

Article title: *Crackinge Thraso: the Braggart Soldier Image in Sixteenth-Century Sermons and Religious Polemic*

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Abstract:

The article contributes to recent debates about the use of “profane learning” by humanist scholars in the sixteenth century in their sermons and religious polemic. It does this by surveying the use of references in such texts to the braggart soldier “Thraso” from the ancient Roman comedy *Eunuchus*, by Terence. The article situates the surprising number of references to this morally dubious figure – in sermons, polemic, and wider religious writing – within a Renaissance pedagogy that stressed the character’s usefulness for the moral and political imagination. Identifying differences between the rhetorical contexts of sermons and polemic, it surveys and analyses a range of references to Thraso, and argues that even evocations of such a resolutely hateful figure as Thraso could vary in comic tone. In addition, such evocations were not only simple quotations or epithets; they could also be attempts to channel whole scenes from Terence’s play.

Keywords: Comedy, Sermons, Rhetoric, Religion, Terence, Roman

Given that the figure of ‘Thraso’ – the *miles gloriosus* from Terence’s ancient Roman play *Eunuchus* – has been read, in almost every period, as a resolutely dubious, even hateful character, it may seem strange that there are so many specific references to him in early modern religious writing. Thraso features variously across what historians have described as the explosion of “Protestant print” in sixteenth-century England.¹ Even at the beginning of that, however, we find, for example, the staunchly Roman Catholic voice of William Chedsey making mention of Thraso in a sermon at Paul’s Cross in 1544.² Discussing the Pharisees’ questioning of Jesus in Mathew 22, Chedsey calls on his humanist learning with this reference not only to Thraso but to the character Gnatho from the same play, who is Thraso’s *parasitus*. Chedsey says, “It is true that one sayeth. *Si tu vis esse Thraso nusquam deerit Gnato*: If thou delite to be flattered with all, thou shalt never mysse flatterers”. Chedsey’s English words gloss his Latin proverb, which translated more directly reads: “If you wish to be Thraso, Gnatho will never be wanting”. Chedsey follows this up immediately with a moral lesson: “men be so blinded nowe a dayes and so myche standeth in their owne conceite, that the proverb which saynt Augustyne doth use is verified in us. *Crevit caput et impinguatum est oleo*. Our heades be growen great and fatted with oyle”.³ Boasting Thraso is a useful image of what it means to be prey to any slick flatterer with some oil.

My purpose in this article is to survey some of the most interesting references to Thraso in sixteenth-century sermons and polemic in England, and, through Thraso, references to Roman comedy. It is also to situate those references within a pedagogical culture that

¹ See: Green, *Print and Protestantism*, 180-2; Collinson, et. al., “Religious publishing in England”, 29-66.

² Chedsey’s sermon was published the year after in 1545, as *Two notable sermons lately preached at Pauls Crosse*.

³ Chedsey, *Two notable sermons*, DIIIv-DIVr.

thought of Roman comedy as being useful in both moral and civic terms. As I cannot investigate the rhetorical context of each example thoroughly, the aim is rather to contribute to recent scholarly discussions about the broader phenomenon of “profane learning” in print material specifically styled “sermons” and in religious writing more broadly.⁴ The use of profane learning – non-biblical material, such as references to characters and situations from ancient literature, quotations from it, and extracted, or developed moral *sententiae* – is, of course, one feature of the influence of humanism on the training of clergy in this period. There are so many references to Thraso in the print material in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth century – across so many kinds of writing – that one feels as if the character came to have a special place in humanist imaginations at the time, in something like the same way Hamlet and Falstaff have in later ones. The references to Thraso help us to focus usefully on aspects of the operation of sixteenth-century humanist pedagogy in the religious sphere, a pedagogy that emphasized that character’s usefulness for the moral and political imagination. As I have said, Thraso turns up in many kinds of broadly “religious” writing. One of the most useful contrasts, however, and a key contrast in this essay, is between writing styled as “sermons” (as, for instance, Chedsey’s *Two Notable Sermons*) and writing which would be better described as “polemic”. While we may have a strong sense that the demands of decorum in “sermons” are stricter than those in the realm of polemic, at the same time, the references to Thraso do run across these areas of Protestant print.

Of course, when it comes to the knotty and difficult issue of decorum, we are not merely dealing with the difference between sermons and polemic, but in addition, the difference between sermons as heard and sermons as printed. The latter is a difficult issue. It is related to the question of how different a sermon in print was to its original verbal delivery. For instance, one might ask the following questions of the Chedsey example above.

⁴ Reisner uses the phrase in “Preacher and Profane Learning”.

Would Chedsey actually have mentioned Thraso in public at the Paul's Cross pulpit? Or, is it, instead, the sort of reference only suitable for a printed sermon? Furthermore, if Chedsey had been delivering the sermon elsewhere than Paul's Cross, would the reference be any more/less suitable? Answering those questions is difficult. One might expect that a printed sermon was a safer place to use profane quotations because of the relative distance between preacher and reader, and then assume the relative indecorum of profane quotations in a spoken-sermon context, given that it involves the more immediate prospect of personal offence and potential embarrassment. The case of William Glibery, who was charged by some of his auditory for over-audacious jesting, is a relevant example.⁵ On the other hand, going into print meant taking other kinds of care. Even if the main structure, focus and argument of a spoken sermon likely survived the passage into print, preachers went into print partly for the purposes of theological self-construction and political intervention, as Mary Morrissey and Arnold Hunt have pointed out, about which much care must have been taken.⁶ The potential for indecorum must have existed with the audience of a spoken sermon as well as with the wider audience of a printed one. Yet how are we to substantiate ideas about where and how those "audiences" actually were different beyond the reactions of particular individuals? Mary Morrissey and Noam Reisner have both drawn attention to the fact that preachers used profane learning differently for different audiences. Since some "puritans", for instance, did object to it, though by no means all, a more helpful approach may therefore be to recognize that preachers of whatever stripe used learned quotations if they felt that it suited the audience, as Morrissey has suggested.⁷ However, it is still an especially difficult task to imagine critically the differences between the audiences of spoken sermons and those of printed sermons.

⁵ See the discussion and sources in Craig, "Sermon reception", 178-9.

⁶ See Morrissey, *Paul's Cross Sermons*, 36-67, and Hunt, *Art of Hearing*, 147-56.

⁷ See Morrissey, "Scripture, Style and Persuasion", 695-6.

Perhaps the differences are no clearer when thinking about the respective audiences for “sermons” and “polemic”. In a culture pervasively obsessed with theological *correctness* can we really say that doctrinal polemic – with its greater abundance of profane learning targeted primarily at highly educated religious enemies – was not in any way also shaped by the expectation of a much wider readership? For those reasons, and because the scope of this essay precludes a fuller investigation of actual audiences, I prefer to engage with the issue of decorum at the level of rhetorical purpose rather than audience make-up.⁸

What follows proceeds on the assumption that the greater number of (more playful) references to Thraso in the polemical sources is the result of a difference of decorum shaped, for instance, by the respective rhetorical purposes of edification (sermons) and vilification (polemic). Of course, even at the level of rhetorical purpose, the differences were more complex than that, as will become clearer. The larger pattern I want to draw attention to, however, is that in spite of those very differences, the impulse to exert knowledge of Terence on the world is testament to the power of one particular aspect of humanist education not commonly addressed in the same context as “religion”.

Two ideas will emerge from the survey. First, the references to Thraso could range in their comic tone. On the one side, they could be brutally scornful and othering; on the other, they could be playful and self-involving. When preachers and polemical writers referred to other people or notional others as something like a “cracking Thraso”, this did not function merely to create a self-distancing scorn for them. While it certainly could do that, such references could also involve structures of self-reference and self-dramatization. Chedsey, as was seen, uses Thraso/Gnatho as registers of behaviour that anybody might fall into even as he uses them for the sake of moral/civil disapprobation. Second, uses of

⁸ For a larger discussion of the topic of decorum in religious ridicule, see Anselment, *‘Betwixt Jest and Earnest’*.

Thraso could range from being simple references to that name, or quotations from the text, to more complex attempts to utilize the *image* of Thraso from his Roman dramatic context. To recognize that “Thraso” could evoke not merely ideas but a dramatic context from Terence’s comedy itself challenges afresh the tendency to understand sixteenth-century uses of “profane learning” as a process largely of pulling classical references out of their original context. Rather, and especially in the polemical sources, images of Thraso in residual dramatic context became powerful ways of expressing anti-theatricality and exploring both the rhetorical excess of a religious enemy and one’s own potential to indulge in it.

Reisner’s discussion of profane learning in sermons, while especially helpful, nonetheless focuses only on references to Ovid.⁹ Almost no study has been devoted to where and how preachers and religious polemicists used references to Roman comedy, and none bring together sermons and polemic in this way. Reisner suggests, reasonably, that Ovid was “the most radically profane of all classical poets” and yet for the generations brought up to read Roman comedy as morally instructive, the very dubiousness of figures such as Thraso in dramatic context – not to mention the *meretrices* – went right to the heart of the ambivalence felt in a religious context toward Latin literature.¹⁰

It is, of course, hardly surprising that early modern preachers and writers of polemical religious literature made reference to profane learning. After all, this was a clerical culture in which generations of school children and university students were made, day after day,

⁹ Reisner, “Preacher and Profane Learning”, 81-5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 81.

to imbibe Cicero, Horace, Virgil, Ovid, Seneca, and of course Terence – to speak only of the standard Roman authors.¹¹

Before turning in more detail to that educational culture, let us recall the figure of Thraso from Terence's play *Eunuchus*. Thraso is a bragging (or 'cracking') soldier who is pursuing a relationship with the courtesan Thais. Thais has another paramour, however: Thraso's younger rival Phaedria. Phaedria eventually gets the upper hand with Thais, to Thraso's dismay. His frustration comes to a comic climax in a scene at the end of act IV. Thraso marches up to Thais's house together with an army of household slaves brandishing their utensils in order to demand her attention – "centurion Sanga" has brought his sponge!¹² Of course, Thais is not scared and Thraso has no real intention to fight or stomach for confrontation, so, after a pathetic show of weakness, he sulks off with a pout. Another memorable scene is that which begins act III. In this scene, Thraso tells Gnatho tall tales about his exploits in war and wit, as Gnatho his hungry parasite is busy flattering him to maintain a place at the table. Gnatho goads Thraso further here so that he can make the soldier that much more the butt of his own joke, a joke he shares with the audience in an aside.¹³ Both scenes – which I will call the "confrontation scene" and the "flattery scene" respectively – are important for what follows.

To return to the educational culture in which preachers of the period were raised, the reason we find these scenes, and their comic energy, turning up in their religious writing is that Roman comedy was indeed taken seriously by humanist teachers as having a pedagogical purpose. Phillip Melanchthon, for example, thought the household slave-army

¹¹ The foundational study is T.W. Baldwin, *Small Latine and Lesse Greeke*; but, for a more recent and focused study, see Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric*, 11-47. For a focused study of one particular author, see also, Wallace, *Virgil's Schoolboys*.

¹² Reference is to John Barsby's *Loeb* edition; the scene is at act IV scene viii, and the reference to Sanga at line 776.

¹³ The scene occurs at lines 391-453, Gnatho's joking aside at 409-10.

scene quite funny (*ridicula*), saying so in his commentary on Terence, collected in the Corpus Reformatorum as *Enarratio Comoediarum Terentii*, a compendium of learned discussion devoted to explaining what young Christian boys could get out of reading Terence.¹⁴ Concerning Thraso's particular significance, Melanchthon suggests that "there is no kind of life where you will not find a great many Thrasons" and that "it is for this reason that the image of Thraso in this play should be diligently observed and contemplated, so that you might learn how inept and empty such busybodies are".¹⁵ Melanchthon's general approach to Terence's characters is to say that in them "examples are set before the mind of prudence and imprudence in order that we may compare and establish our own ways from them, and correct our judgment, and so that we may learn what is to be approved and what disapproved".¹⁶ Elsewhere he suggests that "comedy is nothing else but a certain image of human councils and experiences".¹⁷

Erasmus, too, was even more famously obsessed with what one can learn from Terence's characters. Throughout his writing, Erasmus refers to their usefulness. For example, in a widely known letter to a "friend" he speaks of people who "fail to perceive how much moral goodness exists in Terence's plays, how much implicit exhortation to shape one's life...nor do they understand that this kind of literature is entirely suitable – nay, was invented – for the purpose of showing up men's vices...As for those who complacently blow their own trumpet, who we observe to include most of the ignorant men

¹⁴ Melanchthon, *Enarratio*, 713.

¹⁵ "nullum autem vitae genus est, ubi non plurimum Thrasonum reperias...quare diligenter intuenda contemplandaque Thrasonis imago in hac fabula, ut discas, quam sint inepti, quam nihili, ardeliones isti" (713).

¹⁶ "prudentium et imprudentium exempla proponuntur, ut ex illis et nostros mores comparemus, et iudicium corrigamus, disceamus, quae probanda sint, quae improbanda" (695).

¹⁷ "Neque vero aliud est comoedia, nisi humanorum consiliorum et eventuum imago quaedam" (697).

of wealth, they should look at their brother Thraso, and understand how absurd their boasting makes them look”.¹⁸

While in this essay I focus on the many references to Terence’s Thraso, it must be said that he was not the only Terentian character to capture the imaginations of sixteenth-century religious writers. Gnatho (from the same play, *Eunuchus*) as well as Micio and Demea (the two brothers from *Adelphoe*) were sometimes referred to as well. For Melanchthon, Micio was interesting as a two-sided image of parenthood: early in the play he is an “image of lenity, which is useful at every age”, but later in the play, he is “a ridiculous example of prodigality”.¹⁹ Robert Sanderson in a sermon preached at Paul’s Cross thought of Micio – as many others did too – when he needed an example of Roman sexual license: the character had acquired a certain notoriety for all too easily excusing his son’s brothel creeping.²⁰

Erasmus’s and Melanchthon’s comments about comic character as reflecting an image of what moral weakness might look like in a civil (and familial) context accords completely with the old idea – attributed in the fourth century to Cicero by Donatus in the latter’s own commentary on Terence – that “comedy is an imitation of life, mirror of habits, and an

¹⁸ Erasmus, *Collected Works*, (hereafter CWE), vol. 1, 59. For Latin text see Allen, v.1, 124: “non vident quanta illic sit moralitas, quanta vitae instituendae tacita exhortatio...Neque intelligunt totum hoc scripti genus ad coarguenda mortalium vitia accomodatum, imo adeo inventum...lactabundi et sibi placentes, quales divitum plerosque imperitos videmus, Thrasonem suum spectent ac tandem cum sua magnificentia quam ridiculi sint intelligant”.

¹⁹ Melanchthon, *Enarratio*: “imaginem lenitatis...quae prodest omnibus aetatibus” (745), and “ridicula prodigalitatibus exempla” (758).

²⁰ Sanderson, *Two Sermons*, 78; Sanderson quotes Micio’s words “Non est flagitium mihi crede adolescentulum scortari” (ll. 101-2 of the play – see Barsby’s edition), words that became problematic for lovers of both Terence and Christian morality.

image of truth”.²¹ We can immediately see why this is of notional interest to preachers and polemicists across the ecclesiological spectrum if the comic mirror is linked with an idea stated clearly in Andreas Hyperius’s popular preaching manual. In the contemporary sixteenth-century English translation, by John Ludham, Hyperius says that: “those therefore that endeavour themselves to teache the people in sacred assemblies, have neede of a double doctrine and understandinge: the one of thinges divine...the other of thinges humaine”.²² Hyperius then justifies the second category of useful knowledge – “thinges humaine” – thus: “for how shall hee prudentlye frame his sermon agaynst usurye and manye unjste bargaynes and contractes, eyther else agaynst lewd and cancred customes commonlye received, that have not some kinde of knowledge of civill affayres?”²³ This is precisely what Melanchthon suggested one could get from reading Terence.

Yet it is not just a general knowledge of the stupidity and vice of other people that makes references to Thraso and Gnatho meaningful, for Thraso became an image with which to explore imaginatively one’s own moral weaknesses. This is a repeated topos throughout Erasmus’s letters. In a famous letter to Pope Leo X of 1516 – justifying his revision of the New Testament – Erasmus worries that he may “show a touch of Thraso in the comedy”.²⁴ In a letter to Andrea Ammonio, he writes of how the Bishop of Basel has honoured him, and jests that, “if I am to turn Thraso like this, it had better wait until we

²¹ See Donatus, *Commentum Terenti*, ed. Wessner: “comoediam esse Cicero ait imitationem vitae, speculum consuetudinis, imaginem veritatis” (22).

²² Hyperius, *The Practis of Preaching*, 4r.

²³ *Ibid.*, 4r-4v.

²⁴ CWE, vol. 3, 224; Allen, vol. 2, 187 [letter no. 384]: “nonnihil Thrasonis e comoedia referre”.

meet”.²⁵ In a letter to Erasmus, Thomas More admits with tongue a little in cheek, “although not free from failings in many other ways, at least I am no Thraso; I am entirely free from vainglory”.²⁶ The implicit approach here to bragging Thraso and his flattering parasite Gnatho – as self-dramatizing roles one might try to avoid falling into – can also be seen well beyond Erasmus and his circle. The English educationalist Richard Mulcaster writes that people with a contempt for knowledge “will cause them selues to be their owne *Gnatoes*, a most unproper part, to be seene vpon a stage, when the same person plaieth *Thraso*, and answereth himselfe, as if he were two”.²⁷ Stefano Guazzo’s treatise on courtesy, *The Civile Conversation*, also plays with the idea that Gnatho and Thraso are respective roles one might self-theatrically relate to: “If one of these *Gnatoes*, of whom you haue made mention, should fall to commending mee, and bend him selfe to set mee fourth in the best colours he coulde, undoubtedly I shoulde become a very *Thraso*”.²⁸ Even Sir Philip Sidney, who thought of laughter primarily as an expression of scorn, thought that “no man living” could see “flattering Gnatho” or “vainglorious Thraso” playing their parts without wishing them to be punished, unless “perchance the sack of his own faults lie so behind his back that he seeth not himself dance the same measure”.²⁹

Where reference is made to Thraso in publications specifically styled “sermons” the comic tone varies: from outright scorn for what is distant from the self to a tone more self-referential. Robert Milles’s Paul’s Cross sermon, *Abraham’s Suite for Sodome*, preached 1611 and published the following year, is an example of the former, a straightforwardly

²⁵ CWE, vol. 3, 296-7; Allen, vol. 2, 246 [letter no. 414]: “sed praestat coram hunc Thrasonem agere”.

²⁶ CWE, vol. 5, 147; Allen, vol. 3, 104 [letter no. 683]: “me ut tibi probem (quanquam multis alioquin ineptiis non vaco) vacare saltem longissime ab Trasonicis adfectibus”.

²⁷ Mulcaster, *Positions*, 221.

²⁸ Guazzo, *The Civile Conversation*, 33r-34v.

²⁹ Sidney, *Apology for Poetry*, 98.

negative type set out for distancing scorn. Discussing a list of “idle bees”, he comes to a most despised category: “The fourth idle Bee, or sect of philosophers is the stoicke...And these I call your Mimical comedians, and apish actors, who with Thraso, thunder out sesquipedalia verba, a heap of inkehorne terms”.³⁰ Robert Shelford’s use of Thraso to characterise the antichrist is similarly scornful. Shelford notes of the antichrist that: “Against all these [Monarchs, Kings, Judges, Idols] he shall proceed, not onely like a Thraso, by way of bragging and boasting; but by way of opposition”.³¹ Likewise, John Scull in his *Two Sermons* published 1624, makes scornful reference to “vainglorious Thraso” – just as Sidney does in a different context – when condemning “maledicendo”, ill-speaking.³²

By contrast, some uses in the “sermons” approach a more self-referential tone, such as was seen in Erasmus and Mulcaster, where “Thraso” embodies faults that the writer feels they might easily fall into. The Chedsey example I began with does this. A further example occurs in Samuel Collins’s Paul’s Cross sermon of 1607. After a long recitation of comparisons to make his point about forthrightness over deceitfulness, he pauses:

But I stand upon thornes, while I stand upon comparisons. Nos nec pugnas narramus nec cicatrices nostras [We do not tell of our battles and scars], though *Thraso may*; it is enough for us, if we may be found one day among them, in quorum ore non est inventus dolus, in whose mouth there was found no guile, as Saint Austine [sic] sweetly expounds it.³³

Boasting Thraso, of course, registers here a contrast with one’s ideal self. But Collins self-consciously uses the proverbial phrase “I stand on thornes” to mean “I am impatient,

³⁰ Milles, *Abraham’s Suite*, fol. D5v.

³¹ Shelford, *Five Pious and Learned discourses*, 259.

³² Scull, *Two sermons*, 44.

³³ Collins, *A Sermon*, 65.

anxious, uncomfortable”, having so eloquently and relentlessly recounted his comparisons. It is “Thraso” who symbolises the over-abundant wordiness he perhaps senses himself to be approaching. Thus he quickly reverts to a simple declaration of the point: one ought to use one’s mouth without guile.

The variety of comic tone – expressing both opprobrium and self-identification – becomes even more visible in the polemical sources. Before getting to them, however, I want to bring to the surface at this point in the discussion the relative textual or generic fluidity that exists across the sphere of “religious publishing” in the Protestant England of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.³⁴ An obvious example is the crossover between “sermons” and “treatises”. Robert Shelford’s publication *Five pious and learned discourses*, mentioned above, included two “sermons” and three “treatises”. Thomas Taylor’s *Three Treatises* of 1633 contain discourses that read just like sermons.³⁵ The full title of Egeon Askew’s 1605 publication (which also mentions Thraso) itself declares the crossovers: *Brotherly reconcilment preached in Oxford for the union of some, and now published with larger meditations for the unitie of all in this Church and common-wealth: with an apologie of the use of fathers, and secular learning in sermons.*³⁶ References to Thraso turn up in other religious “genres” too, such as the moral philosophising of Thomas Rogers and the exegetical writing of Gervase Babington and James Pilkington, though of course such publications are not in any easy way generically separable.³⁷ Clearly there

³⁴ For a clear sense of the fluidity, see: Collinson, et. al., “Religious publishing in England”, 29-35.

³⁵ They have also been glossed as such: *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁶ Askew refers to Thraso at 247. For further discussion of the sermon/treatise overlap see Green, *Print and Protestantism*, 194-5.

³⁷ For the references to Thraso, see: Rogers, *A Philosophical Discourse*, the “Preface to the Friendly Reader”, unpaginated; Babington, *A Very Fruitful Exposition*, 261; and Pilkington, *A Godlie Exposition*, 49v.

was a complex cross-pollination of arenas in which religious ideas and “profane learning” could be brought together. This is an important point because the crosspollinating religious literature exploding onto the English Protestant book market from the mid sixteenth century invites us to think about the way references to Roman comedy run across areas of religious print material we tend to keep notionally separate.

From that variety, I shall focus, in what follows, on the references to *Thraso* in the polemical writing. In them, playful self-reference seems more pronounced than in the self-styled “sermons” and is integrated into more specific complaints, such as low-quality biblical exegesis. It is as if the rhetorical context is slightly different here, and the writers feel freer than they would in “sermons” to enjoy the roleplaying potential of *Thraso* and *Gnatho* and the opportunity it affords of addressing other issues, such as everyone’s potential for rhetorical excess. For example, Petrus Frarinus uses the reference to express his scorn for Martin Luther thus: “This bragginge *Thraso* telleth manie strainge matters of him selfe more maruelouse then true”.³⁸ The epithet here is full of opprobrium, but the tone of it must be interpreted in light of the fact that Luther himself does the same thing when he refers to one of his religious adversaries thus: “Satan began to open his eyes; and to prick forward his trusty servant John Eccius, a notorious enemy of Christ... This same proud prancing *Thraso* frushing in his fustian fumes, vaunted lustily that he durst attempt all things for God’s glory, and the honour of the holy See Apostolic...”.³⁹

That reciprocity in the use of the label “*Thraso*” becomes even more pronounced in the famous dispute in the 1560s between Bishop John Jewel (apologist of the Elizabethan establishment) and Dr Thomas Harding (an English Catholic exile).⁴⁰ Right near the end of

³⁸ Frarinus, *An Oration*, fol. DIIIr.

³⁹ Luther, *A Treatise*, “An Epistle to the Pope”, fol. Bv-B2r.

⁴⁰ For more discussion of the Jewel-Harding debate, see Southern, *Recusant Prose*, 60-6, and Morrissey, *Paul’s Cross Sermons*, 162-73.

Harding's near-270-page *reiondre* to Jewel, Harding quotes Jewel's suggestion about him that "Thraso wil talke of that he hath not", to which Harding, the Catholic exile, replies:

Bring us but one plaine sentence of any Scripture, ancient Doctor, or Councel making clearely for you, that a Priest hath not auctoritie, and therefore may not offer vp Christe in the Euchariste, as I haue brought many for proufe of the contrary: and I will be contente the name of Thraso be not returned vpon you. If ye haue none to bring, as sure I am ye haue not. For your Thrasonical Challenge, that name will become you better then me.⁴¹

Even if Jewel had used "Thraso" mostly as an opprobrious epithet for a boaster, Harding went a step further in his response, suggesting that misplaced confidence based on incorrect handling of biblical texts is a special condition under which a person might deserve the epithet. Thus he links the reciprocity of the rhetorical flourish with a fault that everyone, in their own way, is trying to avoid.

Later on in the 1580s, William Rainolds (the Catholic elder brother of John Rainolds, writing from the English College at Rheims) refers back to the Jewel–Harding debate while conducting his own polemic against M. Whitaker. Rainolds, as he looks back, aligns himself with Harding against the mutual religious adversary Jewel. Rainolds evaluates the Jewel-Harding debate, pointing to what he sees as the unfair way Jewel had misrepresented Harding's arguments by conveniently forgetting the "joyntes and sinews" of his book: "sometime half pages, sometime fower or five lines in a side, sometime whole sentences or peeces of sentences, according as he thought requisite for the bettering of his cause, and disgracing of his aduersarie".⁴² Rainolds is clear enough about what he thinks of Jewel's style of argument, but he adds:

⁴¹ Harding, *A reiondre*, fol. 260v-261v.

⁴² Rainolds, *A Refutation*, 76.

This is as much as if some bragging Thraso appointed to combat with his enemy, should at the time of fight, cause his enemy to be tied up in prison, and shewe his chivalry upon a man made of cloutes. This is in steede of a body, to fight with a shadow.⁴³

Rainolds very likely has in mind the confrontation scene from *Eunuchus*, mentioned before, featuring Thraso's pathetic stand against the courtesan Thais. If so, Rainolds is using the comic energy of the whole scene to condemn Jewel's apparently cowardly attack on alleged strawman arguments. Here, just as before, Thraso signifies what Rainolds wants to avoid himself, yet Thraso is being used nonetheless to characterise the kind of fault that polemicists on both sides are susceptible of making. The tone is not exactly self-referring. However, the reciprocity of its application in rhetorical context means it is not straightforwardly othering scorn either.

References to Thraso in sixteenth-century religious polemic are relatively common and many are used as more or less straightforwardly negative epithets. In *The contention betwyxte Churchyard and Camell*, Terence's two characters are enlisted thus: "You ascribe to me, the manners of Gnatho / Full clarkeley applied good master Thrato".⁴⁴ William Fulke, inveighs against his adversary in this way: "Here *M. Allen* like *Thraso* upon the stage alone, must shew his veyne in foolish insultation, as though he had ouerthrowne a whole army of men, when he hath not killed a mouse: he lacketh but his *Gnato* to hold him up".⁴⁵ Fulke channels the flattery scene from *Eunuchus* but does so, it seems, in a largely scornful and othering way. Walter Haddon's enormous treatise against the "slanderous invectives" of the Portuguese Bishop of Silves, Jerónimo Osório, labels the

⁴³ Ibid. "Cloutes" are cloths or leather patches.

⁴⁴ Churchyard, *The contention betwyxte Churchyard and Camell*, B1v.

⁴⁵ Fulke, *Two Treatises*, 145.

Bishop “Thraso” more than ten times.⁴⁶ John Rainolds, George Wither, and George Downname, too, each liken their adversaries to Thraso.⁴⁷

However, one final and more complex example of polemic takes us back to the roleplaying with Gnatho and Thraso exemplified by Erasmus, Mulcaster, and Guazzo above. In addition, the author seems – as in the case of William Rainolds and William Fulke, just mentioned – to be using a whole scene from *Eunuchus* to energize the polemic. In this case, an anonymous author writes against the great Hebrew scholar Hugh Broughton. Broughton had written a pamphlet attacking the Augustinian view that Christ descended into hell (Gehenna). The anonymous author responded with a publication of 1599, entitled: *Master Broughtons letters, especially his last pamphlet to and against the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, about Sheol and Hades, for the descent into Hell, answered in their kind*. The anonymous adversary attacks Broughton’s mode of scriptural interpretation. In order to do so, he quotes lines from *Eunuchus*, from the first scene of act III, lines spoken by Gnatho. Identifying himself with Gnatho (and thus Broughton with Thraso), the author writes: “Papae, iugularas hominem. Give me leave, good master Thraso, to tickle you. Tuumne obsecro, hoc dictum erat?”⁴⁸ The Latin words are Terence’s. In dramatic context, the comic parasite Gnatho speaks them as he ridicules Thraso’s vanity with false praise. Thus, the words “Papae, iugularas hominem!” (Gosh! you had your sword at his throat! – ll. 416-7) are Gnatho’s teasing response to Thraso’s bragging tale about a (less-than-impressive) comeback he once flung at someone who had annoyed him. Likewise, the words “Tuomne obsecro te, hoc dictum erat?”, following Barsby’s modern edition (Was that *your* witticism, for goodness sake? – l. 428) are part of

⁴⁶ Haddon, *Against Ierome Osorius*, 4r, 7v, 28v, 82r, 279r, and other places.

⁴⁷ See: John Rainolds, *The Summe of the Conference*, 664; Wither, *A View*, 90; Downname, *A Treatise*, 183 (printed as 181).

⁴⁸ Anon. *Master Broughtons letters*, 33.

Gnatho's ironic praise for another of Thraso's dubious one-liners. Broughton's anonymous adversary has therefore constructed his critical voice as a "tickling" of Broughton's ear by hedging it between the playful (and mildly affectionate, if largely disdainful) flattery of Gnatho. The whole of the flattery scene beginning act III of *Eunuchus* seems to be operating in the background. The scene is not perhaps as easy to visualize dramatically within a mental image – to use Melanchthon's terms – as is the confrontation scene that William Rainolds channels. Nonetheless, Broughton's adversary, just like William Fulke, seems to be utilizing the flattery scene's overall comic force to vivify his rhetorical voice. Since Gnatho was as often considered morally repugnant as Thraso, this is an interesting and complex case. The theatrical comic tone is self-involving and the rhetorical force seems to express moral and critical disapprobation in a way that acknowledges some mutuality of imperfection. Perhaps its very playfulness relates to the fact that the author chose to remain anonymous.

What I hope to have shown is one way in which humanist educational culture focused on ancient Roman literature exerted its influence across overlapping areas of religious print material. As early modern religious writers of all kinds made reference to Thraso – and other characters from Roman comedy driven indelibly into their moral imaginations at grammar school – they did so in a variety of comic tones, ranging from outright scorn to something more self-involving. Furthermore, when Thraso was evoked, he could bring with him not just a moral point about boasting, pride, flattery, credulousness, imprudence, bad exegesis, rhetorical excess, and even weak argumentation, but the residual image of a scene from the play. Noam Reisner makes the reasonable point that "the early modern practice of reading across fragmented texts in the interests of copia...certainly accounts for the majority of profane quotations".⁴⁹ The point needs to be supplemented, however, by a recognition that characters in their dramatic context mattered to early modern readers

⁴⁹ Reisner, "Preacher and Profane Learning", 80.

too: for instance, the confrontation scene and the flattery scene from *Eunuchus* that William Rainolds, William Fulke, and Hugh Broughton's adversary (together with their many implied readers) knew intimately. Peter Mack has argued that Renaissance reading of classical texts was not merely a matter of the "reading in fragments" required for filling in commonplace books, but could also be an attempt to focus "on the text as a whole".⁵⁰ Such a reading and using of ancient texts as we have seen here – with a view to pondering the *imago* (the 'image', as Melanchthon put it) of a character in dramatic context – is perhaps another example of a type of reading that cannot be adequately described as "fragmentary". Part of the very meaning of deploying such an image is connected with the character's dramatic context.

Thraso is an interesting case-study for considering Roman comedy's place in humanist pedagogy in relation to sixteenth-century sermons and religious polemic. Across the array of printed religious material, the many references to him suggest that Thraso was taken (in a sense) seriously as a pedagogical topos. The distinctness of the edificatory rhetorical purpose in a "sermon" probably had an effect on a sermon writer's decision not to speak too volubly about Thraso – especially where printed sermons were also intended to signify to powerful patrons a minister's capacities, including his sense of clerical decorum. Nevertheless, we can never know how often preachers referred to Thraso and similar characters in their pulpits as opposed to the versions of their sermons they had printed. By contrast, in the polemical sources, the desire to vilify, humiliate, and reassert the stakes of theological correctness, as well as the desire to engage in the sort of intellectual debate in which Thraso could be an evocative image of the rhetorical excess that either side was vulnerable to, are probably reasons why Thraso is mentioned more often, and more playfully, there. Polemical rhetoric licenses a greater satirical edge, and is of course much

⁵⁰ Mack, "Rhetoric, ethics and reading", 3. On the making of commonplace books, see Moss, *Printed Commonplace Books*.

greater in scope. Perhaps especially when the polemical voice is anonymous, a powerful humanist impulse is, in a sense, let loose. But interestingly, even in the self-declared “sermons” – where a countervailing pressure might be felt against anything too dilatory on a morally dubious example – the desire created by humanist education to exert one’s knowledge of Terence and his comedies onto the world – and the self – seems to have found a means of expression.

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