As the riddler, therefore, Leonardo holds a privileged position, for he is able to impart deeper knowledge to those who, in his view, are blind to the consequences of their actions. Borystawski's insightful definition of the riddle as a "transition from the state of obscurity to the state of enlightenment" (12) lays bare the formation and completion of the riddle process. Once the riddle is solved, the solver experiences a sense of enlightenment and is faced with a solution that has revealed a notion in a different light. Because Leonardo's descriptions of the solutions – be they inanimate objects, animals, concepts, or human acts – are generally moral in nature, the process from obscurity to enlightenment is a hoped-for instant of reflection upon unexamined behaviour aimed at altering it for a better and morally-correct human society. Though Leonardo holds the key at the beginning, he metaphorically hands it to his audience, thus bestowing on posterity the power to avoid the future that, in his *Profezia*, he seems to be prophesying for the human race.

CONCLUSION

Leonardo's *Bestiario*, *Favole*, *Facezie*, and *Profezia* are collections comprised of fragmented texts that bring to light his views on the nature of morality in human life. The order of presentation in this dissertation reinforced the connection between the four collections in its demonstration of how Leonardo, in his composition of the *Bestiario*, distances himself from some of the conventions of a primarily medieval genre to call attention to the power of reason and experience as human factors able to interpret and to cooperate with nature; how, in both the *Bestiario* and particularly in the *Favole*, he posits the idea of a humanity whose behaviour is governed by natural laws that work in favour of the common good when understood and respected by human beings; how, in the *Facezie*, he offers a concrete picture of the reality of his time in order to show the outcome of a humanity that is flawed and has failed to follow moral codes that benefit all; and, finally, what, as illustrated in the *Profezia*, he conceives as a just end for a human condition that has disillusioned Leonardo with its poor decisions and conduct.

The conclusions in this dissertation have been drawn by examining Leonardo's four literary collections in specific contexts: history, literary, and philosophical. Consequently, this methodology has shown Leonardo's intentionality as a writer, one who not only belongs to genre traditions but who also employs (and, at times, manipulates) specific genre conventions, and as a thinker who comments on ethical issues concerning and affecting humankind. It has demonstrated the often neglected importance of the *Bestiario*, *Favole*, *Facezie*, and *Profezia* in the spectrum of Leonardo's thought and works. In particular, the present study has emphasized the moral dimension in the four literary collections which constitutes the vital message in these writings and fully reveals Leonardo's voice. In fact, the

three contexts – history, literary, and philosophy – were originally selected in order to draw attention to the moral nature of these writings.

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