

LORENZO VALLA AND THE LIMITS OF IMAGINATION

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Introduction

One would expect the concept of imagination to play an important role in the writings of the humanist Lorenzo Valla (1407-1457).¹ As a fervid and devoted student of Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*, which he said he knew almost by heart, he was certainly acquainted with Quintilian's sections about the emotions and the ways in which the orator can manipulate them by using various kinds of vivid descriptions. Valla considered himself to be Quintilian's spokesman, tirelessly campaigning for rhetoric and eloquence and the revival of good, classical Latin. His bitter quarrels with other humanists and his attacks on traditional systems of thought required at least the use of rhetorical techniques, and it would have been a simple step for him to proceed to reflect on one of the key concepts of the rhetorician's art, *imaginatio*. But while he employed the imagination in a specific, rhetorical sense in his dialogue *De vero falsoque bono*, Valla also recognised the dangers of the imagination, especially when employed by scholastic philosophers and theologians. He frequently praised eloquence² and wrote extensively on types of argumentation in his work on dialectic, assessing their strength in terms of persuasiveness and usefulness, but he did not treat the concept of *imaginatio* and its power to manipulate the emotions in explicit terms, nor does one find such discussions in the glosses to his copy of Quintilian.³

In this article several aspects of Valla's thought and scholarship will be discussed, which may have rendered him less sympathetic to the faculty of imagination: his aversion to abstract terms and entities; his criticism of

¹ For a brief and excellent introduction to Valla's thought and scholarship, see Monfasani's article in *REP*, vol. 9, pp. 568-573 with further bibliography. The literature on Valla is vast. In this article I shall only cite what is most relevant to my theme and argument.

² See below, pp. 103-110.

³ Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, esp. VI.2 and VIII.3. Valla, *Le Postille* (eds. Martinielli and Perosa); see below, pp. 103-110. For a recent treatment of *imaginatio* in Quintilian and Renaissance authors, see Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, pp. 182-188, and Peter Mack's contribution to this volume.

Aristotelian psychology; the association of imagination with feigning and faking; and his emphasis on the social and cultural role of language in society rather than on the creative, imaginative use of it by individual speakers. In addition, Valla did not profess to teach eloquence or to write about the precepts of rhetoric, but wanted to study the finer semantic and formal distinctions of words in Latin. His aim was not to teach how to summon up arresting pictures, arising from the power of imagination, and how to employ the tropes of simile and metaphor in order to convey these pictures to an audience. His interests focused on the intricacies of the Latin language and vocabulary, on semantic precision, on *elegantia* rather than eloquence. Moreover, in the rhetorical tradition *imaginatio* was considered to be an important faculty, but the dangerous and darker sides were also acknowledged. (Quintilian even spoke of ‘a vice of the mind’.) Imagination, then, was not an unproblematic concept.

Abstraction

In itself the process of imagining things in the mind or portraying things in art is something valuable. In a brief note on the verb *fingere* in the *Elegantiae*, Valla writes:⁴

Fingere refers, strictly speaking, to the potter or *figulus* who makes forms from clay. From this it is extended in a general way to other things skilfully made by a man’s talent and skill, especially if they are unusual or novel. *Effingere* is to *fingere* in the form of something else, to portray by means of *fingere* ... From *effingere* is derived the noun *effigies*, which is a figure made in the living likeness of something or someone else, or in the image of truth, including paintings and sculptures.

He gives quotations from Cicero and Quintilian. The latter for instance wrote that Cicero, who ‘devoted himself heart and soul to the imitation of the Greeks, succeeded in reproducing (*effinxisse*) the force of Demosthenes, the copious flow of Plato, and the charm of Isocrates’.⁵

Though there is no separate section devoted to *imaginari* in the *Elegantiae*, the product of *imaginari* or *fingere* in this normal sense of

⁴ *Elegantiae Linguae Latinae* V.43, in *Opera Omnia*, vol. 1, p. 178. I quote from Baxandall’s translation in his *Giotto*, p. 10.

⁵ *Institutio oratoria* X.1.108 (ed. and transl. Butler), vol. 4, p. 62. Cf. Valla’s remark on rhetorical exercises in the schools: *in conventu scholasticorum fictam causam orat, id agens, ut in veris postea causis possit orare* (*Elegantiae* IV.81, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 1, pp. 148-149).

making, portraying or imagining something or someone does often occur: *imago* is simply the image, portrait, picture and so forth, materially (statue, sculpture, painting) or mentally (mental picture).⁶

These verbs, however, often have negative connotations, as appears from Valla's *Oration on the Falsely-Believed and Forged Donation of Constantine*, in which the verb *fingere* is invariably used in the negative sense of falsifying or dreaming things up: the forger of the document is said to feign, to make things up (*fingere*), the forgery being a *fictum*.⁷

Of a different kind are the *ficta* of philosophers, which are not lies in the sense of forgeries but certainly no less harmful. Valla was averse to abstract terms and concepts, loathing scholastic-Aristotelian philosophy with its rebarbative and ungrammatical terminology and distinctions. Abstraction as the process which leads to abstract terms and entities was therefore highly suspect, because it turns one's attention away from the world of common sense and its objects. At several places in his *Repastinatio dialectice et philosophie*, Valla reacts against abstraction and treats its products as fictions or chimeras. In the first version of this work, dating from about 1431/33, Valla criticises the process of abstraction that leads to abstract entities such as whiteness and blackness:

But first of all one ought to mock their belief that quality can exist without any subject or at any rate that quality can be separated mentally (*certe cogitatione fingi*). They call abstract, words like 'whiteness', 'blackness'. I do not remember ever thinking (*finxisse*) of things like this even when I was burning with a fever. For whoever pictures (*imaginatur*) these things must imagine (*imaginantur*) them united with some subject or substance: either snow, or a cloud, or a wall, or a piece of clothing, if he thinks of whiteness ... But these people want to imagine (*fingi*) man, horse, lion, animal without any individual instance. Not even angels could grasp this with their imaginations (*imaginatione*). But let us pass over these inanities.⁸

⁶ E.g. *Elegantiae* II.36, IV.37, V.11, VI.47. See *Laurentii Vallae Elegantiarum concordantiae* (eds. García Pinilla and Herráiz Pareja), *ad loc.*

⁷ Valla, *De falso credita et ementita Constantini donatione* (ed. Setz), p. 60: *Nam aliquot iam seculis aut non intellexerunt donationem Constantini commenticiam fictamque esse aut ipsi finxerunt ...*; p. 140: *ut appareat eum, qui sic locutus est, mentitum esse nec scisse fingere, quod Constantinum dixisse ac fecisse verisimile esset*; cf. pp. 133 and 151. In this sense *fingere* is identical with *commentiri* (cf. pp. 60:5, 146:6, 148:7 and 154:8).

⁸ *Repastinatio dialectice et philosophie* (ed. Zippel), vol. 2, pp. 373-374. (I shall quote the volume and page number of Zippel's edition. Vol. 1 contains Valla's third version of the *Repastinatio*, including a critical apparatus which lists variant readings from the second version. Vol. 2 contains the first version.) I quote the

Valla here points to the limits of imagination. Imagination in itself may be useful in combining pictures of existing things (though Valla does not discuss this traditional function), but when one tries to conjure up something without a determinate nature such as a universal horse which lacks any individual characteristics, it leads to nonsense and vain and empty concepts and words. The verbs *imaginari* and *figere* are used interchangeably by Valla for this process of feigning things which in reality cannot exist. And in his *De vero falsoque bono* the Epicurean spokesman Maffeo Vegio rejects the concept of *honestas* as a *res imaginaria*, which does not correspond to anything in reality.⁹

For Valla imagination is clearly bound by our ordinary conception of the everyday world, which is adequately described by classical Latin, that is, the Latin of the great authors. He would certainly not have repudiated mythological things such as centaurs or other non-existent things like golden mountains, which may be used by poets – they have a *summa dicendi licentia* after all, because their fictive nature is obvious.¹⁰ Philosophers, however, use these terms and concepts as if they describe things which really exist.

In the passage from the *Repastinatio* just quoted, Valla, however, goes one step further, criticising not just the existence of abstract entities, but any act of mental abstraction. The passage does not recur in the later versions of the *Repastinatio*. Perhaps Valla realised that in his own account of substance and quality he also considers things in separation from each other, which in reality are always united (e.g. the substance of the soul and

translation of this passage from Mack, *Renaissance Argument*, p. 60. Bishop Berkeley was later to express a similar point when he attacked the doctrine of abstract ideas because they would require a mental image of something which has no determinate nature, for instance a triangle which is ‘neither oblique, nor rectangle, equilateral ... but all and none of these at once’; *Principles of Human Knowledge*, in Berkeley, *Works* (eds. Luce and Jessop), vol. 2, p. 13.

⁹ I refer to the text which is edited under its first title *De voluptate* by Lorch. I quote the transl. of Heiatt and Lorch: p. 140; cf. pp. 90 and 187. The usefulness of the English translation is marred by several transpositions of blocks of texts and a disorder of pages (pp. 66-71: read: 66, 70, 68, 72; 275: transpose the first line to the bottom of the page; p. 277: transpose first 18 lines to the bottom of the page; pp. 285-289: read: 284, 288, 286, 290; p. 301: transpose last 13 lines to the beginning of the page).

¹⁰ *Repastinatio* (ed. Zippel), vol. 1, p. 59 and vol. 2, p. 434. But even the *figmenta* of the poets, Valla writes in the preface to his *Gesta Ferdinandi regis Aragonum*, linking poetry and history, should be based on true, historical events: *Nec fieri potest, ut poete figmenta sua non in rerum gestarum veritate velut fundamentis edificent* (ed. Besomi, p. 5).

its three qualities). Nevertheless, he would certainly think that his point remains valid, namely that one cannot even think of something like a horse without any individual instance. Other examples clearly illustrate this. In his critique of matter and form, for example, he accuses the *peripatetica natio* of inviting us to imagine something which cannot be imagined: prime matter without any form or form without matter. We can only imagine something which has an image, and then we cannot but imagine something as having a corporeal body.¹¹ Likewise, in his discussion of the category of quantity, which he seeks to reduce to that of quality, Valla gives a physical interpretation of mathematical entities. He rejects the view that lines are longitudes without width and that points are indivisible quantities which occupy no space. He thinks it is ridiculous to hold that a multiplication of lines does not result in something wider than the original line, and that a multiplication of points does not lead to something bigger. He also holds that points are parts of a line and not, as Aristotle and his medieval followers thought, the termination of a line, for how can termination be without a place? Our imagination seems an important instrument for Valla in rejecting entities, posited by scholastic philosophers and other theorists: whatever we cannot imagine does not exist and whatever exists should be imaginable. We simply cannot imagine (*imaginari*) a point which is not a part of a line nor a line which cannot be brought back or reduced to a line.¹² Those who believe that a point can be divided further imagine (*imaginari*) something smaller than what God has made and what the nature of things offers.¹³

This attack on abstract concepts and entities is often linked to Ockham's nominalist programme. It is not difficult to see why. Both Ockham and Valla admit of only substances and inhering qualities, reducing the ten Aristotelian categories (quantity, relation, time, place, etc.) to these two (or three in the case of Valla, who is dubious about action as a separate category). Both thinkers show an aversion to abstract entities of various kinds, attack 'one' as a transcendental term, criticise the notion of privation, and equate action with passion. It is therefore not surprising that scholars

¹¹ *Repastinatio* (ed. Zippel), vol. 1, p. 111: *Tum, quod materiam quandam faciunt ab omni forma seiunctum, quam vocant "materiam primam", hoc pereque stultum est atque formam qualitatemve facere citra materiam, ne dicam stultius ... Et eam iubent nos imaginari, que imagine caret. Accipe rationem propositione sua dignam: "ut imaginamur formam sine materia, ita possumus imaginari materiam sine forma". "Imaginamur" quod "imaginem" habet, non quod non habet. Et tamen in illo quoque mentiuntur: nihil enim imaginamur nisi tanquam corpus.*

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 147.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 146: *que ipsorum insania erit, qui tum conentur aliquid nosse aut imaginari minutius quam id quod Deus fecit et quam natura rerum fert*

have spoken about Valla's 'nominalism', or even his 'occamismo' and about his 'Anknüpfung an Ockham'.¹⁴ This, however, is incorrect, as I have argued in a recent article where I have compared the two thinkers: the similarities between the two are superficial and fortuitous and are overshadowed by differences in interests, arguments, techniques and intellectual outlook.¹⁵

In a similar vein Valla also criticises the speculations of natural philosophers who dare to say what the nature of the heavens is. Their speculations are dreams, for they go beyond the evidence of the senses.¹⁶ As soon as the imagination is not bound by the senses anymore and not directed at concrete things of the world in which we live, it produces the fantasies and empty concepts of philosophers and others.

Valla on the soul

Valla accused philosophers of reifying terms, concepts and entities, which in fact were the products of their all too fanciful imagination. His aversion extended to processes such as sensation and cognition, as can be seen from his discussion of the soul in his *Repastinatio*. In this work, which is mainly devoted to a critique of Aristotelian-scholastic metaphysics and dialectics, Valla also found opportunity to deal with points pertaining to zoology, astronomy, ethics, theology, and psychology, including the soul. The soul was of course one of the most crucial themes which were discussed among the scholastics, particularly in their commentaries on Aristotle's *De anima* and its Arabic commentators. Thomas Aquinas, for example, had enumerated five genera of powers, namely vegetative, sensitive, appetitive, locomotive and intellectual.¹⁷ The vegetative powers of the soul included nutrition, growth and reproduction; the sensitive included the functions of the five exterior senses as well as the four or five inner senses (common sense, imagination, the estimative or cogitative power and memory, all of which are located in the brain). Intellectual knowledge is the result of a process of abstraction which starts with sense perception, resulting in images or phantasms. These phantasms, in their turn, are grasped by the active intellect which abstracts the form from the image, producing in the possible intellect a form (intelligible species) by means of which intellectual

¹⁴ Zippel, introduction to his edition, vol. 1, p. lxxxviii and xci; cf. cxviii. Kessler, 'Die Transformation' and *idem*, 'Die verborgene Gegenwart Ockhams'. While I am critical of Kessler's interpretation, I am much indebted to his stimulating work.

¹⁵ Nauta, 'William of Ockham and Lorenzo Valla'.

¹⁶ *Repastinatio* (ed. Zippel), vol. 2, p. 422.

¹⁷ E.g. *Summa contra Gentiles* IV.58.

knowledge is achieved. The details of this process and the roles of the various powers were hotly debated in the universities, especially in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries but also later.¹⁸ Because of its middle function between the lower process of sensation and the higher process of intellectual cognition, the imagination had an important role in providing the intellect with images. It could also easily lead to various kinds of errors and mistakes, when its function was disturbed (during, e.g., hallucination). Dreams and visions also made use of images, which were provided by the imagination. Following Avicenna, Albert the Great distinguished *imaginatio* from *phantasia* but this distinction was not universally accepted.

Valla has no truck with all these faculties or functions which scholastics had distinguished within the human soul, and he returns to the Augustinian picture of the soul as a wholly spiritual and immaterial substance which was made in the image of God, consisting of intellect, memory and will.¹⁹ Of course, this Augustinian view of the soul remained influential in the later Middle Ages, especially among Franciscans, but it was combined with Aristotelian concepts and distinctions such as the active and the passive intellect. Valla does not show that he was aware of the scholastic debates on the soul, and his simplification of the processes of sensation and cognition is mainly achieved by neglecting them. Without much discussion he rejects the various functions of the soul (vegetative, sensitive, imaginative, intellectual),²⁰ implying that medieval scholars had accepted a plurality of souls. He discusses the five exterior senses, focusing on the way we talk about objects. He does not exhibit any inclination to treat the physiological aspects of sensation. The term 'species' does not occur at all. The inner senses are likewise ignored. And he does not mention *imaginatio* nor the *vis estimativa*, while the common sense is only mentioned in order to be refuted.²¹

Valla seems to think that the soul's unity is imperilled if the various processes of sensation and cognition are distinguished and allotted to

¹⁸ The literature is vast. Good introductions are the chapters by Boler, Kuksewicz and Mahoney in the *Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, and those by Park (including a diagram of the faculties of the soul on p. 466) and Kessler in the *Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, as well as K. Park's introduction to G.P. della Mirandola, *Über die Vorstellung/De imaginatione*, which includes a good bibliography. For the important Avicennian tradition see Hasse, *Avicenna's De anima*, pp. 127-153.

¹⁹ *Repastinatio* (ed. Zippel), vol. 1, pp. 59-73 and vol. 2, pp. 408-411 and 418-419. For a more extensive treatment of Valla's views on the soul see my 'Lorenzo Valla's Critique'.

²⁰ *Repastinatio* (ed. Zippel), vol. 2, p. 409.

²¹ *Ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 73.

different faculties or powers, and he therefore stresses that it is one and the same soul which perceives, reasons and wills.²² Nevertheless, he too cannot avoid giving these capacities separate functions: memory, which covers sensation, comprehends and retains things; reason (which, he says, is 'identical to the intellect') examines and judges them; and will desires or rejects them.²³ Memory is fundamental, being the 'mother' of reason or the soul's life.²⁴ As the first capacity it is said to see, hear, taste, smell and touch outer things, but Valla is not interested in the subsequent steps of the processes of sensation and cognition. He apparently feels that the soul's nobility is jeopardised if we allow it to become subject to experiences from outside. Valla wants the soul to be an autonomous, immaterial entity, which takes the initiative in sensing and knowing, the outer objects being only the occasion of sensation and cognition. This is confirmed by his brief treatment of the question whether colours, sounds and other sense perceptions extend to the senses, as the peripatetics hold (the theory known as intramission) or whether the power of the senses reach out to them, as Macrobius, Lactantius and 'many philosophers' hold (extramission). Valla prefers the extramissionist theory, because, on account of the presence of our soul in the senses, it is much easier for our soul to extend, by way of the rays of the eye, to the colours than that the colours come to the eye. The senses, he writes, function as a multiple mirror.²⁵ This is not a very helpful image, for a mirror is passive in receiving images of things. In later versions too Valla writes that extramission is to be preferred because 'colours and shapes are not carried to the vision by help of brightness, but come to the eye as though to a mirror'.²⁶ This is not the place to go into a detailed exegesis of the entire passage – I have done that elsewhere²⁷ – but the relevant point here is the occurrence of the term *images*. Even an extramissionist account of perception, in which the soul is the active principle, cannot do without the existence of images; they seem to be necessary as carriers of information, for how else can processes such as 'comprehending', 'retaining' and 'judging things' be performed? As is often the case, Valla does not provide further details, since he is clearly not interested in the psychological and physiological side of sensation and cognition. I therefore do not think that Valla 'is undoubtedly referring' to the scholastic controversy about the existence and nature of sensible

²² *Ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 75.

²³ *Ibidem*, vol. 1, pp. 66-67 and vol. 2, p. 410.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 73 and vol. 2, p. 410.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 446.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 156; cf. *De voluptate* (ed. and transl. Heatt and Lorch), p. 273: 'the eye which is made in order to delight in receiving color'.

²⁷ 'Lorenzo Valla's Critique'.

species, as has been suggested by Trinkaus.²⁸ The relevant terms are not even mentioned, and his discussion about the direction of sense perception – an age-old discussion going back to the ancient Greeks – is not the same as the scholastic controversy about the existence and nature of sensible species. Even Ockham, who rejects sensible species, does not question that objects act on the senses with efficient causation to produce cognition, that is, intuitive cognition according to Ockham's theory.²⁹ It might seem that Valla comes close to Ockham in holding that perception is immediate, but Ockham's theory of the soul is markedly different from Valla's, and the context of the debate (the role of species), distinctions (such as intuitive and abstract cognition), sources and arguments differ vastly – a point which will not be discussed here.

Thus, the power of imagination as a faculty of the soul does not play any role in Valla's discussion of the soul, nor do the other faculties and powers which the scholastics had distinguished. Valla may not have disagreed with the standard view of *imaginatio* that it retains images of things no longer present and that it is able to combine various images into new concepts, but he does not even mention this obvious point.

'Imaginatio' in the rhetorical tradition

Because of his critique of scholastic terms and concepts, it is only to be expected that in his treatment of the soul Valla did not discuss the various faculties and powers of the soul, which are responsible for processes of sensation and cognition. Perhaps he felt that to do so would be falling into the trap of reifying processes and things. *Imaginatio*, however, had not only found a home in the scholastic discussions on the soul, based on Aristotle's *De anima* and the commentary tradition thereon, but also in the rhetorical tradition. Basically, it concerns the general power most people have to imagine things, sometimes even to such an extent that they really believe in their imaginations; for instance, some people conjure up images of wealth in such a vivid way that they truly believe they are rich. This, of course, is mere daydreaming or hallucination. Yet, this 'vice of the mind' (*hoc animi vitium*), as Quintilian calls it,³⁰ can be used by orators in a profitable way (*ad utilitatem*). They can summon up pictures in their own mind, and thanks to their rhetorical qualities, communicate these images in the minds of their

²⁸ Trinkaus, 'Valla's Anti-Aristotelian Natural Philosophy', p. 301.

²⁹ *In Libros Sententiarum* II.13 (eds. Gál and Wood), p. 276. For a comparison between Ockham's and Valla's views on the soul, see my 'Lorenzo Valla's Critique'.

³⁰ Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* VI.2.30 (ed. and transl. Butler), vol. 2, p. 434.

listeners who, on seeing these images in their own mind's eye, come to accept the orator's point of view. This may come close to demagoguery and manipulation, but this is anticipated by Quintilian's insisting that the figure of the orator is the true *vir civilis*, who promotes and defends the common good.

The perfect orator, then, must possess the means to inflame or work upon an audience in order to bring them over to accept his point of view. A good knowledge of the emotions and how to arouse them is essential, and so is the ability to conjure up vivid mental images (*imagines, fantasias, visiones*): 'those vivid conceptions ... together with everything that we intend to say ... must be kept clearly before our eyes and admitted to our hearts: for it is feeling and force of imagination (*vis mentis*) that make us eloquent'.³¹ Although Quintilian never used the noun *imaginatio*, he used the verbs *imaginari* and *fingere* and the nouns *imago, visio* or sometimes *phantasia*.

Though one looks in vain in Valla's works for an explicit treatment of this power to summon up pictures and to convey them by means of rhetorical tropes and similes, Valla often speaks about the power of the word to move the audience or the reader. Without discussing his broader views on eloquence and oratory, I shall draw attention to a few passages which are relevant to my theme. Like Quintilian, Valla sees the importance of the orator in furthering the public good: 'it has always been my intention to please God and help men through the study of oratory'.³² An orator is someone who *causas orare vel in iudiciis vel in concionibus, qui Graece dicitur ῥήτωρ, id est rhetor*, but Valla adds that the Latin word 'rhetor' refers to a declamator, that is, someone who studies rhetoric (e.g. in the school of a rhetor) rather than to an orator.³³ An orator is traditionally someone who teaches, delights and moves, while the dialectician, focusing on arguments and reasoning, only teaches.³⁴

The moving force of words is underscored by Valla in a comment in his *Raudensiane note*, which is a critique of the *Imitationes rhetorice* by Antonio da Rho ('Raudensis').³⁵ Criticising a suggestion by Antonio da Rho

³¹ Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, X.7.15 (ed. and transl. Butler), vol. 4, pp. 140-141.

³² Valla, *Epistole* (ed. Besomi and Regoliosi), p. 147: *is mihi semper animus fuit ut oratoriis studiis Deo placerem hominibusque prodessem*; cf. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, Proem. I.13, II.15.34, XII.1.1. See also Valla's *Elegantiae*, I, proemium. This proemium has been critically edited by Regoliosi in her *Nel cantiere del Valla*.

³³ *Elegantiae* IV.81, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 1, p. 148.

³⁴ *Repastinatio*, II, proemium (ed. Zippel), vol. 1, p. 176. The rhetorical triad to teach, to move and to delight is often mentioned in *De vero falsoque bono* (e.g. *De voluptate* (ed. and transl. Heatt and Lorch), p. 278.

³⁵ On this work, see Regoliosi, 'Umanesimo lombardo', and the literature cited

that crying is something only for women, effeminate and weak people and not something which can be brought about artificially, Valla explicitly defends this third task of the orator, giving examples of orators, including Cicero, who brought people to tears.³⁶

Do you not realise, Antonio da Rho, that you contradict Cicero and truth itself and the entire Roman bent? Did Cicero not move people to tears? Certainly by *ars*, not because the tears flowed spontaneously from the speaker or audience. Do you still deny this? Thus, was it stupid of Cicero to teach how to bring people to tears? What? Did Marius not weep in the case of Aquilius on account of Antonius' peroration? Did not the oration itself, being wistful, mournful and fit to provoke tears, bring this about? Did not the entire populace of Rome shed tears when Gaius Gracchus wept at the murder of his brother? Do we not read of a thousand other instances where the audience was moved to tears, solely by the power of speech?

The saints, apostles and Christ himself wept and by their weeping moved others to tears. Christ even commanded us to weep.³⁷ And Valla goes on to describe the effects of reading of great literature on himself and on the reader in general:³⁸

there.

³⁶ *Opera Omnia*, vol. 1, p. 425: *Non sentis Raudensis, te Ciceroni quoque, atque ipsi ueritati, omnique indoli Romane repugnare? An non mouit lachrymas Cicero? certe ex arte, non quia lachryme ipsae uel actori, uel auditoribus sua sponte erumperent, negas adhuc? Stulte igitur Cicero de mouendis lachrymis praecipit, quid? Marius in causa Aquilii Antonio perorante non flebat, aut non oratio ipsa M. Antonii id efficiebat, moesta, flebilis, et apposita ad lachrymas commouendas? Non uniuersus populus Romanus lachrymas fudit Cn. Graccho necem fratris deflente? Non mille alios legimus audientium lachrymas concitasse, sola ui orationis? Quintilian often praises the brothers Gracchi as models of eloquence and mentions Antonius' defence of the praetor Aquilius in *Inst. orat.* II.15.7.*

³⁷ *Ibidem*: *Non denique sancti ipsi atque apostoli et fleuerunt, et fletum auditoribus excusserunt? Non Christus et fleuit, et fletum non tantum mouit, sed flere non iussit?*

³⁸ *Ibidem*: *Quid? non ipsa lectione rerum mirabilium ab optimis auditoribus compositarum ita mouemur, ut iram, gaudium, timorem, spem, dolorem concipiamus, et saepe lachrymas erumpentes cohibere nequeamus? quid de se excellentissimi quique confitentur? nemo non heroum qui ad Troiam pugnarunt, inducitur aut indignatione aut dolore aut misericordia aut gaudio aut desiderio lachrymasse? Et certe humani potissimum homines, nec agrestes nec efferati, uel sponte uel ad actionem optimi oratoris in fletum erumpunt.*

What? Is it not through the reading of marvellous things, described by the best authors, that we are moved so that we conceive anger, joy, fear, hope, and grief and cannot but break out in weeping?

A similar point is made by Valla in his notes on Quintilian's text. Quintilian had described the power to dispel 'the graver emotions of the judge by exciting his laughter', so that his attention is diverted from the facts of the case.³⁹ Valla glosses this by saying that he does not understand why Ambrose had denied that holy men can be moved to laughter, and he quotes the example of the priest Helias.⁴⁰

The moving effects of eloquence are also emphasised by Valla in his introduction to his treatise *On the Profession of the Religious*. The orator's excellence constitutes the value of a topic rather than its intrinsic nature: 'we do not measure a topic so much by its intrinsic nature as by the skill of the writer, with the result that subjects are generally judged to be either sublime or insignificant according to the degree of the author's ability'.⁴¹ 'Those who discourse sublimely, eloquently, and with grandeur, do not necessarily owe their success to the subject matter The cause lies with the writer rather than with that which is written about'.⁴² Hence, our emotional responses are fully determined by the way an orator (either in speech or in written text) is able to evoke them:⁴³

even in judicial cases one orator's speech is passionate, while another's is cold, and when the first declaims, the judges and the audience first become angry, then calm down; at one point they rejoice, cheer, and laugh; at another, feeling pity and sorrow, they weep; whereas when the other delivers his speech, they can hardly resist sleep or even succumb to it?

³⁹ Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, VI.3.1 (ed. and transl. Butler), vol. 2, p. 438.

⁴⁰ *Le Postille* (eds. Martinelli and Perosa), p. 135: *Hoc solum Ambrosius in libris Officiorum [I, 23, 102] negat esse sancti viri, movere risum, quod cur velit non video, cum Helias ille solitarius horridus pellitus ac pilosus in sacerdotes Baal factus fuerit, de quo scribitur libro Regum III^o: [reg. 3, 18, 27] et deridebat eos Helias propheta dicens: "invocate ingenti voce, ne forte occupatus sit aut dormiat" etc. Quod si deridere permittit, quanto magis risum aliter movere, quod fit multipliciter.* Another passage from Ambrose is quoted without comment. See also *De voluptate* (ed. and transl. Heatt and Lorch), pp. 256-257 (on laughter).

⁴¹ *De professione religiosorum* (ed. Cortesi), pp. 3-4; transl. Zorzi Pugliese, p. 17.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 9; transl. Pugliese, pp. 18-19 (slightly adapted).

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 7; transl. Pugliese, p. 18. Cf. also *Repastinatio*, in which Valla inserts a long section from Quintilian (*Inst. orat.* V.11) on examples used by orators to enliven their speech in order to convince the audience. In particular fables and stories are mentioned as useful in speeches to an audience of simple people (ed. Zippel), vol. 1, pp. 338-339.

Another example of the employment of eloquence in order to promote morals and the public good can be found in Valla's preface to his *Gesta Ferdinandi regis Aragonum*, in which historians are ranked above poets and philosophers.⁴⁴ Poetry and history are praised for their combination of *utile* and *dulce*. It is much more effective to teach morals in an indirect, non-doctrinal way by portraying the illustrious deeds of Homeric heroes such as Nestor, Agamemnon and Hector rather than by trying to inculcate moral lessons in dry, theoretical discourse:⁴⁵

It is extremely annoying when people want to prescribe moral lessons to others, for this comes close to arrogance and vanity. Our mind is sublime and proud, and despises accepting lessons from someone who is supposed to be wiser than we, while it finds pleasure in listening to someone who teaches indirectly by way of examples and in an attractive way.

History must be ranked even higher than poetry because history is more true (*verior*), even though their aims are the same, that is, to teach and to delight.⁴⁶ History teaches morals by examples. It contains much more *gravitas*, *prudencia* and *civilis sapientia* than philosophy does. Cicero and Quintilian are cited to confirm the highly exemplary value of the study of history. As always, Quintilian is a most important source for Valla whose interpretation does not always do justice to Quintilian's position on the relationship between oratory and philosophy.⁴⁷

it is desirable that we should not restrict our study to the precepts of philosophy alone. It is still more important that we should know and ponder continually all the noblest sayings and deeds that have been handed down to us from ancient times. And assuredly we shall nowhere find a larger or more remarkable store of these than in the records of our own country. Who will teach courage, justice, loyalty, self-control, simplicity, and contempt of grief and pain better

⁴⁴ Ed. Besomi. On this work, see Ferraù, 'La concezione', pp. 270-272; Gaeta, *Lorenzo Valla*, pp. 169-192.

⁴⁵ *Geste Ferdinandi* (ed. Besomi), p. 4: *Nam precipere aliis velle fere odiosum est, quia arrogantiam et tumorem animi olet. Mens enim nostra sublimis ac superba ut rectam preceptionem tanquam a sapientiore dedignatur accipere, sic eidem oblique per exempla et blande subeunti acquiescit.*

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 5: *idem propositi sit historico quod poete, ut prosit et, quo magis prosit, etiam delectet; nimirum tanto robustiorem esse historiam, quanto est verior.*

⁴⁷ *Institutio oratoria* XII.2.29 (ed. and transl. Butler), vol. 4, p. 399. On Valla's interpretation of Quintilian, see the pertinent remarks by Martinelli, 'Le Postille', pp. 33-34 and note 24, and pp. 37-39.

than men like Fabricius, Curius, Regulus, Decius, Mucius and countless others? For if the Greeks bear away the palm for moral precepts, Rome can produce more striking examples of moral performance, which is a far greater thing.

Like a judge in court, the historian must be an independent, impartial and keen observer of facts, able to weigh the various and often contradictory accounts of one and the same event. And, of course, he must possess a perfect style to match this task.⁴⁸

Though the two primary tasks of the historian are to teach and to delight, teaching by examples does of course require the capacity to give a lively portrait of historical persons and past events – a capacity which is based on a good knowledge of the emotions and patterns of human behaviour in various different circumstances. This enables the historian to give a more verisimilar account of the past, and such an account stimulates the reader to try to emulate the illustrious deeds and actions of historical figures (or to avoid the wicked ones). Valla does not speak about fancy or imagination, but his comparison of the human mind with a mirror, that receives the records of illustrious deeds of the past and consequently gives us hope and stimulates us to emulate them,⁴⁹ suggests that a historian must possess a good imagination, that is, knowledge of how to summon up pictures in one's own mind, and by dint of rhetoric, communicate these images. The primary aim of the historian, however, is not to arouse sympathies, to evoke strong emotional response or to bring people over to one's position (although this aspect of *movere* is surely present in so far as historical writings encourage us to imitate the good deeds of historical personages) but to narrate the past in a truthful and edifying manner. Consequently, Valla emphasises the qualities of impartiality, discretion and wisdom in a historian, whose account must be based on the *fides historiae*.⁵⁰

Linked to this, I believe, is Valla's analysis of fictive examples. In his *De vero falsoque bono*, for instance, he relates the fable of Gyges as it is found in Herodotus, whom Valla had translated, Plato's *Republic* and Cicero's *De officiis*. Gyges had a ring which enabled him to become invisible and do wicked things. While its function was to raise moral questions about our behaviour in the absence of external restraint, it is interesting to note that Valla subjects the fable to the criterion of internal consistency, that is, whether the sequence of events told by the *fabula* is

⁴⁸ *Gesta Ferdinandi* (ed. Besomi), pp. 7-8.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 4: *velut pictura personarum et spem inducat animo et stimulos emulationis incutiat*.

⁵⁰ Valla uses this phrase in a letter to Flavio Biondo from 1444, in *Epistole* (ed. Besomi and Regoliosi), p. 254.

internally consistent and convincing.⁵¹ The author of the fable, Valla says, ‘did not know how to invent a tale properly: this one does not square with itself and lacks coherence’,⁵² and he then discusses a number of details from the fable which are implausible.

Such an appeal to internal consistency also informs Valla’s demonstration that the *constitutum Constantini* is a forgery. Valla marshals a wide array of arguments, pointing to chronological impossibilities, inconsistencies, anachronisms and so forth. Another type of argument used by Valla in this work brings us close to the rhetorical strategy we have been considering so far, namely, to summon up pictures. What would Constantine’s sons have done, having discovered their father’s plan to donate a large part of his imperial domains to Pope Sylvester? Imagine the scene before your eyes (*Ponite igitur illos ante oculos mente*):⁵³

he would offend his sons ... humiliate his friends, ignore his relatives, injure his country, plunge everybody into grief, and forget his own interests! But if, having been such a man as he was, he had been transformed as it were into another man, there would certainly not have been lacking those who would warn him, most of all his sons, his relatives, and his friends. Who does not think that they would have gone at once to the emperor? Picture them to yourself, when the purpose of Constantine had become known, trembling, hastening to fall with groans and tears at the feet of the prince, and saying: ‘Is it thus that you, a father hitherto most affectionate toward your sons, despoil your sons, disinherit them, disown them?’

In employing the rhetorical strategy of evoking such pictures and fictive dialogues, Valla’s aim is to show the internal inconsistencies of the case. The argument of the author of the *constitutum Constantini* is psychologically implausible as it makes Constantine behave in a different way from what one would expect. It goes against the logic of events and the logic of people’s behaviour. Valla’s analysis of the *constitutum Constantini* is similar – at least in this respect – to his interpretation of the fable of Gyges. Both are *ficta*, which are internally inconsistent, contradictory and

⁵¹ *De voluptate* (ed. and transl. Heiatt and Lorch), pp. 188-194. See Langer, ‘The Ring’: ‘Valla’s dialogue ... submits the fictional example to standards of dialectical, that is, logical argumentation surprisingly more characteristic of the treatise’ (p. 144), and ‘pushes it into the realm of “what could have been” and allows it to be forceful only under those circumstances’ (p. 145).

⁵² *De voluptate* (ed. and transl. Heiatt and Lorch), pp. 188-189: *huius fabule auctorem nescisse probe fingere, cuius fictio non quadrat nec sibi constat*.

⁵³ Valla, *De falso credita et ementita Constantini donatione* (ed. Setz), p. 68; transl. Coleman, *The treatise*, p. 37.

implausible. Valla's use of fictive examples and speeches (often in the form of prosopopeia or *oratio ficta*) serves the purpose of finding the truth. Eloquence and truth are two sides of the same coin.

One of the most explicit uses of *imaginatio* is found in the third book of *De vero falsoque bono* in which Antonio da Rho, in the role of Christian interlocutor, gives a picture of the happiness in Paradise. What was denied to philosophers, mathematicians and theoreticians, namely to picture things which go beyond the senses, is here defended by appealing to faith:

if we succeed by an act of the imagination in presenting before their eyes (*ante oculos imaginatione quadam ponamus*) those things that do not fall under them, have we not gained a great support, and something like a token for the faith, something that is like a miracle? ... faith is strengthened greatly if we do get to see what is promised.⁵⁴

The verb *imaginari* and *ingere* are used interchangeably by Antonio, and essentially mean to 'picture', 'to put before one's (mental) eye' and 'to see'.⁵⁵ This use of the *imaginatio* became an essential tool of preachers in their orations on the Christian mysteries in Quattrocento Italy.⁵⁶ As O'Malley has shown, the development of this tool was influenced by the revival of the *genus demonstrativum*, or epideictic genre, of classical rhetoric, in which praise and blame are appropriately distributed. In depicting the heavenly rewards, Valla has Antonio make ample use of the rhetorical technique of *illuminatio* or *evidentia*, which, as Quintilian writes, 'makes us seem not so much to narrate as to exhibit the actual scene, while our emotions will be no less actively stirred than if we were present at the actual occurrence'.⁵⁷ This is one of the best examples in Valla's works of his explicit use of the rhetorical concept of *imaginatio*.

Valla's view of language

Even though Valla recognised and discussed the *vis orationis*, his primary interest lay with the refinement of the Latin language. As he writes in the *Elegantiae*: 'I am writing not about eloquence, but about the refinement of the Latin language, from which one may nonetheless begin the pursuit of

⁵⁴ *De voluptate* (ed. and transl. Heatt and Lorch), p. 287.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, e.g. p. 286 (*temptemus imaginari*), 288 (*effingenda*), 299 (*ingamus*), 306 (*affingere*), 312 (*pone tibi ante oculos*).

⁵⁶ O'Malley, *Praise, passim*, but see esp. pp. 63-70.

⁵⁷ *Institutio oratoria* VI.2.32 (ed. and transl. Butler), vol. 2, p. 434-435. See Marsh, 'Struttura', pp. 311-326, at 323-324.

eloquence'.⁵⁸ Valla's interests in the correct usage of words was influenced by the study of the Roman law. He praised the writers of the *Digest* for their correct and elegant use of Latin. Without these qualities, he suggests, it is impossible to write about any art or discipline and certainly civil law, which hinges on fine distinctions: 'In my judgment, one can neither add to nor subtract from, not so much their eloquence (to which their subject does not greatly lend itself) as their Latinity and refinement, without which all learning is blind and illiberal, especially in civil law'.⁵⁹

A focus on the *proprietas* of words, on the various ways in which they are used in practice and on the distinctions of meanings of a term (or of two or more related terms), ties the use of language to social conventions and customs. It stresses the common and ordinary use of language rather than the unexpected and extraordinary. It may therefore be not too speculative to suggest that this view of language as primarily a social and cultural vehicle for communication could easily lead to a comparative lack of attention to the imaginative aspects of our use of language. *Imaginatio* was generally considered to be a power of the mind, that is, of the *individual* orator or speaker. To conjure up images or to use powerful imagery is essentially a personal quality which requires *ars* and *ingenium* to develop.⁶⁰ Valla's view of language, while far from ignoring the importance of verbal skills and oratorical powers in individual men, underscores the aspects of communal intelligibility and communication. In a famous passage in his *Oratio in principio studii*, delivered at Rome in 1455, he develops this view into what has been termed a 'theory of culture'. Why could the Roman culture become so powerful and influential? Because of the language which spread far and wide.⁶¹

For it is ordained by Nature that nothing should be able to progress or grow very much that is not being built up, elaborated, and refined by many individual men, particularly men who are in competition with each other and vying with each other for public esteem.

⁵⁸ IV, proemium (*Opera Omnia*, vol. 1, p. 120); I quote Marsh's translation in his 'Grammar', 102.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 102, quoting *Elegantiae* III, proemium (*Opera Omnia*, vol. 1, p. 80).

⁶⁰ Though Quintilian writes that the attainment of rhetorical effects is easy: 'We shall secure the vividness we seek, if only descriptions give the impressions of truth, nay, we may even add fictitious incidents of the type which commonly occur ... Though the attainment of such effects is, in my opinion, the highest of all oratorical gifts, it is far from difficult of attainment. Fix your eyes on nature and follow her' (*Inst. orat.* VIII.3.70-71, ed. and transl. Butler, vol. 3, pp. 248-251).

⁶¹ I quote from the transl. by Baxandall (*Giotto*, p. 118). On this oration and its background, see Rizzo, *Lorenzo Valla, Orazione*.

Progress is only made possible by the work of many hands:

no art can be established by a single man, nor indeed by a few men; it needs many, very many men, and these men must not be unknown to each other – how otherwise could they vie with each other and contend for glory? But above all else they must be known and related to each other by virtue of communication in the same language ... Thus the sciences and arts were meagre and almost nothing as long as each nation used its own peculiar language. But when the power of the Romans spread and the nations were brought within its law and fortified by lasting peace, it came about that very many peoples used the Latin language and so had intercourse with each other.⁶²

Language then is for Valla the vehicle of cultural growth, or at least a necessary condition of it. As in the other arts, two phases in its development may be distinguished: the phase of invention and creation by individual artists and orators, followed by a process of communication of these achievements to other competitors in the field.⁶³ This process is made possible by a language which is shared by all, leading to a common tradition in which individual achievements are recognised and valued. Language is pivotal, for Roman achievements vanished after the collapse of the Roman Empire; only the Roman language was preserved, deteriorating, however, from the time of Boethius onwards. Valla expressed his hopes that classical Latin would soon regain its importance, even though the circumstances had vastly changed between classical Rome and fifteenth-century Italy. But Valla witnessed the flourishing of the arts in his own time, and why, he asked, could language not follow their example?⁶⁴

Valla put more emphasis on language as a vehicle of social and cultural progression and as an instrument of communication than on the extraordinary, singular and unique features of the use of language by individual speakers. Language is like a city which could be built only by many hands and many generations. Hence, his studies of the intricacies and

⁶² *Oratio*, transl. in Baxandall, *Giotto*, p. 119.

⁶³ *Ibidem*. Cf. also the important remarks by Rizzo, '*L'Oratio*', p. 76 where it is suggested that the idea of Latin as the foundation of the developments of arts and sciences was already expressed by Petrarch.

⁶⁴ For some good critical remarks on Valla's position, see Regoliosi, '*La concezione*', pp. 145-157, esp. 154-157 where it is noted that Valla's position is not quite consistent, for while Valla recognised and accepted the development of Latin in the classical period, he rejected later developments and was blind to the new role which the vernacular had occupied. In aiming at one universal language, Valla pursued '*una chimerica ed equivoca illusione*' (p. 157).

niceties of Latin grammar, syntax and vocabulary were led by his principle that custom (*consuetudo*) should rule the use of language. What fell outside the scope of classical Latin, as exhibited by a wide-ranging reading of classical authors, was – with a few exceptions – to be rejected.

This does not mean, however, that Valla's view necessarily entailed a neglect, let alone a denial of the importance of *imaginatio* for the rhetorician. *Imaginatio* – so one may argue – simply worked at a different level, that is, at the first stage where orators created powerful language, full of images and rhetorical tropes. Moreover, rhetoricians advised moderation in using images and similes: they should not be commonplace, but neither should they stray too far away from our common language and common views. Quintilian stressed the need for unexpected and arresting images and similes: 'the more remote the simile is from the subject to which it is applied, the greater will be the impression of novelty and the unexpected which it produces'.⁶⁵ On the other hand, our imagery should never be unduly far fetched. Over-ambitious and extravagant language should be avoided, for it leads to obscurity. As Quintilian said about metaphor:⁶⁶

While a temperate and timely use of metaphor is a real adornment to style, on the other hand, its frequent use serves merely to obscure our language and weary our audience, while if we introduce them in one continuous series, our language will become allegorical and enigmatic.

Imaginatio should therefore never be allowed to wander aimlessly, losing touch with our ordinary world and conceptions. The orator should be reminded of Quintilian's words that 'all eloquence is concerned with the activities of life, while every man applies to himself what he hears from others, and the mind is always readiest to accept what it recognises to be true to nature'.⁶⁷ Orators should therefore find a proper balance between the two extremes, for this ensures good results in trying to convince an audience or arouse its emotions.

This requirement of striking a good balance between cliché and eccentricity is fully in line with Valla's general point of view that eloquence should be rooted in our activities of life. Moreover, his own works show that he himself knew well how to approach his audience and how to adapt his tone (for instance in the *Oratio in principio studii* in which he praises the papacy),⁶⁸ as he also knew how to stir negative response (e.g. in his not

⁶⁵ *Inst. orat.* VIII.3.74 (ed. and transl. Butler), vol. 3, pp. 252-253.

⁶⁶ *Inst. orat.* VIII.6.14 (ed. and transl. Butler), vol. 3, pp. 306-308.

⁶⁷ *Inst. orat.* VIII.3.71 (ed. and transl. Butler), vol. 3, pp. 250-251.

⁶⁸ Cf. Rizzo, 'L'Oratio', p. 80.

so flattering lecture on Thomas Aquinas delivered before the congregation of Dominicans in Rome), inventing new images and similes or adapting traditional ones to new contexts. He certainly did not have any qualms about *imaginatio* as used by orators and rhetoricians – we have seen several examples from Valla’s works – so long as it stayed within the boundaries laid down by the classical theorists. Nevertheless, because his main interests concerned the grammar and semantics of the Latin language, as governed by *consuetudo loquendi*, he may have felt it unnecessary to dwell upon the classical account of *imaginatio* as a power to arouse the emotions of one’s public.

Conclusion

The concept of *imaginatio* was developed and used within several different contexts. Being primarily a term standing for the faculty of the mind which combines pictures of objects no longer present, it played an important role in the commentary tradition on Aristotelian writings on the soul. It was taken up and developed in the rhetorical tradition, in which Cicero and Quintilian discussed this *vis mentis* as an important instrument for the orator’s task of moving his audience. Though the two traditions were not entirely independent of each other, it is clear from the case of Lorenzo Valla that the rhetorical concept did not necessarily involve a consideration of the philosophical-psychological and, more particularly, the Aristotelian tradition. Valla did not pay any attention to the imaginative faculty of the soul, not only because he had an entirely different, more Augustinian picture of it, but also because he would have considered the listing of various kinds of faculties as a typically scholastic exercise. According to Valla, scholastic philosophy made use of procedures in which abstract terms were reified and considered in abstraction, and these abstractions and reifications were the product of the *imaginatio*. This critique of the role of imagination in philosophical theorising reminds one of Wittgenstein’s. As David Pears paraphrases Wittgenstein’s views:⁶⁹

Philosophical theories are a product of the imagination, and they offer us simple, but seemingly profound pictures, which blind us to the actual complexities of language. The new philosophy is an organized resistance to this enchantment, and its method is always to bring us back to the linguistic phenomena, with which we are perfectly familiar, but which we cannot keep in focus when we philosophize in the old way.

⁶⁹ Pears, *Wittgenstein*, p. 16.

Taken in isolation, these words may be applied to Valla. It is therefore not surprising that some scholars have discerned some similarities between Valla and Wittgenstein (though not with regard to these criticisms of philosophical theorising as a product of the imagination).⁷⁰ But even if some positions may strike us as similar at the surface level, they are motivated and developed in vastly different ways – naturally so, given the entirely different worlds in which the two men lived. Moreover, the charge that philosophers are misled by reification, abstract terms and metaphorical language, is an old one, going back to Plato. In Plato's *Parmenides*, for instance, the interlocutor Parmenides criticises the young Socrates for reifying the Forms and taking the essentially metaphorical description of the relationship between Forms and things in a literal way.

Valla's negative view of *imaginatio* seems therefore to have been restricted to its use in philosophy and theology. While he did not explicitly deal with the rhetorical interpretation, he was aware – as we have seen in various passages – of the importance of a good imagination in the orator. *Imaginatio* can serve different functions, dependent on the context or the discipline: a poet has a *summa dicendi licentia*, an historian aims at a truthful reconstruction of past events, an orator tries to convince his audience. They all make use of eloquence, of which imaginative pictures form an essential part. And each adjusts his language and style to his audience or readership. A polemical debate requires a different tone than an historical account or a poem, just as the style and vocabulary of a letter vary according to the status of the addressee. But while he put these general maxims into practice all the time, in his reflections on language Valla laid more stress on its social and cultural function rather than on the use of language by individual speakers and writers. The fundamental criterion of the correct use of language is the *consuetudo popularis* or – to give some equivalents found in Valla's *Repastinatio* – *consuetudo sermonis humani, utissima verborum consuetudo, communis loquendi mos, loqui naturaliter atque hominum more, naturalis sensus ususque communis*.⁷¹ This ties language closely to human activities and conceptions of the everyday world.

⁷⁰ Camporeale quotes Wittgenstein in his 'Lorenzo Valla': Valla's *consuetudo loquendi* 'non è qualcosa di diverso da ciò che il Wittgenstein ... chiama "la grammatica della parola"' (p. 233; cf. 217). Waswo has also linked Wittgenstein with Valla in 'The ordinary language philosophy of Lorenzo Valla' and in his *Language and Meaning in the Renaissance*. This approach, in particular Waswo's interpretation, has been severely criticised (and rightly so, I believe) by Monfasani, 'Was Lorenzo Valla an Ordinary Language Philosopher?'

⁷¹ Listed by Camporeale, 'Lorenzo Valla', pp. 230-231. On the entire question, see Tavoni, *Latino*.