

The end of a world? Ruggiero Boscovich and the tradition of didactic poetry.

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Labor omnia vicit
inprobus et duris urgens in rebus egestas.
Virgil, *Georg.*, I, 144.

1. *Boscovich and the Jesuits' didactic poetry*

Boscovich's epics and short poems of didactic genre represent a substantial part of his entire poetic production. Regardless of the unpublished works, they include *De Solis ac Lunae defectibus* (5505 verses in the *editio veneta* of 1760, then 5557 verses in *Les Eclipses*, the French edition of *De Solis*, 1779) and three Latin epigrams published in 1756 in the Arcadi's poetic collection: *In planetarum dispositione*, *De Solis maculis*, and *In Graecam Fabulam Saturni a Iove in regno pulsi*.¹ Astronomy is also involved in the epithalamium for the marriage between the Venetian patrician Giovanni Correr and Adriana Pesaro.² So the didactic verses add up to more than a half of the total amount of Boscovich's verses.

This imposing production (for a Jesuit, whose main activity was pure and applied science) can be well understood on the background of Jesuits' didactic tradition in poetry. Throughout the 17th and the 18th century the Jesuits composed and published hundreds of didactic Latin poems. Haskell (2003, p. 4), probably the most comprehensive study specifically addressed to this subject, includes more than 250 works in their number, though the focus is concentrated on a small group of works mostly published in France and Italy, with a production peak in the 1760s and 1770s. Nevertheless, the number could impressingly grow as the investigation encompasses in its scope the Iberian Peninsula and the Spanish-American world (not to say the Far East), where the influence of the Society of Jesus was powerful.

An appropriate background for the understanding of the role of Latin didactic poetry of the Modern Age – mostly a product of the Jesuits or the circles around them –³ is provided by the pedagogical, aesthetical, philosophical and literary theories of the Society. The aims of such genre can be hardly reduced to the satisfaction of pure didactical tasks, like teaching young pupils or making the scientific results available to a broader and learned audience through something like a popularization activity. In fact, as noted by

Haskell, the most part of the Jesuit didactic poets were teachers in the Society colleges and wrote hexameters in a world where – at least since the middle of the 18th century – Latin was on the wane. Moreover, with the remarkable exception of Boscovich, in most cases the subject of a didactic poem was not the research area of its author: e.g. Orazio Borgondio, who was Boscovich’s predecessor at the chair of mathematics from 1712 until 1740, wrote short didactic poems on the circulation of the blood, the respiration, the navigation, the lightning, etc. (I will return to this point in section 3). Finally, a long and complicated poem in hexameter could hardly teach something to students which were able to easily find the requested information in clearer prose works, maybe endowed with diagrams.

So this kind of didacticism in poetry had no immediate didactic purpose. As obvious as it may seem, it is worthwhile to remember that didactic poetry is, in first instance, *poetry*, i.e. literary work. The theme of the amusement (i.e. the distraction from troubles), which was typical in such classical poetic genres like the bucolic, is often developed by the Jesuit authors in their didactic works. Borgondio and Carlo Noceti, who were both Boscovich’s teachers at the Collegio Romano (Noceti was professor of philosophy; Borgondio taught mathematics) and authors of some didactic poems, tell in their own accounts that they did poetry when they were free from teaching (as reported by Haskell 2003, in particular pp. 6, 192 and 205-206). It is not important here if their accounts truly reflect the real circumstances. Regardless of the ‘truth content’ of such narratives about themselves, the essential aspect is their function in mediating a literary *topos* which was peculiar to Latin philosophy and poetry: the dichotomy *otium/negotium*. Let’s think to the famous *incipit* of Virgil’s *Echlogs*: “*Tytire, tu patulae recubans sub tegmine fagi*”, and Tytirus’s reply to Meliboeus: “*Deus nobis haec otia fecit*”; God gave the mortals a time free from troubles (*otia*) during which they can practise, “careless in the shade”, their poetic skills.⁴ The theme was picked up by Boscovich himself in rhetorically admitting, by the end of the Preface of *De Solis ac Lunae Defectibus*, to cultivate poetry «as a sort of pastime, not professionally» («[...] *ob animi oblectamentum* [...] *non ex officio*»: Boscovich 2012a, p. xxxvii). For a Jesuit, whose most important duty and work (that is *negotium*) was teaching, the time for poetry could only be the *otium*, the respite from the burden of the school.

For a Jesuit didactic author, the cultivation of the poetic virtue could represent a double-faced activity: it was at the same time the *practice of skills* and techniques he had learned in his years as a pupil of rhetoric and *humanae litterae* classes, and the *celebration* of

the ideals and education methods of the Society. The poems were mostly recited in special occasions like inaugurations of buildings and institutions, the opening of the school courses at the Collegio Romano, religious events and feasts. Thus, the celebrative mechanism acted on more levels: celebration of the occasion, celebration of the author of the verses, celebration of Jesuits' pedagogical methods.

This obviously applies to all poetic genres, and there is a plenty of occasion-poetries or celebrative poems in Boscovich's poetical work. It also provides a reason for the importance of the dedicatee at least in Modern Latin poetry. To celebrate someone in celebrating something – and science above all other things – meant to take him into consideration for his role in shaping culture in the most general sense; and celebration was performed through the highest form of classical culture, that is the poetic form. In return for his poetic appreciation, which was a prove of his ability in making verses too, the author could expect direct access to his dedicatee and patronage from him (this was the case of Boscovich's epics *Poema versibus heroicis* in honor of Stanislaus of Poland, 1753, and *Pro Benedicto XIV Pontefice Maximo Soteria*, 1757) and even financial support, as for Boscovich's dedicatory epistle to Louis XVI in *Les Eclipses* (a circumstance in which he was mistaken, as we shall see in section 4).

In the second half of the 18th century the number of didactic poems recited during special occasions remarkably grew. To a certain extent, it was a kind of a vogue – but a vogue guided by the belief that didacticism reflects Jesuits' pedagogical ideals: it celebrates the virtue of work and labour, that is the “sweet burden” of teaching. In this general scheme, popularization was a side effect of a grand purpose: the celebration of Jesuits' teaching-working virtues. Moreover, the sudden disappearance of the didactic Latin poetry as an autonomous literary genre becomes easily understandable. Because such poems were mainly composed and recited *by Jesuits for Jesuits*, they were to follow the fate of their Order, which was suppressed in 1773.⁵

This “celebrating feature” of the Jesuits' Latin poetry – the celebration of the burden of the school – provides the reason for which the classical model of the Jesuit didactic poets was not the great philosophical-cosmological epic of Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, but more generally Virgil's *Georgicorum Libri*, which glorify labour and work as an essential piece of human existence. In Virgil's mind, and consistently with Ottavianus' and Meценate's expectations, *Georgics* could serve as a stimulus for a regeneration based on the

manual labour after the bankruptcy of religious, political and civil values because of the civil wars; so the ideal addressee of Virgil's text is the educated elite which could contribute to this renewal process.⁶

Also in the case of the Jesuits' didactic poetry the audience was formed by the cultivated members of well-to-do families, from which stemmed the most part of the pupils of the Jesuits' colleges. Moreover, by making didactic verses of georgic genre their Jesuit authors could indicate that science – which was their own work as the commitment for teaching and learning – was the most important factor of social development. But instead of the work as the arduous manual labour depicted by *Georgics*, for them the work was the science as daily undertaking for the glory of God, accordingly with Ignatius of Loyola's ideals. The celebration of the work and the celebration of the science meet together in the interface between the Jesuits' values and those expressed by Virgil's poetry (a more detailed account is to be found in Guzzardi 2012).

2) *Boscovich and Virgil*

Boscovich's debt with Virgil, which is particularly evident in the first version of *De Solis ac Lunae Defectibus* (1735 ca.),⁷ can hardly be underestimated.

After some months his appointment as teacher of *humanae litterae* at the Jesuits' College of Fermo, on the middle Adriatic Italian coast, Ruggiero Boscovich wrote to his brother Natale (December 3, 1733) that "the school tires me less than in Rome [...]. Usually I am free in the evening and I can do what I want – which is a great advantage, both for I am not bound, like in Rome, to a material and annoying effort and for I can study for my own".⁸ Remarkably, amongst the manuscripts from those years (end 1733 to beginning 1735) there is the first version, 359 verses long, of the poem *De Solis ac Lunae Defectibus*, which would be completed and published in London only in 1760. The composition date traces back to Boscovich's stay in Fermo, briefly before going back to Rome as a teacher in the low classes of the Collegio Romano. During the same period he probably was engaged in writing the notes to Carlo Noceti's didactic poems *De Aurora Borealis* and *De Iride*.⁹

Boscovich's manuscript is entitled *De Solis, ac Lunae defectibus Carmen*, with *carmen* meaning a medium-length composition. It consists of a preamble in prose and a first part in verses, while the second part of the poem would never be written in the form Boscovich projected in 1735. The preamble provides the reason for which Boscovich wrote the poem:

The eclipse of the Moon on the 2nd of October, which appeared to me while, observing the sky, I was pondering over the subject of this inaugural lecture, troubled and hesitant, captured my attention; so I think I hardly could do something more appreciable to the most learned men than by dealing, in a heroic *carmen*, with ‘the sun’s many eclipses, the moon’s many labours’, which Virgil himself, the prince of poets, considers very apt to the 2nd book of the *Georgics*.¹⁰

It is important to notice that this is a *literary pretext*; that is, we actually don’t know if Boscovich was inspired by Virgil or by an astronomical phenomenon, or rather he followed suggestions by his former mentors in poetry (as well as natural philosophy and mathematics) Noceti and Borgondio. Whatever the ‘real’ reason behind the poem, no one of the essential elements of a typical didactic poem in the Jesuit tradition seems to be missing here. Boscovich recited his *carmen* at the opening lesson of his 1735 course of *Humanae Litterae* in Rome, and this circumstance is consistent with the celebratory feature of the Jesuits’ didactic poetry; in front of such audience he deliberately (and not surprisingly) makes use of a Virgilian reference, and a closer examination of Boscovich’s *carmen* allows to identify the main source mediating Virgil, that is the Jesuit Giovanni Battista Riccioli’s *Almagestum Novum*;¹¹ finally and most importantly, the context and the meaning of the passage of the *Georgics* is consistent with the scheme advanced in the previous section.

Here is Virgil’s integral passage with Boscovich’s quote emphasized (*Georg.* II, 475-482):

Me vero primum dulces ante omnia Musae,
 Quarum sacra fero ingenti percussus amore,
 Accipiant, caelique visa et sidera monstrent,
 Defectus solis varios, lunaeque labores,
 unde tremor terris, qua vi maria alta tumescant
 Obicibus ruptis, rursusque in se ipsa residunt,
 quid tantum Oceano properent se tinguere soles
 Hiberni, vel quae tardis mora noctibus obstet.¹²

Virgil is expressing the idea that poetry (the Muses) could show a way to understand the natural phenomena to their ‘officiants’, i.e. the poets (indeed, *sacra ferre*, «to bear the holy emblems», means also «to celebrate the rites»). And after few lines, Virgil goes on: “Blessed is he who has succeeded in learning the causes of things” [“*Felix, qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas*”, *Georg.*, II, 490]. For a 24-years-old Jesuit like Boscovich, who was about

to begin his teaching activity, “*rerum cognoscere causas*” could mean nothing but to devote himself to the science, in the twofold dimension of studying and teaching.

An allusion to this Virgilian verse can be found in the 1735 *carmen*:

Felices anni! Felicia secula! Causas
Tantarum queis posse datum cognoscere rerum.¹³

All in all, Boscovich’s reference to *Georgics* carries the sense, at least for him, of making didactic poetry. For him as a Jesuit, the reference to Virgil indicates that science – science as knowledge applied to individual natural phenomena – is worth to be treated in poetic form: it is *culture* in the most classical sense. Hence, the quote of Virgil’s exhortation to the Muses in order that poetry becomes a guide into sciences, also functions as the *justification* for the value of teaching and learning natural sciences. Here is another parallel with Virgil: inasmuch the didactic poetry ennobled work and labour in *Georgics*, it can enoble science and teaching in modern times.

3. From 1735 *carmen* to 1760 poem: from father Borgondio to Newton.

As we have seen in the previous section, in 1735 Boscovich believed he would add a second part to his *carmen* on the eclipses in order to complete a medium-length composition.¹⁴ We have just mention that he never completed this early version of the poem in the projected form. This observation is confirmed by in the preface to *De Solis ac Lunae defectibus* (1760), which includes the statement that the 1735 *carmen* was «roughly 300 verses long on the whole».¹⁵ Another interesting circumstance corroborating the hypothesized unfinished form of the *carmen* is Boscovich’s autograph in Italian placed before the manuscript, which reads: «Poem of the Eclipses, as it was first composed in Fermo by Ruggiero Gius. Boscovich, in order to be recited in Rome, as he did on the inaugural lesson in november 1735 at the Collegio Romano – which subsequently became a poem in 5 books printed in London and Venice, and then in 6 books reprinted in Paris, with French translation».¹⁶

The first part of the 1735 *carmen* deals with the causes and phenomenology of the eclipses, illustrates some related phenomena (e.g. the red colour which appears in the terminal phase of a lunar eclipse), and mentions a number of theories. As Boscovich anticipated in the preamble, the second part should present the movements of the Sun and the Moon in order to make clear «how one has to explain the possibility of predicting their

eclipses and, should an opportunity offer, by what manner one has to reject the Copernican motion of the Earth».¹⁷

This condemnation of Copernicus's geodynamicism is not surprising, in particular in the context of an inaugural lecture at the Collegio Romano. First of all, for the Jesuit the obligation to defend the geostatic theory of the Universe, also in the form of a *refutatio* of the *hypothesis Terrae motae*, lasted until 1757; and Boscovich's mentor, Borgondio, devoted an early dissertation (Borgondio 1714) to the immobility of the Earth. As observed by Casini (1983), Borgondio could expound in detail Newton's theory and methods by using the technique of *refutatio* – an expedient which, in effect, ensured to Newtonianism a large circulation within the Jesuits' scientific citadel. Since the beginning of his collaboration with Borgondio in 1738, Boscovich himself would play a major role in a more and more direct appreciation of Copernicus's *hypothesis terrae motae* by using a method reminiscent of the *refutatio* technique.¹⁸

It is not easy to say how Boscovich planned to undertake the refutation of the motion of the Earth in the second part of his 1735 *carmen* – a project he would give up in assembling the new version of the poem in 1760, with Newtonianism as its main theme. In comparing the two versions, Newton's insertion proves to be the most remarkable change regarding the topics of the poem, which probably led Boscovich to the new distribution of the subjects: the movements of the sun and the moon, which should originally be treated in the second part of the 1735 *carmen* and could maybe help to reject Copernicus' theory, are the subject of the first book and are now explained in the light of Newton's gravitational theory; however, the second, third and fourth book – altogether devoted to the Solar and Lunar eclipses and some related phenomena – developed the various subjects of the first part of the 1735 *carmen*. And the dramatic change in Boscovich's attitude towards the "new" astronomy emerges most clearly in the fifth book, where Newton's theory of light is described and applied to the optical phenomena taking place during total lunar eclipses.¹⁹

But the real difference between the two versions of the poem is their dedicatee. Making his appearance in the first verses under his *nomen arcadicum* of *Pastor Achemenides*, the dedicatee of the 1735 *carmen* was Orazio Borgondio:²⁰

Ante tamen Pindique patrem, doctasque [Uraniae] sorores
Te primum mea vota petunt, te in carmina poscunt
Pastor Achemenide Arcadiae, ter maxima silvae

Gloria, dum sacras naturae inquirere leges
Et non agresti iuvat exornare camena²¹.

Boscovich explained the reference to «Pastor Achemenide Arcadie» in a marginal note on this same sheet of the manuscript, probably in thinking of a future publication of the *carmen*, and he referred to four of the didactic poems of his mentor.²²

But in the mature version of the poem in 1760 any reference to Borgondio was completely forgotten; even in the Preface, Boscovich merely remembered to have recited the poem «already in 1735» and only acknowledged Carlo Noceti and Benedetto Stay for having taken him back to the «love for the Muses» (Boscovich 2012a, p. xxxii). And yet in the 1760 poem the verses quoted above still remained (with minor changes); but in the new version the addressee of such enthusiastic dedication was the Royal Society in the person of its President, George Parker, count of Macclesfield (Boscovich 2012a, I, vv. 15-20). Moreover, after having presented the major results of English astronomy in book first, Boscovich included a praise to Newton («a sort of apotheosis», as he writes in the Preface) in book fifth.

An obvious explanation of such behavior was Boscovich's stay in London, where *De Solis ac Lunae defectibus* firstly appeared. But what is the reason of this apparent amnesia? Why was any form of acknowledgement of Borgondio missing in the 1760 poem, despite the fact that in 1735 he had been recognized as Boscovich's original mentor in didactic poetry? It is maybe arguable that a reference to him – even a mention – in a Newtonian context would have sound as an appreciation of the outdated, anti-Copernican astronomy, which on the contrary provided the 'official background' – leaving aside whether it was a mere expedient or not – of the 1735 *carmen*.

4. From *De Solis ac Lunae defectibus* (1760) to *Les Eclipses* (1779)

The composition of *De Solis ac Lunae defectibus* (1760) requested plenty of time. The most part of the first book was probably completed as soon as 1749, but Boscovich composed a big portion of the poem while working at the map of the papal states in the early 1750s. In the subsequent years he also included some of the verses he had wrote for the Arcadians' collections. Other verses should be written during his stay in London in 1760. As it is arguable from Boscovich's correspondence from those years, he worked out the fifth book and the footnotes while living in London as a guest of Genoa Republic ambas-

sador in England, Francesco Maria Ageno.²³ An year later some other changes had to be included in the the *editio veneta* of Boscovich's epic: the «Editoris Monitum», that is a short poem in honour of the Genoa ambassador (62 verses), the epistle *Editor Venetus Lectori* (also called *Praefatio Editoris Veneti*), the *Catalogus Operum*, and the *Argumenta*. Apart from minor corrections, in the poem itself there are no substantial differences between the London and the Venetian edition.²⁴ Far more remarkable would be the changes in the French bilingual edition printed in Paris in 1779.

As early as in 1760, briefly before the publication of the poem in London, Boscovich had hoped he might find someone in order to provide a French translation. In a letter to his brother Bartolomeo he writes that «M. de Vatellet [i.e. Claude-Henri Watelet], an outstanding poet and my very good friend [...] says that he will try to translate my poem on the Eclipses in French».²⁵ Watelet, with whom Boscovich had a friendly relationship, had just published a didactic poem called *L'Art de peindre* and was elected member of the *Académie française* on november 29th 1760. From Boscovich's correspondence we know that he (according to Boscovich, enthusiastically) received *De Solis ac Lunae defectibus* at the beginning of 1761, that is very briefly after the first appearance of the poem in England.²⁶ But it seems that he never made the promised translation, and Boscovich soon gave up his ambition. Almost twenty years had to pass before he was able to find a faithful translator: his former French Jesuit brother Augustin Barruel (1741-1820).

A native of the Ardèche, Barruel entered the Society of Jesus in 1756. After he completed his *cursus studiorum*, he taught for some time at the Jesuits' college of Toulouse, until the growing aversion against the Order in France forced him to move to Bohemia and Moravia. He came back in 1774 as the tutor of Franz Xaver von Sachsen's sons. A former co-regent of Saxony (together with Maria Antonia of Bavaria), Franz Xaver resigned in 1768, as the underage Elector Frederick Augustus III reached his eighteenth birthday, and settled in Pont-sur-Seine (France) an year later. At that time, Boscovich was in France (since 1773: see Hill 1961, pp. 85-91) as the Director of Naval Optics of the French Navy, after having escaped the continuous fight with his Jesuit colleague Louis La Grange, the director at the Brera Observatory in Milan (a detailed account of Boscovich's resignation from Brera is given by Proverbio 1987). In France he met a number of former Jesuits, and Barruel was amongst them. Boscovich became a good friend of the Prince Franz Xaver too, oftens being his guest in Pont-sur-Seine. Because of the lack of the correspondence be-

tween Boscovich and Barruel, it is difficult to say whether Boscovich, as a former co-brother in the Jesuit order, introduced Barruel in the prince's circle, or he and Barruel met first at Franz Xaver's home.²⁷ Anyway, in Boscovich's letters from 1778 there are many references to Barruel's effort in translating the poem.

By the end of July 1779, he had finished the work under Boscovich's continuous supervision. His contribution included a 'translator's preface' and a French translation in «poetic prose» of the poem, while he adopted a «plain, didactic prose» for the footnotes.²⁸ In his preface Barruel also accounts for the most remarkable difference between the original London and Venetian editions and the new Paris version. He pointed out that Boscovich had chosen to add up a digressive episode (what we could dub an *epyllion*, in classical terms) to the second book, which was the longest one with its 1426 verses and 89 notes. So Barruel argues that he had to divide this book in two parts, and the poem turned now to be in six books instead of five.²⁹

However, Barruel's explanation of the new distribution of the poetic material in six books (or *chants* in the French translation) does not appear really compelling. It is obviously true that the second book was by far the longest one; but Boscovich added just 45 verses, and now the second and third books, respectively devoted to the causes of solar and lunar eclipses, turned out to be *by far* the two most concise (here is the length of each *chant*: Book I: 985 + 78 vv.; Book II: 690 vv.; Book III: 787 vv.; Book IV: 1034 vv.; Book V: 960 vv.; Book VI: 1021 vv.). One could observe that, because of the new distribution, Boscovich could treat the solar ('new' Book II) and lunar eclipses ('new' Book III) separately, while they were the unique subject of the former Book II in the London and Venetian editions; though, the 45 verses-long *epyllion* added to Book II does not deal directly with the eclipses of the Sun; rather it refers to the occultations «which Jupiter undergoes through its four satellites, and Saturn through its five satellites and ring».³⁰

5. Back to Lucretius?

Barruel's preface hints at an alternative reason for Boscovich's behaviour in structuring the French edition. After having begun with a usual reference to Virgil (Boscovich's poem would be no less «Newton's work put in the mouth of Virgil, that is the physics itself embellished with all the attractiveness of poetry»), he quotes a review of Boscovich's poem which had appeared in 1761 in the *Acta Eruditorum*: «As well as the ancients had got

their Lucretius and Manilius, the moderns have theirs; amongst them we count father Boscovich». ³¹ In the context of the review, the reference to three of the most important didactic Latin poets (Manilius was the poet of the *Astronomica*, circa 10 A.D.) is not surprisingly in itself; but Barruel himself added something remarkable: «In order to translate Virgil, one should be Voltaire or Delisle at least; the translation of the *modern Lucretius* probably requires something more». ³²

Some years before, «modern Lucretius» had been an appellation for Benedict Stay, whose two poems (*Philosophiae [...] versibus traditae libri VI*, Rome 1747; *Philosophiae recentioris [...] versibus traditae libri X*, Rome 1755-1792) were usually regarded by his contemporaries as openly Lucretians. ³³ In fact, the application of such 'title' to Boscovich was quite new, but the identification with Lucretius was not simply Barruel's opinion. It probably originated from Boscovich himself: he was well aware of the review quoted, because he had mentioned it in a letter to Conti on January 3rd, 1763. Because of the close collaboration between the two Jesuits, the suspect arises that 15 years later Boscovich would pass the information to Barruel. ³⁴ In this new Lucretian atmosphere, the distribution of the poem in six books appears quite understandable: both *De rerum natura* and Stay's first and 'more' Lucretian poem were divided in six cantos. ³⁵

So in *Les Eclipses* Boscovich's preferences seem to suddenly shift to Lucretius. But was it really a 'Lucretian conversion'? Taking some other hints into account, this was more probably something like an opportunistic winking at the Lucretian tradition in France. Compared to 1760-1761, the audience of a typical didactic poem was changed very much: it was no longer formed by the Jesuit fellows from the colleges of the Society nor represented by the exclusive circle of the Arcadian Academy. Now Boscovich's audience must be widespread, potentially including all French-speaking educated people. Because of this, in a memorandum to Count de Vergennes (one of Boscovich's most influential friends on the court and the Minister of Foreign Affairs) he emphasized the potential popularization aims of the poem: now its the subject was put in prose in order to make it «accessible to all the people without using geometry». ³⁶ He repeatedly used this 'popularization argument' in other occasions, e.g. in the quoted letter to Gambarana. ³⁷

Therefore, in 1779 Boscovich was possibly convinced that the translation of his poem could have a popularizing effect. But in France – more than in Italy – the herald of didactic poetry in general was Lucretius much more than Virgil. This is true also for Jesuit

didacticism: since 17th century, a number of Lucretian themes and stylistic elements were included in the georgic poems of French Jesuits, and Lucretius kept on playing a major role in didacticism.³⁸ In France, a reference to him much more than one to Virgil could mean a link to that tradition, so Boscovich was simply seize a chance.

However, despite Boscovich's misplaced confidence in the popularization potential of the translated poem,³⁹ the work remained largely unsold, and this circumstance might result in a dramatic financial problem for Boscovich himself, for the King had rejected the hoped funding and Boscovich had to cover the expenses by himself.⁴⁰ The golden age of the Latin didactic poetry was over, as Boscovich would recognize some years later, in sadly complaining that «the taste of the century has been changed: too few people have an interest in latin poetry, few people in geometry and very few in a work which applies poetry to the objects related to geometry».⁴¹ But in that lingering twilight of a tradition, *Les Eclipses* represented, together with its Latin 'master', *De Solis ac Lunae defectibus*, one of the most complex, powerful and rich scientific-poetic architectures.

¹ [Boscovich *et al.*] 1756, pp. 214-216. The mix of mythologic and scientific elements featuring these short poems also characterizes *De Solis ac Lunae defectibus*. The epigram *De Solis maculis* is pickud up – with some changes – in Book III of the poem (see Boscovich 1760 and Boscovich 2012b, n. 20 to v. 391, pp. 171-172; the epigram is not to be found in *Les Eclipses*).

² Boscovich 1758. Giovanni Correr (or Corer) was the son of Pietro, the ambassador of Venetian Republic whom Boscovich accompanied in his journey to Constantinople in 1759. On the relationship between Boscovich and the Corrers, see Boscovich 2010b, pp. 228-236; see also Proverbio 2008. On the epitalamium *In nuptiis Joannis Corarii et Andrianae Pisauriae*, see Graciotti 1993, pp. 27-28.

³ With some remarkable exceptions: for instance, Giordano Bruno's Latin epics, which have a peculiar significance in the context of the modern didacticism: *De monade numero et figura*, *De minimo magno & mensura*, *De innumerabilibus, immenso, & infigurabili, seu De uniuerso & mundis*, all printed in Frankfurt a.M. in 1591. See on this Haskell 1998.

⁴ On the complex relationship between *otium* and *negotium* in Latin culture see Burck 1966; André 1962 and 1966; Schalk 1991. On the concept of *otium* in the modern culture see Vickers (1990).

⁵ It is worth mentioning in this context the ethical-pedagogic didactic poem of Rogacci (1690). Note that Benedetto Rogacci (1646-1718) – native of Ragusa like Boscovich, Stay and other Jesuit didactic poets – was the secretary in charge for all Jesuit Colleges in Italy. About the Ragusin tradition in didactic poetry see Martinović 1999. I owe a debt of gratitude to Ivica Martinović for this suggestion and for having made available to me the content of this essay. Of course Latin didactic poems were also composed and read by (and *for*) the Arcadians and, more generally, the most important literary academies; but the importance of such academies in shaping the special character of Jesuit didacticism *in Latin* appears to me questionable. On the role of the Arcadians in didacticism see Baragetti (2011). I owe a special thanks to John Heilbron for this remark about possible connections between the literary academies and the Jesuit didactic tradition.

⁶ See La Penna 2010, p. 72. On the “proliferation of the addressees” of Virgil's Georgics see Schiesaro 1993; Batstone 1997, pp. 132-135.

⁷ The manuscript is preserved at the Bancroft Library (University of California, Berkeley), Boscovich Archives, MS 587/1. On Boscovich's manuscript and their intricated history, see Hahn 1965.

⁸ "La scuola mi da assai meno fastidio della Romana [...]. Le serate d'ordinario mi restano libere potendo di esse disporre a modo mio, il che non è piccolo vantaggio, si per non essere tanto legato q:to ero in Roma ad una fatica materiale, e noiosissima, si anche per potere studiare per me". Ruggiero to Natale Boscovich, Fermo, 3 dicembre 1733, in Boscovich 2012c, p. 14.

⁹ The most important and influential biographies of Boscovich are Hill 1961 and Marković 1969, to which is to be referred to for a reconstruction of Boscovich's chronology and background.

¹⁰ «Lunae defectus, quem mihi 2a Octobris nocte intueri licuit, iam diu de huiusce prolusionis argumento sollicitum, incertumque in eam adduxit mentem; ut nihil sapientissimis uiris me gratius facturum esse arbitrater, quam si, quos ipse poetarum Princeps Virgilius Georgicorum 2o carmini censet aptissimos, *defectus Solis varios, Lunaque Labores*, heroico carmine pertractandos susciperem». Emphasis added. The (partial) lunar eclipse referred by Boscovich took place in the night between October 1st and 2nd 1735.

¹¹ He has used the quote at least three times in his poetic career: in the text of 1735 *carmen* (v. 358: "et Solis, Lunaque labores"), in the 1760 version of *De Solis ac Lunae defectibus* (Boscovich 2012a, I, 59) and in the incipit of the dedicatory to Louis XVI at the opening of *Les Eclipses* (Boscovich 2012b, p. [ii]). The 1735 poetic variant appears also in the *Ecloge. Recitata in publico Arcadam consessu Anno 1753*, printed together with other poems in [Boscovich et al.] 1756, p. 201. For further details about Boscovich's reading of Riccioli, see Guzzardi 2012, p. 9.

¹² "But as for me – first may the Muses, sweet beyond compare, whose holy emblems, under the spell of mighty love, I bear, take me to themselves, and show me heaven's pathways, the stars, the sun's many eclipses, the moon's many labours; whence come tremblings of the earth, the force to make deep seas swell and burst their barriers, then sink back upon themselves; why winter suns hasten so fast to dip in Ocean, or what delays clog the laggard nights". Virgil 1999, p. 171.

¹³ «Happy years! Happy centuries! to those which may be allowed to know the causes of so important things». Boscovich 1735, vv. 297-298. This couple of verses is reprised in Boscovich 2012a, II, vv. 1362-1363. Here is the French translation by Augustin Barruel: «Heureuses les années, heureux les siècles aux quels il a été donné de connoître les causes de ces phénomènes si intéressans!» (Boscovich 2012b, p. 231).

¹⁴ In the preamble he stated: «I will give the whole matter in two parts, the first of which I am now going to articulate, the second I will keep for the future» («In duas partes rem totam tribuendam censui, quarum alteram nunc exponerem, alteram reservarem in posteram»). Boscovich 1735, preamble.

¹⁵ Boscovich 2012a, p. xxxii.

¹⁶ This is a note written in Italian by himself and proposed to Boscovich 1735, probably in ordering his own manuscripts after 1780: «Poema degli Eclissi, come fu composto da principio in Fermo da Ruggiero Gius. Boscovich per recitarsi in Roma come fece nella prefazione al cominciare a insegnar la prima in Coll[egi]o Romano nel Nov.[embre] 1735, e che poi è divenuto di 5 libri stampato in Londra e in Venezia, indi di 6 libri ristampato in Parigi colla traduzione francese».

¹⁷ «In alteram vero partem Solis ac Lunae motus reieci, quorum Legibus cognitiss, quo pacto praenunciari possint ipsi defectus explicandum, dataque occasione Copernicanus ille telluris motus refutandus esset». Boscovich 1735, preamble.

¹⁸ On Borgondio, Boscovich's early activity, and the *hypothesis Terrae motae*, see Casini 1983, pp. 143-155; Baldini 1992, pp. 29-30; Pepe 2010, pp. 11-13. On Copernicanism and Boscovich's interest for Tycho's system in the first book of *De Solis ac Lunae defectibus* (1760 and 1761), see Dadić (2012), pp. 3-4.

¹⁹ For a comprehensive account of the topics of each book, see Dadić (2012).

²⁰ Achemenides Metropolitano was the name Borgondio assumed as a fellow of the Roman «Accademia degli Arcadi», the literary academy of which Boscovich was elected a member in 1744 with the name of Numerius Anigreus.

²¹ «Even before than the father from the Pindus [i.e. Apollo] and [Urania's] sisters [i.e. the Muses], my vows are addressed to you, Shepherd Achemenides of Arcadia. For you they invoke three times in verses the highest glory of the [Arcadia] wood, as it is appropriate to investigate the sacred laws of nature instead of embellish them through rural poetry». Boscovich 1735, vv. 15-22.

²² «Father Orazio Borgondio of the Society of Jesus, whose four poems stands out among the memories of the Arcadians: *De motu sanguinis, De incessu, De volatu, De natatu*». («P. Horatius Burgundius Soc: Iesu, cuius extant inter Arcadam monumenta poemata 4 de motu sanguinis de incessu, de volatu, de natatu».)

²³ On the composition of the poem see Dadić 2012a. An account of Ageno's life and diplomatic activity is to be found in Oreste 1960.

²⁴ For a synopsis of the variants see Guzzardi 2012, pp. 22-23.

²⁵ «M. di Vattellet eccellente poeta, e mio amico grande [...] dice, che tenterà di fare una tradduzione in Franc:e del mio poema degli Eclissi». Ruggiero to Bartolomeo Boscovich, Parigi, 3 marzo 1760, in Boscovich 2010a, p. 235.

²⁶ Boscovich seems to refer to this circumstance in a letter to Bartolomeo on January 18th, 1761: «My work is arrived in Paris, and it [enchants]». («La mia opera è arrivata a Parigi e [incanta]»). Boscovich 2010a, p. 436. The editor of the correspondence reads «incontra» ('meets') instead of «incanta»; I also compared the edited letter with the original, preserved at the Boscovich Archives (Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley), MS A1 Berkeley Part 3, W 1A.

²⁷ On Barruel's life and literary activity see Riquet 1974. On Franz Xaver von Sachsen and his friendship with Boscovich see Boscovich 2012c, footnotes by E. Proverbio on pp. 151 and 258; see also Poter (1898) for a general account of Franz Xaver's life. It is also remarkable that Boscovich wrote a number of short poems (partly of didactic subject) in honour of Franz Xaver and his family; they are remained unpublished and are now preserved in the Boscovich Archives in Berkeley.

²⁸ «Prosa poetica» and «prosa corrente istruttiva» respectively are the expressions Boscovich used to describe Barruel's work in a letter to Gambarana dated Boynes, July 10th, 1779, in Boscovich 1888, p. 322.

²⁹ The third book, which was the second part of the second book in the London edition, was provided with a new group of verses which served as its *incipit*. There are some other important differences too: the poem was now dedicated to King Louis XVI, with a long «épître dédicatoire» in verses describing Boscovich's career in France and his debts with the king; some notes were reduced, some other added; finally, at the end of the book Boscovich gave a summary of the works quoted in the dedicatory epistle. See the synopsis of the variants in Guzzardi 2012, pp. 22-23.

³⁰ Boscovich 2012b, p. 154, footnote 33.

³¹ Barruel 1779, p. xxx. See also Barruel's source: [Anonymous] (1761), in particular p. 170.

³² Barruel 1779, p. xxix; emphasis added.

³³ See on this Tacconi 1994a, pp. 333-374; Haskell 2003, pp. 223-228.

³⁴ Boscovich to Conti, January 3rd, 1763, in Boscovich 2008, p. 92.

³⁵ About Lucretius's diminished influence on Stay's second (Newtonian) poem, see Tacconi 1994a, pp. 336-338, 359-374; Tacconi 1994b, pp. 381-383.

³⁶ So the «Memoire à M. de Vergennes sur la dedicace des ouvrage de Boscovich et leur impression, Paris, 31 Janvier 1779», in Boscovich 1888, pp. 312-313: «Touts ces objets [i.e. the issues treated in the poem] y son ausi traittés en prose sans les ornements de la poésie, qui peuvent servir pour une espèce de traité mis à la portée de tout le monde sans l'usage de la géométrie [...]. Il a choisi pour celui-ci la version de son grand poëme avec le texte latin, parce que [...] il est a portée de tout le monde».

³⁷ Boscovich's popularization argument is also to be found in the quoted letter to Gambarana, in a letter to Natale Boscovich (December 21st, 177[9], in Boscovich 2012c, pp. 64-65) and in the «Précis des ouvrages mentionnés et compris dans l'Epître Dedicatoire», in Boscovich 2012b, p. 533, footnote 5.

³⁸ On Lucretius's reception in France see Ford 2007; Beretta 2006, pp. 177-194. See also Haskell 2003, pp. 164-167; Haskell 2007, in particular pp. 196-198.

³⁹ Boscovich remarkably appears firmly convinced that *Les Eclipses* would find a wide audience: see the letter to Natale Boscovich on December 21st, 177[9], in Boscovich 2012c, pp. 64-65.

⁴⁰ Boscovich's hope that the book will be sold well are expressed in the quoted letter to Natale (see the previous footnote). But after some months he had to change his mind. His complaints transpire from a letter by Conti on July 3rd, 1780: in France many copies remained unsold, and Conti himself declared that he himself «would prefer the Italian poetry [...]. And in general, except for the case of Latin language, I don't believe that philosophy is a subject suited to poetry». («Io stesso preferirei la Poesia Italiana ma dubito che la sua Indole il suo genio, non sia adattato a quelli Argomenti. E in generale eccetto la lingua latina, le cose Filosofiche scientifiche non li credo argomento per la Poesia»). Conti to Boscovich, Lucca, July 3, 1780, in Boscovich 2008, p. 490.

⁴¹ «Il gusto del secolo si è mutato: troppo pochi si curano della poesia latina, pochi della Geometria». Boscovich to Johann Joseph M. von Wilczek (plenipotentiary of Milan), August 9th, 1786, the letter is preserved at the Bancroft Library (University of California, Berkeley), Boscovich Archives, MS A1 Berkeley Part 2, 2W 1. Ironically, Boscovich was referring to a new edition of Stay's *Philosophiae recentioris Versibus traditae Libri X*,

the print of which was initiated and then suspended because of the lack of request. Stay had to wait until 1792 to see the complete edition of his second, 'Newtonian' poem.