

Intertextuality in Erasmus' Correspondence: Analysis of Textual Echoes and their Assessment

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Abstract

The backbone of this paper focuses on a selection of letters written by Erasmus to the monk Servatius Rogerus and one addressed to his friend Jacob Batt. By way of introduction, I address the theoretical principles that Erasmus elaborates in his work *De Conscribendis Epistulis*, with the aim of showing the coherence of this humanist between his didactic proposal and the elaboration of his letters. I then go on to identify the sources that the Dutch humanist uses both explicitly and implicitly in his correspondence.

Introduction

I intend to give an overview of the humanist's literary production. First, I will deal with the theoretical principles that Erasmus elaborates in his work *De Conscribendis Epistulis*. Then, I will examine several letters written by Erasmus, alluding to aspects that he deals with in other works and that are present in his missives, since around the same dates, circa 1487, he wrote poems and his *Adagia* that will see the light of day in 1500.

Didactic Proposal of the *De Conscribendis Epistulis* for the Elaboration of the Missives

Erasmus of Rotterdam published the definitive edition of *De Conscribendis Epistulis* in Basel in 1522. The Dutch philologist establishes the use of the letter as a conversation between absent persons according to the classical style¹, as it appears in the treatise *On Style*, attributed to Demetrius of Falero (*Demetr. Eloc.* 4.223); also, in Cicero in the missive addressed to Lucius Papirius Peto (*Cic. Fam.* 9.21.1) and likewise, in Seneca in one addressed to Lucilius (*Sen. Ep.* 75.1). On the other hand, the humanist² states that the epistles are the literary reflection of the Latin language spoken by the educated classes, as he formulates linguistic guidelines when writing the missives that belong to the sphere of the cultivated man. In the same ideological line, we quote two Renaissance authors, Juan Luis Vives³ and Justus Lipsius⁴; Erasmus, Vives and Lipsius understand conversational language in the same way as Hofmann⁵, Hiersche⁶ and Stevens⁷ would do in the 20th century; all of them agree in considering that colloquialisms are typical of the oral expression of the most educated layers of society. It is worth noting, as a novel contribution, Erasmus' nuance with regard to spoken Latin⁸. The humanist makes it clear that not all the expressions of the language spoken in the various spheres of life are appropriate, and he differentiates between a Latin spoken by the educated social class *sermo familiaris*, as opposed to a spoken Latin full of incorrectness (*vulgar Latin*). Next, our scholar proposes Cicero⁹ and Terence as models, since they express themselves in a clear, fluent and brilliant accessible style¹⁰.

¹Est enim (quod scite scriptum est a Turpilio comico) epistola absentium amicorum quasi mutuus sermo". (Erasmus, 1529, fol.10v).

²Quod si quis non dignatur epistolae vocabulo, nisi quae priuatis de rebus inter amicos obambulet [...] et quod solemus cum amicis confabulantes, miscebimus, si videbitur, non solum multa, verumetiam varia. Huic generi magis congruet atticismus, ac stilus humilior". (Erasmus, 1529, fols.10v - 11r).

³Sed ut de Cicerone loquar, eius epistolae adeo sermonem eius domesticum et familiarem exprimunt, ut ego illum non aliter cum uxore, cum liberis, servis, familiaribus, in foro, in campo, in balneo, in cubiculo, in triclinio locutum existimem". (Vives, 1782, p. 298).

⁴De Stilo: certum, et veterum exemplo. Testatum est, simplicem eum esse debere, sine cura, sine cultu; similiter cottidiano sermoni. Itaque Demetrius, ut dialogum [=Demetr. Eloc. 4.223] Epistolam scribi vult et ipse Cicero, texti eam quotidianus uerbis [=Cic. Fam. 9.21.1]. Seneca apposite: qualis sermo meus esset, si una sederemus aut ambularemus, illaboratus et facilis: tales uolo esse epistolas meas [=Sen. Ep. 75. 1]". (Lipsius, 1591, p. 18).

⁵(Hofmann, 1929, pp. 209-213). (Corominas, 1958, p. 2).

⁶(Hiersche, 1970, p. 169).

⁷(Stevens, 1931, p. 182).

⁸Quamquam ne tum quidem omnia placebant doctis, quae vulgo in conciliabulis, theatris, aut castris iactarentur, et erant in libris eruditorum, ad quae resisteret plebeius lector. Nunc vero latine loquendi consuetudini, non a foris aut conciliabulis idiotarum, sed a probatis autoribus petitur". (Erasmus, 1529, fols. 7r 7v).

⁹On Quintilian's expression "dulcis, et candidus, et fusus", translated as "sweet", "unbending" and "detail-oriented", see: (Soriano, 2015, p. 48).

¹⁰Quid Ciceronis oratione candidius, quid apertius? [...] Quid Terentiano sermone luculentius?". (Erasmus, 1529, fols. 7r -7v).



In a letter to Cornelius Geritz¹¹ (circa 1460-1531) our Dutch philologist¹² makes a classification of his models for his poetry and prose works; for his poetry he follows Vergil, Horace, Ovid, Juvenal, Statius, Martial, Claudian, for his prose writings he mentions Cicero, Quintilian, Sallust and Terence¹³. I have respected the order of mentioning the authors, given by Erasmus. The letters selected for the commentary contain as sources authors that he proposes for both poetry and prose; from the facts it can be inferred that in his missives the humanist is totally innovative, he uses these sources in the service of the expression of the affective phrase.

In his manual *De conscribendis Epistulis*, he identifies the *sermo familiaris* as the expression and manifestation of the affections. He considers¹⁴ that the affective phrase is present in the different kinds of letters, both private and public, as well as in literary works. In particular, he gives the example of Vergil, where the poet uses the *verba (figurae dictionis)* in the service of the affections¹⁵. He also cites Cicero's speeches¹⁶, among his works he mentions *In Verrem*.

Erasmus¹⁷ considers that the expression of the affections should be reflected in both *res* and *verba* through the reciprocal and continuous involvement of content and form of expression. In this framework, the *res* and the *verba* allude to a series of stylistic figures that can be used with a certain freedom¹⁸. A few centuries later, Hofmann¹⁹ lists various stylistic devices in the affective sentence in the sphere of the *res* and *verba*, just as Erasmus had already done. It should be noted that those addressed to Servatius are very lyrical, the humanist expresses his emotions and feelings in an intense way. The wit and intelligent humour²⁰ to which he refers in his treatise, is revealed in the letter to his friend Iacob Batt. The text reveals Erasmus' genius as a wordsmith, showing the sales as Cicero had already pointed out in his work *De Oratore* (Cic. *De Orat.* 2.236) and Quintilian in his *Institutio* (Quint. *Inst.* 6.3.17).

The scholar leaves a great deal of freedom with regard to the structure and subject matter of the letter. However, he establishes as parts of the epistle what are understood

as parts of a discourse: *salutatio*, *exordium*, *narratio* and *conclusio*²¹. The novelty he brings is to establish a fourth type²², that of the family letter, where all subjects can be included and the flexibility inherent in these writings is accepted. The missives, which are the subject of this study, fit into the novel proposal of the fourth type, the family letter.

Commentary on the Letters to Servatius Rogerus

I am approaching the commentary on the letters in chronological order, following the classification given by Percy Stafford Allen (1906). Before turning to the commentary on the correspondence, it is necessary to clarify that the term love, used in his epistles dedicated to Servatius, refers to a love of friendship as understood by Aristotle and Cicero. The Stagirate deals with this subject in the eighth and ninth book of his *Nicomachean Ethics*. The philosopher perceives friendship (*ἡ φιλία*) as a communion of feelings and life in which friends desire the same for themselves and for each other (Arist. *EN* 8.1156a1). Aristotle states that wanting or loving is the virtue of friends (Arist. *EN* 8.1159a33-35). Cicero (Cic. *Amic.* 27) also tackles this same aspect in his discourse *De Amicitia*, he considers that nature is what pushes towards friendship, towards the natural need to love and he understands the term *Servatius* as the feeling that will bring us this relationship of friendship.

Fourth letter

I begin with the first letter to Servatius, written around 1487. Erasmus²³ writes to Servatius to express his longing for him, although he considers that one way to alleviate the absence of the other is through correspondence. To achieve this effect, on the one hand, he repeats twice the adverb *una* with the sense of "being together as one"; on the other hand, he uses a vocative to refer to his friend as half of his soul: "*o animae dimidium meae*",²⁴ an expression that appears in Horace: "*Et serves animae dimidium meae*". (Hor. *Carm.* 1.3.8). In the seventh letter²⁵ and the thirteenth²⁶ makes use of a similar expression to refer to Servatius.

Erasmus in his poetic compositions of his youth also deals with the concept of the union of two souls in one; he dedicates an elegy to the power of love,²⁷ written around 1487, the same date he wrote the letter, which is the subject of the commentary; the title is: *Elegia de praepotenti virtute Cupidinis pharetrati*. This poem gathers a great deal of medieval wisdom on love which it combines with examples from the Bible and mythology where great men and women lost their love. I adduce verses that portray love as a force that binds two hearts together: "*Sit licet unus amor, necit duo corda duorum / Ut duo duo iam non sint ffect unus amor*". (vv. 13-14)²⁸.

On the basis of the above, it can be inferred that our scholar follows Aristotelian principles about the concept of friendship. Specifically, in one part of Aristotle's treatise (Arist. *EN* 9.1168b5) he points out that all the proverbs dealing with friendship speak of one soul only and state that between friends everything is common, therefore it is to be concluded that friendship is equality; Aristotle identifies the friend as the extension of oneself: "*ἑτερος γὰρ αὐτὸς ὁ φίλος ἐστίν*". (Arist. *EN* 9.1170b5)²⁹. The Latin equivalent is "*alter idem*",³⁰ a phrase used by Cicero in his speech *De Amicitia* (Cic. *Amic.* 80).

²¹(Arcos, 2008, pp. 393-394).

²²"Hactenus igitur epistolarum genera quatuor proposuimus, et suas cuique generi formas subiecimus, nunc ordine de unaquaque specie praecipiemus". (Erasmus, 1529, fol. 56v).

²³"Et si corporum praesentia (quod quidem esset quam iucundissimum) una esse nequimus, quid erit cur non literarum vicissitudine, si non quam saepissime, at interdum tamen, una simus? Has igitur quoties intuebere literas, quoties lectitabis, te Erasmus tuum coram videre, coram audire putes. Quid igitur rerum agitas, o animae dimidium meae?".

²⁴(Erasmus, 1906, p. 77).

²⁵(Erasmus, 1906, p. 80).

²⁶"Ego, cum dolore confici conspicerem sodalem meum carissimum atque animae dimidium meae". (Erasmus, 1906, p. 87).

²⁷(Erasmus, 1956, p. 141).

²⁸(Erasmus, 1956, p. 141).

²⁹(Aristotle, 1960, p. 152).

³⁰(Cicero, 1923, p. 188).

¹¹Cornelius Gerardi Aurelius (ca 1460-1531) is the Latinised name of Cornelius Geritz, also known as Cornelius Goudanus after his home town of Gouda. He was a teacher of Erasmus and a close friend of Robert Gaguin. Probably in October 1508 or 1509 he received the poet's laureate crown from the Emperor Maximilian I. In addition to his numerous humanist writings, he also wrote religious works in which the influence of the modern *Devotio* can be felt. But his lasting importance lies in his role as historian (Goudriaan, 2004, pp. 155-78).

¹²The textual words of Erasmus are as follows: "My authorities in poetry are Maro, Horace, Naso, Juvenal, Statius, Martial, Claudian, Persius, Lucan, Tibullus, and Propertius; in prose, Tully, Quintilian, Sallust, Terence". (Hyma, 1930, p. 158).

¹³(Morgan, 1901, p. 64).

¹⁴Quid enim est in rerum genere, quod literis non committatur? In his gaudemus, dolemus, speramus, metuimus. In iis stomachamur, expostulamus, blandimur [...] His tanqua certissimis ministris, omnes animi affectus, his publica, his priuata, his domestica credimus. (Erasmus, 1529, fol. 54v).

¹⁵Siquidem in libris, quibus titulum incidit, Confessionum, narrat, sibi frequenter ac clamatum fuisse, ubi Iunonis apud Maronem in Troianos stomachantis, verba et affectus caeteris feliciter adumbrasset. (Erasmus, 1529, fol. 28r).

¹⁶In affectibus autem permovendis praecipue. Atque adeo prope sola dominatur amplificatio: cuius quidem vis omnis, in allevando, deprimendo consistit. Ea quod genus est Ciceronis in *Verrem*". (Erasmus, 1529, fol. 72v).

¹⁷"Sed in his quae ad concitandos affectus potissimum valent, his fere rationibus constare videtur, rebus, verbis, amplificatione, figuris, et compositione". (Erasmus, 1529, fol. 71v).

¹⁸"Obscuris allusionibus uti, amphibologiis, significationibus, paromiis, a enigmatibus, clausulis de repete precis. tantum habenda ratio, qua de re, cui scribas". (Erasmus, 1529, fol. 8r).

¹⁹(Corominas, 1958, pp. 7-11).

²⁰"Elegans, faceta, in iocis, acumine deleitet [...] sed ita tamen, ut in tanta uarietate, unum quendam tenorem obtineat, uidelicet, tu semper munda sit, semper erudita, semper sana". (Erasmus, 1529, fol. 9v).



Fifth letter

In the following missive,³¹ dated approximately 1487, Erasmus complains to his friend that he had concealed his illness from him. He thinks that an ailment cannot be silenced, and for this he makes use of some verses by Juvenal (Juv. 9.18-20), where the Latin poet shows that both health and illness are manifested in the body³².

Erasmus then adduces a verse of Ovid: "tectus magis aestuat". (Ov. Met. 4. 64). In view of the above Charles Béné³³ considers that Erasmus has chosen this verse of Ovid, taken from the story of Pyramus and Thisbe, to indicate that the love that was hidden, had its outcome in suicide. From the above, it can be concluded that Béné applies to the term *ignis* the meaning of "amorous passion", a value which it has in Ovid's verse and which he attributes to the state of Servatius. However, throughout the missive, it does not speak of amorous passion, but of a tormented, pained and sorrowful soul: "animi tormenta latentis in aegro". (Juv. 9.18)³⁴. For this reason, it would be convenient to make a different reading of the term *ignis* with the sense of "affliction of the soul"; consequently, the humanist with the cited verse (Ov. Met. 4.64) would want to warn Servatius that the more repressed the *animi tormenta* ("pains of the soul") remain, the greater virulence they show when they have the opportunity to manifest themselves.

Erasmus, in his edition of his *Adagia* 1508, wrote a proverb entitled: "Ignis non exstinguitur igni", the term *ignis*,³⁵ is understood as "malum", as "something that harms" and has a negative value, a meaning that was later used in an emblem by Sebastián Covarrubias (1539-1613) in his work *Emblemas Morales*. Covarrubias, who had a great admiration for the *Adagia* of Erasmus,³⁶ wrote the emblem 84,³⁷ which has as its motto "tanto magis aestuat". (Ov. Met. 4. 64). The epigram also associates *ignis* with something negative, with "pain", "anger" and "grief", which ignite the chest and become very strong if we contain them.

This interpretation of the meaning of *ignis* gains force if we continue reading the following lines of his letter, for Erasmus reproaches his friend for having concealed his suffering and the fact that he suffered it in solitude; he states that if Servatius opts for a voluntary death, he will die at the same time as he does ("*Ergone vis solus portare angustias pectoris tui, ergone vis sponte perire et una amantissimum tui occidere?*")³⁸.

In this context he repeats the adverb "una" with the same meaning as in the previous letter,³⁹ indicating unity. This concept of being two persons with one soul also appears at the beginning of this missive when he says that he does not know whether to console his friend or to be consoled ("Quamquam ego qui te consolari cupio, ipse magis consolandus sum").⁴⁰ Finally, he conveys his great regret by a series of exclamatory accusatives⁴¹ ("Heus impium animum, o mentem inhumanam!")⁴² and alludes to the expression: "Vae misero mihī". (Ter. Hau. 917), from the comedy the *Heauton timorumenos* ("the executioner of himself"), a phrase which he attributes to

³¹(Erasmus, 1906, pp. 78-79).

³²"Quamquam ego qui te consolari cupio, ipse magis consolandus sum, cum quia quia nullum calamitatis genus superesse videtur quod non in dies experiar, tum quia iamdudum nihil omnium rerum molestius fero atque acerbius quam tuas unius miseras [...] unde haec nata est assidua praeter solitum taciturnitas, unde ista in vultu aegri species? Profecto, ut ille ait, Deprendas animi tormenta latentis in aegro / Corpore, deprendas et gaudia, sumit utrumque / Inde habitum facies [=Juv. 9.18-20]". (Erasmus, 1906, p. 78).

³³(Béné, 1969, p. 33).

³⁴(Erasmus, 1906, p. 78).

³⁵"Ignis non exstinguitur igni: Πῦρ οὐ σβέννυται πῦρ. Igni non exstinguitur ignis. Malum malo non tollitur, ira non sedatur iracundia, sed ferocitas sedatur lenitate, malum patientia tollitur, iniuria beneficio vincit". (Erasmus, 1508, fol. 204v).

³⁶(Hernández, 2015, p. 23).

³⁷"Emblem 84. Tanto magis aestuat [ignis]: El dolor, el enojo y la congoja \ que el pecho enciende en ardiente fuego". (Covarrubias, 1610, fol. 184r).

³⁸(Erasmus, 1906, p. 78).

³⁹(Erasmus, 1906, p. 77).

⁴⁰(Erasmus, 1906, p. 78).

⁴¹Hofmann points out that exclamatory expressions are a resource for the manifestation of feelings, whether positive or negative (Corominas, 1958, pp. 12-14).

⁴²(Erasmus, 1906, p. 78).

Menedemus, one of the protagonists of Terence's comedy, but which is actually uttered by Cremes in his dialogue with Menedemus.

Seventh letter

I turn to the seventh epistle,⁴³ the text begins with the portrait of Servatius as a very cruel person; he compares his affections to the hardness of rock and reiterates in the following lines his insensitivity, while alluding to a hexameter of Vergil to express the outrage that his friend has given him:⁴⁴ Nec lachrimas victus dedit, aut miseratus amantem est. (Verg. A. 4.369) draws a parallel between his situation, where Erasmus claims the affection of Servatius whom he portrays as a person harder than stones, with the one described in Vergil's hexameter. In the aforementioned verse, the Roman poet represents Aeneas as a cold character, as he neither weeps nor pities Dido, an epic figure, on the other hand, endowed with a great warmth of passions in the Vergilian text.⁴⁵ The topic of the hardness of feelings and its comparison with the properties of stones appears in the ninth letter⁴⁶ and thirteenth⁴⁷. The literary antecedents of this commonplace can be found in the archaic Greek poets. I mention Pindar and his poem *Encomium of Theoxenus of Tenedos*:⁴⁸ "Εξ ἀδάμαντος ἢ / σιδάρου κεχάλευται μέλαιναν καρδίαν / ψυχρὰ φλογί". (Pi. Fr. 123, 5-6); this topic is also alluded to by Hesiod in his *Works and Days*: "ἀλλὰ ἀδάμαντος ἔχον κρατερόφρονα θυμόφρονα θυμόν". (Hes. Op. 147). Among the Latin poets it is also used, for example in Ovid (Ov. Ars 1.659) (Ov. Met. 9.615) and in Martial (Mart. 7.99).

Erasmus picks up this same topic in one of his youthful poems, composed around 1487, entitled: *Oda Amatoria*: "Frustra, nam scopulis tu surdior⁴⁹ usque marinis / tu rupe quavis durior". (vv.19-20).⁵⁰ Cornelis Reedijk thinks that this poem was composed around the same time as this letter was written⁵¹.

Then, in view of Servatius's hostile attitude towards him, he offers him some verses of Terence from the *Eunuch* (Ter. Eu. 91-94), in order to make him change his ways. Servatius his feelings similar to those claimed by Phaedria in Terence's example.

One line below, our philologist uses the word *ffuses* on two occasions. The first time,⁵² he uses it to refer to himself and he begs Servatius to put down her negative attitude towards him. To do so, he reworks or transforms part of the following verse from Vergil: "si quis adhuc precibus locus". (Verg. A. 4.319),⁵³ following a familiar style, according to Charles Béné.⁵⁴

Erasmus says "si ullus precibus meis apud te locus ffuses",⁵⁵ unlike Vergil, determines the dative *precibus* with the possessive adjective *meis*, used with emphatic value. In Vergil's verse, Dido demands from Aeneas the commitment that comes with *fides*, which Aeneas clearly does not fulfil. In Erasmus' text, the humanist claims his affection for Servatius, which, according to the facts, is not reciprocated by him. The

⁴³(Erasmus, 1906, pp. 79-80).

⁴⁴"At tu saxis durior durissimis, quo rogaris amplius, eo obfirmas animum durius, eo inexorabilior redderis, ita ut non iniuria Vergilianum illud de te conqueri possim, Nec lachrimas victus dedit, aut miseratus amantem est. [=Verg. A. 4, 369]. Quid id ego, mi Seruati, esse dixerim, duritiemne an pertinaciam". (Erasmus, 1906, p. 80).

⁴⁵(Blair, 1819, p. 271).

⁴⁶"Et quidem, mi Seruati, quis tam saxei pectoris est, quem tua talis non flere cogat epistola?". (Erasmus, 1906, p. 83).

⁴⁷"At tu adamante durior in tua usque sententia persistis". (Erasmus, 1906, p. 86).

⁴⁸(Feam, 2020, p. 81).

⁴⁹Horace uses a similar expression: "Surdior" (Hor. Carm. 3.7.21).

⁵⁰(Erasmus, 1956, p. 144).

⁵¹(Erasmus, 1956, p. 143).

⁵²"An forte eo ingenio es, quo pertinaces esse puellae solent, ut voluptati tibi sit cruciatus meus, et sodalis tui tibi gaudia dolor risumque pariant lachrimae?". (Erasmus, 1906, p. 80).

⁵³(Virgil, 1916, p. 442).

⁵⁴(Béné, 1969, p. 33).

⁵⁵(Erasmus, 1906, p. 80).

second⁵⁶ occasion on which he uses the word “ffuses” is in the form of a vocative and is accompanied by the superlative adjective “dulcissime”, in this case referring to Servatius in a very affectionate way. The Dutchman uses this word in the same sense as Catullus did⁵⁷ to refer not to just any friend, but to those for whom he felt a special affection, such as Veranius and Fabullus (Catul. 12.13; 47.6). Also in the thirteenth letter,⁵⁸ on this occasion he links the accusative noun sodalem to the superlative adjective “carissimum”. Near the end of the seventh letter, he elaborates a hexameter in the form of a lament, where he really launches his regret into the air, not expecting a reply: “Sed quid ego has incassum effundo querelas?”.⁵⁹

The humanist also uses a similar expression in one of his youthful poems. In his poem,⁶⁰ written around 1483, he expresses his complaints in his *Carmen Bucolicum*: “Auribus ffuses refugit Gunifolda querelas (v.31);⁶¹ Nil lacrimas miserata meas: nil flexa querelis”. (v.102).⁶²

Ninth letter

I am commenting on the ninth missive,⁶³ written around 1487, where Erasmus establishes a dialogue with the absent and the illusion of his presence,⁶⁴ it is for this reason that he brings to mind Vergil’s⁶⁵ verse “Absens absentem auditque videtque”. (Verg. A. 4.83).⁶⁶ The reference to Vergil’s hexameter adds a strong emotional charge to his missive. The poet’s intention is to show his feelings whenever he is separated from his friend Servatius. The aforementioned verse shows Dido, always thinking of Aeneas and even though she is far away, she hears her beloved and sees him.

On the subject of friendship and distance, it is worth recalling Aristotle who focused on this aspect in his treatise (Arist. EN 8.1157b8-11). The Greek philosopher discriminates between those who live with their friends and others who would act as friends but distance separates them, yet they are in a position to act as such and distance does not destroy the friendship, only the act.

He ends the letter⁶⁷ by referring to his disagreement with Servatius which he has not been able to settle and concludes with some verses from Vergil (Verg. A. 4.449; 451) to express his sadness. It should be noted that both hexameters of the epic poet show modifications in the missive, following a familiar style according to Charles Béné.⁶⁸

⁵⁶“Itaque, sodalium dulcissime, si ullus precibus meis apud te locus superest”. (Erasmus, 1906, p. 80).

On the meaning of “sodalis” with a special meaning see: (Baños, 2003, pp. 364-365).

⁵⁷ On the meaning of “sodalis” with a special meaning see: (Baños, 2003, pp. 364-365).

⁵⁷“Ego, cum dolore confici conspicerem sodalem meum carissimum atque animae dimidium meae”. (Erasmus, 1906, p. 87).

⁵⁸ (Erasmus, 1906, p. 80).

⁵⁹ Cornelis Redijk sees this poem as an elegant pastoral elegy, he finds allusions throughout the poem to the Aeneid, Virgil’s Eclogues and Georgics, Horace’s Odes, Tibullus and Ovid’s Metamorphoses (Tracy, 1972, pp. 22-23).

⁶⁰ (Erasmus, 1956, p. 137).

⁶¹ (Erasmus, 1956, p. 139).

⁶² (Erasmus, 1906, pp. 83-84).

⁶³ (Bénévent, 2002, p. 66).

⁶⁴ (Virgil, 1916, p. 428).

⁶⁵ “Illa me tibi refert absentem, illa Seruatio me coniungit absenti, ut aptissime illud Virgilianum mihi conveniat: Absens absentem auditque videtque [= Verg. A. 4, 83]”. (Erasmus, 1906, p. 83).

⁶⁶ “Utut se res habet, plane edicito: pudenti enim animo nescio an quidquam sit molestius. Quod si hac una in re te exorare nequeo, et ut apud Virgilium est, Misero lacrimae voluntur inanes, [= Verg. A. 4.449] / Mortem oro, taedet coeli convexa tueri. [=Verg. A. 4.451]”. (Erasmus, 1906, p. 84).

⁶⁷ (Béné, 1969, p. 33).

⁶⁸ “ita ut non iniuria Virgilianum illud de te conqueri possim, Nec lacrimas victus dedit, aut miseratus amantem est [=Verg. A. 4.369]. Quid id ego, mi Seruati, esse dixerim, duritiemne an pertinaciam”. (Erasmus, 1906, p. 80).

As he did in the seventh letter,⁶⁹ the humanist again tries to draw a parallel between his feelings towards Servatius, with the situation recounted by Vergil in the fourth book where the impossibility of understanding between Dido and Aeneas becomes evident. Precisely, in the first example, with an added form misero, our scholar modifies the following verse of Vergil: “lacrimae voluntur inanes”. (Verg. A. 4, 449).⁷⁰ The epic poet represents Aeneas immutable in his decision and lets the tears flow uselessly; however, it has been disputed whether the tears belong to Aeneas or to Dido and Anna and even, following Servius, to all three.⁷¹ In Erasmus, on the other hand, the text is clear that the adjective “misero” refers to the tears of the unfortunate humanist rolling down his cheeks.

The last verse of Vergil (Verg. A. 4. 451)⁷² to which Erasmus refers is “mortem orat; taedet caeli convexa tueri”. (Verg. A. 4. 451) . However, in the missive, the text appears modified, in this case replacing orat from the Vergilian poem with “oro”. The change of person entails a change in meaning, if in Vergil it is Dido who has the vision of her death, with the new reading (“oro”) it is the humanist who has the vision of his own death.

Thirteenth letter

I take the last letter selected, addressed to Servatius and dated circa 1488.⁷³ In this missive, the scholar stresses the importance of friendship,⁷⁴ as he considers that life without a friend is not life, and therefore says: “sine amico vitam non vitam”.⁷⁵ It seems that the humanist had Cicero and his treatise *De Amicitia* in mind and reworked Cicero’s expression: “sine ostrill,vita esse nullam”. (Cic. Amic. 86).⁷⁶ On this aspect, Charles Béné⁷⁷ points out that Erasmus sometimes reworks or transforms the texts of Latin authors, following a familiar style as already indicated on other occasions.

Returning to the subject of friendship and its scope, Aristotle (Arist. AN. 8.1155a5-6) points out the importance of it, for no one would want to live without friends, even if he possessed all other goods. In his letter to Servatius, the Dutchman makes clear his loving friendship for him,⁷⁸ but he feels that his friendship is not reciprocated; in a tone of complaint he uses a verse from Vergil’s Eclogues, somewhat modified. In the original text, the epic poet says: “Non illum ostril possunt mutare labores”. (Verg. Eccl. 10.64).⁷⁹ by means of the pronoun illum Vergil alludes to the law of love that cannot be changed no matter how many evils befall one.

On the other hand, in the missive, the humanist replaces the demonstrative pronoun that appears in Vergil “illum” with the value of “the law of love” with the personal pronoun “te”, a pronoun linked to Servatius, with the sense of “your way of feeling”; in other words, Erasmus with the option “Te numquam ostril poterunt mutare labores”⁸⁰ means the opposite of what Vergil expressed in his hexameter, i.e. “that no matter how hard he tries, Servatius will not change the way he feels”, he shows the other side of the coin, if there is no love, nothing can be done.

⁶⁹ (Virgil, 1916, p. 452).

⁷⁰ “Servius: Mens immota manet. Ad illud refertitur [...] Lacrymae inanes [...] quidam tamen lacrymas inanes vel Aeneae, vel Didonis, Vel Annae, vel omnium accipiunt. (Burmans, 1746, p. 550). Variorum: ita et mens Aeneae licet lacrimis Didonis et Annae commoveatur et tundatur, tamen immota manet”. (Burmans, 1746, p. 551).

⁷¹ (Virgil, 1916, p. 452).

⁷² (Erasmus, 1906, pp. 86-87).

⁷³ “Ergone deserto sodali viduus et sine amico instituo vivere ? At equidem sine amico vitam non vitam, imo mortem puto”. (Erasmus, 1906, p. 86).

⁷⁴ (Erasmus, 1906, p. 86).

⁷⁵ (Cicero, 1923, p. 192).

⁷⁶ (Béné, 1969, p. 33).

⁷⁷ “Egoque eo ingenio sum (si a me ipso laudandus sum) tu nihil in hac vita amicitiae antefendum putem, nihil avidius expetendum, nihil studiosius conservandum. Veruntamen quoniam iuxta Virgilium Te numquam nostri poterunt mutare labores, hac, quam omnium mihi cupio maxime, carendum mihi est”. (Erasmus, 1906, p. 86).

⁷⁸(Virgil, 1876, p. 24).

⁷⁹ (Erasmus, 1906, p. 86).

⁸⁰ “durum quidem: sed levius sit patientia / quidquid corrigere est nefas. [=Hor. Carm. 1.24.19-20]”. (Erasmus, 1906, p. 86).

He then offers two verses from Horace: “Durum, sed levius sit patientia / quidquid corrigere est nefas”. (Hor. Carm. 1.24.19-20)⁸¹ to indicate that his situation is difficult, but with patience it becomes easier to bear what cannot be changed. The term “patientia”, understandable as “moderation of the passions”, has its equivalent in the Greek form “μετριοπάθεια”, an expression used by Aristotle to indicate the just measure of his emotions without extirpating them (Arist. EN. 2.1105b28-29; 2.1106a 25-30; 2.1108a30-b10).

On the other hand, the humanist⁸² lets him know that he will remember Servatius even though he does not remember him⁸³ and brings to mind a verse by Vergil (Verg. A. 4.336)⁸⁴ somewhat modified; in the original version Aeneas tells Dido, also named as Elisa of Tyre that he will remember her as long as he has memory of himself, as long as a breath animates Aeneas’ body (“dum memor ipse mei, dum spiritus hos regit artus”). (Verg. A. 4.336).

In Erasmus’ text, the addressee of the verse is changed: “Dum memor ipse sui, dum spiritus illius artus”;⁸⁵ the scholar opts for the form “mei” instead of “sui” and for “hos artus” instead of “illius artus”. The referent in Erasmus is Servatius, unlike the original verse, the humanist indicates that he will always remember Servatius as long as he has life left. Returning to the thirteenth letter,⁸⁶ the Dutchman asks his friend not to suffer and not to grieve, arguing that from birth one is subject to the dictates of fortune, saying: “homines nos esse, non deos”.⁸⁷ The source of this expression is to be found in Petronius: “homines sumus, non dei”.⁸⁸ (Petr. 75, 2). By indicating the nature of men and not of gods, he intends to reassure Servatius’s tormented spirit, warning him that everything escapes the human being, as he is subject to the inevitable fatum; in line with this, he alludes to a verse from Ovid’s Remedia Amoris: “Et quis non causas mille doloris habet?” (Ov. Rem. 573),⁸⁹ suggesting that all people have a thousand reasons that cause us pain. The theme of “fatum” has been dealt with by different Greek and Roman authors. In Greek tragedy, let us recall Sophocles’ Oedipus Rex, where the protagonists are inevitably pitted against the universe or the gods, always moving towards a fatal outcome by a blind force, the “fatum”. Seneca accepts the Stoic dogma concerning fate (Sen. Ep. 107.11). The wise man obeys his destiny and in doing so performs the supreme act of his freedom. Later on, the subject of “fatum” was developed in Petrarch, who wrote a moral encyclopaedia entitled: De remediis utriusque fortunae, in which he shows how to cope with the harmful effects of both bad and good luck; in the face of fickle Fortune, equanimity is achieved by not allowing oneself to be depressed or seduced by it.⁹⁰

Erasmus in his Adagia makes this concept of destiny as a superior force clear in two of his scholia, which do not appear in his first edition of 1500, published in Paris, but in the second edition of 1508, published in Venice by Aldo Manuzio. One of his mottos is “Fatum immutabile”;⁹¹ our humanist reveals that divine commands are immutable, whereas laws, customs, choices and desires change. Finally, he adduces an

⁸¹ “Ille tamen Servatii sui et meminit et meminere, Dum memor ipse sui, dum spiritus illius artus [= Verg. A. 4.336]”. (Erasmus, 1906, p. 86).

⁸² (Erasmus, 1906, p. 86).

⁸³ (Virgil, 1916, p. 444).

⁸⁴ (Erasmus, 1906, p. 86).

⁸⁵ “Memineris, obsecro, homines nos esse, non deos, [= Petr. 75, 2] eaque lege natos ut omnibus fortunae casibus subiacemus, Et quis non causas mille doloris habet? [= Ov. Rem. 573]. Memineris hanc non tuam unius sed communem omnium sortem esse mortalium”. (Erasmus, 1906, p. 87).

⁸⁶ (Erasmus, 1906, p. 87).

⁸⁷ (Petronius, 1913, p. 172).

⁸⁸ (Erasmus, 1906, p. 87).

⁸⁹ (Martínez, 2014, p. 139).

⁹⁰ “Fatum immutabile. Divina decreta non commutantur, humanae leges pro tempore variantur, quemadmodum et mores et voluntates. Ad id congruet illud ex eodem libro: Οὐ γάρ τ’ αἶψα θεῶν τρέπεται νόος αἰὲν ἐόντων, [= Hom. Od. 3, 147]”. (Erasmus, 1508, fol. 231v).

⁹¹ “Inevitable fatum. Sententiam Homerus eodem libro: Quod homini fati decretum est, id eveniet. In hanc i.e. ἐνθα δ’ ἔπειτα / πείσεται ἄσσοι αἴσσοι κατὰ Κλωθῆς τε βαρεῖαι / γεινομένην νήσαντο λίνω, ὅτε μιν τέκε μήτηρ. [= Hom. Od. 7.196-198]”. (Erasmus, 1508, fol. 232v).

example from Homer (“οὐ γάρ τ’ αἶψα θεῶν τρέπεται νόος αἰὲν ἐόντων”). (Hom. Od. 3.147) to indicate that the will of the gods is unchangeable.

The other motto that appears in his Adagia is *Inevitable fatum*,⁹² he argues that whatever fate determines for man, will come to pass. He then adduces a verse from Homer’s Odyssey (“ἐνθα δ’ ἔπειτα / πείσεται ἄσσοι αἴσσοι κατὰ Κλωθῆς τε βαρεῖαι / γεινομένην νήσαντο λίνω, ὅτε μιν τέκε μήτηρ”). (Hom. Od. 7.196-198), the Greek text also indicates that already at birth the Parcae spin one’s destiny. The inevitable fatum appears in several poems by our scholar; his *Querula doloris*, a composition written around 1487, alludes to fate in verse 8: *Nescio quid misero sorsque deusque parent*. Perhaps around the same date (1487?), he wrote another poem *Ad amicum suum*,⁹³ where he also refers to “fatum”: “Poenitet platen hominis gementem / Flebile fatum”. (vv.175-176). Probably coinciding with the year of publication of his missive, he composed a poem *De patientia*⁹⁴ (circa 1488), specifically mentioning the Parcae: “Hoc voluunt Parcae, hoc ineluctabile fatum / Archanique animi sic voluere deum”. (vv. 47-48).

Letter 119, addressed to Jacob Batt

The subject of the epistle⁹⁵ is the account of Erasmus’ eventful journey to Paris. At the beginning of the document, ⁹⁶ addresses his friend Batt and thanks him for his dealings with him, presenting him as a very close person with whom he shares work and prayers. They were close friends, which is why the Dutchman dedicated an epigram to him on his death: “Ἰάκωβε Βάττε, θάρσσο· / καλῶς θανῶν παλιμφοῖ”.⁹⁷ “Jacob Batt, arm yourself with courage: /he who dies well is reborn”.⁹⁸

This epigram has Theocritus as its source, but he modifies it as he sees fit, giving it a Christianised version. In Erasmus’ epigram to his friend he mentions life after death, whereas in Theocritus life is hope and death despair: “θαρσύν χρῆ, φίλε Βάττε· τάχ’ αὖριον ἔσσοσσε” ἄμεινον. / ἐλπίδες ἐν ζωοῖσιν, ἀνέλπιστοι δὲ θανόντες /”. (Theoc. Id. 4.41-42).⁹⁹ “Courage, friend Batt; tomorrow things may be better. While there is life there is hope; it is the dead who have none”. (Theoc. Id. 4.41-42).¹⁰⁰

In this very short epigram, following Raf Van Rooy (2023, p. 224), our scholar managed to allude not only to the Last Judgement, but also to pagan Greek literature, evoking Theocritus’ Idylls, where a shepherd named Battus is consoled by Corydon, and in these verses life and death are also contrasted. The second line of Erasmus’ epigram, dedicated to Batt, is a very condensed expression of Christian eschatology, and came to have a later life as an adagio in various epitaphs, especially in Basel Cathedral.

Returning to the epistle, throughout the text, the Dutchman in a relaxed tone indicates the attitude he had during the trip to Paris, which was none other than to deceive those who wanted to deceive him, for this reason he says at the beginning of his missive: ¹⁰¹ “*artem arte lusimus*”, ¹⁰² then he says: “*contra Cretensem Cretizavimus*”, ¹⁰³ the literal meaning would be “we act like a Cretan against a Cretan”. The Cretans

⁹² (Erasmus, 1956, p. 179).

⁹³ (Erasmus, 1956, p. 150).

⁹⁴ (Erasmus, 1906, pp. 274-282).

⁹⁵ “Multis nominibus tibi gratias agere debeo, mi Batte [...] ita ut mihi non illius labori modo verum etiam orationi fuerit referenda merces”. (Erasmus, 1906, p. 275).

⁹⁶ (Erasmus, 1956, p. 262).

⁹⁷ The translation is done by me.

⁹⁸ The source for the Greek text is Hopkinson (2015, p. 76).

⁹⁹ “Verum artem arte lusimus et iuxta vetus proverbium contra Cretensem Cretizavimus”. (Erasmus, 1906, p. 275).

¹⁰⁰

¹⁰¹ Octavi Fullat i Genis translates the expression “artem arte ludere” as meaning to “deceive”. (Fullat i Genis, 2002, p. 192).

¹⁰² (Erasmus, 1906, p. 275).

¹⁰³ “Cretiza cum Cretensi. πρὸς Κρήτα κρητίζειν i.e. Adversum Cretensem Cretiza, id est, adversus mendacem mendaciis utere [...] Suidas aliam adagionis causam indicat, scribens Idomeneum Cretensem, cum illi negotium esset datum, ut aes quod e spoliis ab hostibus detractis collectum erat, distribueret, sibi partem longe optimam delegisse”. (Erasmus, 1500, fol. b8r).

were known for their falsehood and there is a Greek word κρητίζειν which means to lie. This expression also appears in the first edition of his *Adagia*. The date of publication of this letter (1500) and the place where it was written (Paris) coincide with the date of the first edition of his *Adagia* (1500), published in Paris. I briefly refer to the proverb “Cretiza cum Cretensi. πρὸς Κρήτα κρητίζειν”.¹⁰⁴ The meaning of the above adage is “to make use of lies against a liar”. Among the authors who handle this turn of phrase, he dwells on the contribution of the author of the *Suda*.¹⁰⁵ The Greek lexicographer explains that Idomeneo the Cretan, when given the task of distributing the copper that had been collected from the spoils of war, chose for himself the best part. Therefore, the humanist considers the expression appropriate also for those who defraud others and fight more intensely for their own interests.

Continuing with the missive, our scholar goes on to narrate his journey, which he considers a tragedy.¹⁰⁶ First of all, he alludes to his fatum that is chasing him from England to his new destination Paris (“*Anglica fata Parisios usque nos sunt persecuta*”).¹⁰⁷ Immediately, by way of irony, he appears as Aeneas confronting Juno, as he expresses it: “Iuno, opinor, aliqua rursus Aeolum in nos excitat”.¹⁰⁸ He evokes some verses from the beginning of the *Aeneid*: “Aeolus haec contra: ‘Tuus, O regina [...]’ (Verg. A. 1.76-77).¹⁰⁹ where Vergil shows Aeolus obeying Juno’s commands. It is the use of epic expressions in this context that produces the satirical effect as a counterpoint.¹¹⁰ During the journey, due to the fatigue of the journey and fearing illness, the humanist decides to hire some horses and presents the owner of the animals as if he were the god Mercury, who he represents as the god of deceit,¹¹¹ since he suspects him,¹¹² he implicitly anticipates the attitude of the man (locator [= “horse lessor and journey companion”]) who will try to deceive him and rob him.

He then tells¹¹³ about the first stop, made with the locator and his son-in-law. With the excuse of resting, at dusk, they stop in a village. A servant girl and the inn where they were originally going to spend the night appear in the scene of the story. The same scenario of the inn and the maid in charge also appears in Petronius’ *Satiricon* (Petr. 90,7). Returning to the missive, after dinner, the scholar describes a scene typical of comedy, in which the maid appears insistently saying that one of the horses had caused some damage; to express this idea, he uses the expression “nescio quid mali”,¹¹⁴ a turn

of phrase that appears in Plautus.¹¹⁵ The locator then relates an alleged accident of his daughter with one of the horses to justify the setting in motion.¹¹⁶

Faced with this situation, Erasmus begins to be aware of the deception and suspicion of the locator and the son-in-law, precisely because of the gestures of both of them, as in the manner of a mime they act by modifying their faces in the face of the facts reported¹¹⁷ (“*Utriusque vultum et gestus curiosius observo*”);¹¹⁸ that is why he adduces an expression of Cicero “*Nisi fingeres, non sic ageres*”. (Cic. Brut. 278)¹¹⁹ with the sense of “unless you pretend, you would not act like that”.

I take another passage from the letter,¹²⁰ where he approaches another village and is forced to spend the night. Erasmus recounts the moments preceding his next stop at an inn, also run by a woman. The humanist uses the expression “*Obscura iam nocte*”,¹²¹ creating an atmosphere of mistrust produced by the darkness of the night, as the young man tells him as a pretext that he does not know where he is and leads him to another inn. With the locution “*Obscura iam nocte*”, he brings to mind a verse by Vergil: “*illi etiam, si quos obscura nocte per umbram*”. (Verg. A. 2.420).¹²² In the aforementioned hexameter, Aeneas refers to the Trojan actions against the Greeks whom they tricked with traps by taking advantage of the darkness of the night, for they had disguised themselves in the armour of the Greeks. If in the epistle the night is equivalent to distrust and deception, in the *Aeneid* the “*nox*” is darkness and suffering. In the aforementioned work of Vergil the word “*nox*” appears very frequently.¹²³ Then, in the narration of his eventful journey,¹²⁴ seeing that the scholar cannot get rid of the locator and his son-in-law, he adduces some verses of Horace from his *Satire* 1.9: “*sicut meus est mos, nescio quid meditans nugarum et totus in illis*”. (Hor. S. 1.9.1-2). The poem is about Horace’s own encounter with an insistent character, whom he hardly knew and from whom he could not get rid of. Regarding this aspect, Manuel Mañas¹²⁵ suggests that the situation described by Horace (Hor. S. 1.9.1-2) can be extrapolated to any time and place; that is why Mañas lists a series of humanists who use this poem as a commonplace. He cites Luis Zapata (16th century), Bartolomé Leonardo de Argensola and Esteban Manuel de Villegas (17th century), Vicente Alcoverro (13th-19th centuries)¹²⁶ and Juan de Salas Calderón (19th century).

¹¹⁵See (Pl. Am. 605) (Pl. Am. 825).

¹¹⁶“*Iam propemodum cenaveramus, cum ministra iuvenem illum una nobiscum accumbentem a convivio sevocat, alteri equo nescio quid mali esse dictitans. Discedit adolescens sed eo vultu ut aliud nuntiatum intellegeres [...] Nos admirari, rogare quidnam accidisset, quod tam inexpectatus atque improvisus adesset. Ait se rem adferre flebilem, filiam suam, eius iuvenis uxorem, ita ab equo calcibus percussam ut iam animam propemodum ageret; tumultuario itinere sese accurrisse, ut eum domum revocaret*”. (Erasmus, 1906, p. 276).

¹¹⁷“*Utriusque vultum et gestus curiosius observo*. In locatore ilico inconstantiam quandam animadverto, in iuvene stuporem qui e regione accumbebat; ac mecum protinus Ciceronianum illud, *Nisi fingeres, non sic ageres* [=Cic. Brut. 278]”. (Erasmus, 1906, p. 276).

¹¹⁸(Erasmus, 1906, p. 276).

¹¹⁹(Erasmus, 1906, p. 276).

¹²⁰“*Obscura iam nocte nescio quid emensi tandem in vicum quandam emersimus. Iuvenis circumspectans fingit se nescire ubinam locorum esset, ducit nos in aedes nescio quas*”. (Erasmus, 1906, p. 277).

¹²¹(Erasmus, 1906, p. 277).

¹²²(Virgil, 1916, p. 344).

¹²³I list below the number of verses in the second book of the *Aeneid*. 2. 135; 2. 361; 2. 397; 2. 420; 2. 590; 2. 621; 2. 754; 2. 795.

¹²⁴“*Iam vico proximi cum essemus, forte praecesserat Anglus una cum iuvene, ego sequor..., sicut meus est mos, nescio quid meditans nugarum et totus in illis* [=Hor. S. 1, 9, 1-2]”. (Erasmus, 1906, p. 277).

¹²⁵(Mañas Núñez, 2008, p. 297).

¹²⁶This practice of using Horace’s poem appears together with other circumstantial poems

¹⁰⁴Fernando García Romero discusses this same aspect about the meaning of the verb κρητίζειν and likewise, alludes to the same source of the *Suda* (κ 2407 Adler): “κρητίζειν τὸ ψεύδεσθαι. Ἰδομενεὺς γὰρ ἐπιτραπείς τὸν τὸν ἀπὸ τῶν λαφύρων χαλκὸν διανεῖμαι τὸν ἄριστον αὐτῷ ἐξείλετο. καὶ ἑτέρα παροιμία· Κρητίζειν πρὸς Κρήτας. ἐπειδὴ ψεύσται καὶ ἀπατεῶνές εἰσι”. (García, 2020, pp. 196-197).

¹⁰⁵“*En tibi alteram narro tragoediam priore etiam atrocior!*”. (Erasmus, 1906, p. 275).

¹⁰⁶(Erasmus, 1906, p. 275).

¹⁰⁷(Erasmus, 1906, p. 275).

¹⁰⁸(Erasmus, 1906, p. 275).

¹⁰⁹(Virgil, 1916, p. 266).

¹¹⁰(Macía, 2011, p. 229).

¹¹¹The god Mercury appears with a rich polysemy, María Delia Buisel values the different attributions and takes into account that he is considered the god of both calculated and unforeseen profits, hence he has become the god of commerce and even of thieves and protector of unscrupulous rogues (Buisel, 2008, pp. 51-52).

¹¹²“*Ego cum iam de via ita essem affectus ut morbum etiam metuerem, coepi de equis conducendis cogitare, non paulo praestare ratus corpusculo quam nummulis parcere [...] Ingreddior, advocatur locator, homo effigie et habitu ita adamussim Mercurium referens ut mihi primo quoque congressu furis suspicionem dederit*”. (Erasmus, 1906, p. 275).

¹¹³“*Ego ut pergeremus hortabar. Ille latronis discipulus causari, equos non esse supra vires defatigandos, satius esse illic pernoctare ac postridie id dispendii anticipata luce sarcire. Non repugnabam magnopere, nihil etiam dum sceleris suspicans*”. (Erasmus, 1906, p. 276).

¹¹⁴(Erasmus, 1906, p. 276).

Once again, the Dutchman tells us of his stay at an inn.¹²⁷ He conveys his mistrust of the innkeeper, who sets the stage for the robbery by wanting Erasmus and his friend to share a room with the locator and his son-in-law. The scholar is wary of the situation described and, by way of an adage, points out that sleeping with the locator and his son-in-law is like handing the sheep to the wolf.

In his book of the Adagia, specifically in its first edition of 1500,¹²⁸ the expression: "Ovem lupo commisisti" is the subject of study. In his Adagia, he suggests as the source of this expression the comedy *The Eunuch* by Terence ("Scelesta, ovem lupo commisisti") (Ter. Eu. 832), specifically indicating that the turn of phrase "Ovem lupo" is uttered by the prostitute Tais in her dialogue with her maid Pitias to express her fear at handing the girl over to the young man Chaereas, who was pretending to be a eunuch. He also alludes to the use of the aforementioned adage to express that if one wants to keep something one must be careful in the choice of the person one puts in charge of this service. The humanist offers an example of Cicero from his *Philippics* (Cic. Phil. 3.11.27) where he portrays Marcus Antonius as the enemy of the state, representing the wolf and the people as the "ovis". He ends the commentary by recalling a passage from the *Iliad* (Hom. Il. 22.262-264). Homer in these verses presents Achilles refusing to make pacts with Hector and compares his situation with the impossibility of making alliances between lions and men, or between wolves and lambs. By way of conclusion, he gives a warning not to entrust any business to the enemy, who will behave abominably towards his adversary, since there is a distrust between the wolf and the lamb because of their innate mistrust.

He ends the letter by evading the two thieves who had annoyingly accompanied him throughout his journey, making use of his cunning,¹²⁹ by going to the Basilica of Saint-Denis, a place that is presented in the letter as practically the end of the journey;¹³⁰ in this way, it can be concluded that the letter presents an annular composition, since it achieves its objective, proposed at the beginning of his missive: "contra Cretensem Cretizavimus".

in a manuscript notebook in the Menéndez Pelayo Library in Santander, ms. 50 (166 ohm), entitled *Entretenimientos poéticos del Exjesuita Dn. Vicente Alcovero* which is dedicated to the Exma. Sra. Duquesa de San Pedro; in this case the anecdote of the Horatian satire fully corresponds to the situation experienced by the Duchess of San Pedro. (Jiménez San Cristóbal, 1999, pp. 262-263.

¹²⁷"Ibi venefica mulier et quid ageretur haud ignara primum suadere coepit ut una potius cubaremus; eos esse viros probos, nec causam esse quo minus illos in cubiculo dormire vellemus. Si quid inter nos haberemus communicandum, id sermone nostrate licere fieri; sin pecuniae nostrae timeremus, illis servandam committeremus, ovem (ut aiunt) lupo [=Ter. Eu. 832]". (Erasmus, 1906, p. 279).

¹²⁸The annotated adage appears in its first edition (1500): "Ovem lupo commisisti: τῷ λύκῳ τὴν οἶν i.e. Lupo ovem. Terentius in Eunuch, Scelesta, ovem lupo commisisti. [=Ter. Eu. 832] De Chaerea ephebo, cui velut Eunuchus virgo soli credita est. Donatus admonet proverbium esse, quod contineat foemineam reverentiam, meretricium sensum. Concinne hoc utemur, quoties ei servandum aliquid committitur, cuius gratia custodem magis oporteat adhiberi. Cicero tertia Philippica: Etenim in concione dixerat se custodem futurum urbis, usque ad calendas Maias, ad urbem exercitum habiturum. O praeclarum custodem, ovium, ut aiunt, lupum! custos ne urbis, an direptor et vexator esset Antonius? [=Cic. Phil. 3, 11, 27] Unde quadrare videtur, quoties inimico negotium committitur, quique nobis pessime velit: propterea quod lupo et agnus genuino quodam odio diffident. Id quod ostendit etiam Homerus in Iliades X: ὥς οὐκ ἔστι λέουσι καὶ ἀνδράσιν ὄρκια πιστά, / οὐδὲ λύκοι τε καὶ ἄρνες ὁμόφρονα θυμὸν ἔχουσιν, / ἀλλὰ κακὰ φρονέουσι διαμπερὲς ἀλλήλοισιν. [=Hom. Il. 22, 262-264]". (Erasmus, 1500, fol. g1r).

¹²⁹"Paulisper rixatus, cum ille nihil se commoveret, ad sacrum me ire fingo; verum recta transmissio flumine Parisios peto, nec prius latronis sicam timere desivimus, quam Dionysius nos moenibus suis exciperet". (Erasmus, 1906, p. 281).

¹³⁰(Erasmus, 1906, p. 281).

Conclusion

The type of letter that the humanist deals with in this selection is the familiar letter, where all subjects can be included and the flexibility inherent to these writings is accepted, as appears in his treatise *De Conscribendis Epistulis*. It should also be noted that in the aforementioned manual, the scholar develops the idea of identifying the affective language with the *sermo familiaris*. Moreover, in his correspondence, Erasmus follows the principles of friendship proposed by Aristotle in his treatise *Nicomachean Ethics*. It has been possible to verify throughout the work that the humanist was in a very creative phase from the literary point of view; specifically, circa 1487 the humanist was elaborating some poems of his youth, around the same time, he had written several letters destined to Servatius, where it is possible to verify in some of them the traces of his poems in his missives. Furthermore, allusions to proverbs can be found in some of his missives. Finally, it is worth noting that throughout his correspondence he uses texts by Roman and Greek authors at his convenience and in a very peculiar way, as he sometimes modifies the original text and even manages to acquire a different meaning from the Greek and Latin passage.

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