



PEROTTI'S EPISTOLARY TREATISES ON METRICS

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In 1453 Perotti wrote a pair of small treatises on metrics whose titles vary in the textual transmission. In the version known to us, the two treatises are in epistolary form: the De generibus metrorum is addressed to Niccolò Perotti's old schoolmate Iacopo Schioppo, and the De metris Horatii et Boethii to Perotti's brother Elio. The two texts normally accompany each other in manuscripts and printed editions. Perotti's treatises became immensely popular, and manuscripts and printed editions abound. The popularity in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries of Perotti's treatises on metrics is a clear sign that they have supplied a demand for metrical instruction. On the other hand, this popularity does not say anything definite about the quality and originality of Perotti's texts. This paper gives a short survey of recent research done on Perotti's treatises on metrics.

During the autumn of 1453, Niccolò Perotti was hard at work on his translation of Polybius. However, he also worked on another, less exacting job, whenever he needed relaxation from the Greek, if we can believe what he says himself in a letter addressed to one of his regular correspondents, the humanist and papal librarian Giovanni Tortelli. In the letter to Tortelli, written in Bologna on 13 November 1453, Perotti says:

Mittam etiam ad Paternitatem uestram per eundem germanum meum opusculum quoddam quod nuper composui de metris, ubi fere omnia metrorum genera complexus sum et rem antea ignotam facillimam reddidi, quod certe erat in lingua nostra pernecessarium, in qua nihil tale habebamus alicuius pretii. Feci hoc ut parumper quiescerem a labore traductionis, qua non parum fatigatus eram.¹

(I shall send you something else, Father, with my brother, a short treatise that I have recently composed on metres; in this work I have surveyed almost all kinds of metres, and I have rendered a subject hitherto unknown very easy to grasp; which was certainly a very neces-

¹ Niccolò Perotti's letter to Giovanni Tortelli, dated 13 November 1453 in Bologna (text: Perotti Letter Project). I have borrowed the Latin text of this and another letter from the Perotti Letter Project – fortunately there seem to be no textual difficulties in these passages. Paolo d'Alessandro (2011, an article in the present volume of *Renaissanceforum*) quotes a larger part of the letter, and he also provides references to its textual history.

sary thing to have in our language, since we had nothing of the kind of any value. I have done this in order to get moments of rest from the hardships of translating, which tired me considerably.)

Perotti is here talking about one, or both, of a pair of small metrical treatises whose titles vary considerably in the textual transmission. I shall call the more general one *De generibus metrorum*, and call the special one, on Horace and Boethius's metres, *De metris Horatii et Boethii*. These titles are the ones used by Jürgen Leonhardt in his comprehensive survey of medieval and Renaissance metrical theory from 1989, where Perotti's two treatises are listed in the Inventory of Sources under number B 120.

In the version known to us, the two treatises are in epistolary form. The *De generibus metrorum* is addressed to Niccolò Perotti's old schoolmate Iacopo Schioppo of Verona, and the *De metris Horatii et Boethii* to Perotti's brother Elio. The two texts normally accompany each other in manuscripts and printed editions,² and some printed editions of Perotti's grammar *Rudimenta grammatices* contain the treatises as well. Perotti's metrical treatises became immensely popular, and manuscripts and printed editions abound. Revilo P. Oliver's original list from 1954 has been successively expanded by Kristeller 1981 and Leonhardt 1989, who are all in my bibliography; and, as far as I know, the present ongoing editorial project has added further items to this list.

The popularity in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries of Perotti's treatises on metrics is a clear sign that they have supplied a demand for metrical instruction. On the other hand, this popularity does not say anything definite about the quality and originality of Perotti's texts. However, until recently scholars were unanimous in their praise of Perotti's works on metrics. In the second volume of his *History of Classical Scholarship* from 1908, John Edwin Sandys says about Perotti that "he produced, in his *Metrica*, the first modern treatise on Latin Prosody (1453)" (p. 71). Sandys's praise sounds sincere, but it is also rather imprecise, since Perotti does not discuss prosody in general. Contemporary Perotti scholars such as Jean-Louis Charlet (1987, 214) and Sandro Boldrini (1998b, 511) prefer to quote the remark of Remigio Sabbadini in his great book on Guarino Guarini's school, namely that Perotti's two treatises are "il capolavoro del secolo" in their field. More recently, in 1981, Sesto Prete said the following about the general work, the *De generibus metrorum*:

Perotti's work is the fruit of a direct examination of the text of lyric poets, especially the Greek. This examination is detailed, and

² I have in general used the edition Venetiis, Johannes Tacuinus, 23.10.1497, H. 10894.

something rather new among humanists before Perotti and in his own days.³

I shall return later to Prete's mentioning of Greek models for this treatise. In the following I shall give a short survey of recent research done on Perotti's treatises on metrics. I have tried to collect all references to modern literature discussing the treatises in my bibliography, but I may easily have missed some.

In contrast to the very positive views just quoted, scholars who tend to qualify the praise of Perotti's scholarship on metrics are certainly not numerous. I have come across only two, Jürgen Leonhardt and Ubaldo Pizzani. The leading modern expert on Perotti's scholarship in this field, Sandro Boldrini, is on the other hand very ambivalent in his judgments. I have decided to begin with a short survey of opinions about Perotti's *De metris Horatii et Boethii*, since this case seems to be more clear-cut than that of the general treatise.

Ubaldo Pizzani is the first to introduce a note of caution. In 1985 he published a special study of the Boethian part of Perotti's treatise. One of the most obvious texts to use as material for comparison is Lupus of Ferrières's *On the metres of Boethius* from the ninth century. This treatise often accompanied manuscripts of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, Papias included it in his *Elementarium*, and commentators on Boethius used it extensively. Pizzani concludes his investigation of Perotti's results in the following way:

His interpretation [*of the metres of Boethius*] ... does not lead to major novelties in comparison with the small treatise by Lupus of Ferrières.⁴

In his monograph from 1989, *Dimensio syllabarum*, Jürgen Leonhardt follows in the footsteps of Pizzani. He uses Pizzani's results, and conducts his own investigation of the Horatian part of the treatise. There exist two or three late-antique surveys of Horace's metres, but Leonhardt singles out the one ascribed to Servius, as Perotti's main model. He says, in a sweeping statement about the two Perottian treatises:

We can ... pass quickly over *De metris Horatii et Boethii*, since hardly anything is found there which goes beyond the information

³ Prete 1981, 22: "Il lavoro del Perotti è frutto di un esame diretto condotto sul testo di poeti lirici, soprattutto greci. Tale esame è particolareggiato e la cosa è piuttosto nuova tra gli umanistici anteriori al Perotti e della sua epoca".

⁴ Pizzani 1985, 252: "L'interpretazione ... non apporta grosse novità rispetto all'opuscolo di Lupo di Ferrières".

given in the corresponding treatises by Servius and Lupus of Ferrières.⁵

Sandro Boldrini has written a number of articles on Perotti's treatise *De metris Horatii et Boethii*, some of them explicitly prefatory to a new edition of this text. However, his edition has not yet appeared, as far as I know. Boldrini has expressed his views on the sources and the originality of Perotti's text most clearly in his 1998 article for the *Enciclopedia Oraziana* on Niccolò Perotti. Here he says, among other things:

The Horatian part shows the same structural design as the treatise *De metris Horatii* preserved in manuscript Paris, Latin 7530, under the name of Servius ... and that of a metrical treatise which prefaces many ... medieval manuscripts containing the Pseudo-Acronean commentary on Horace ...: the latter treatise may be identified as Perotti's model; however, in several passages he uses other grammatical sources from antiquity, and on a certain point he makes an effort to give a personal interpretation. The idea of combining Horatian and Boethian metrics in one treatise originates in all probability in his knowledge of the eleventh-century lexicographer Papias, who in the entry on *carminum varietates* joins together the survey of the metres of the two ancient authors.⁶

One cannot claim that Jürgen Leonhardt and Sandro Boldrini are completely at odds in their opinions about Perotti's treatise. However, whereas Leonhardt keeps to the general features and the simple explanation of Perotti's sources, Boldrini focuses on the modification of, and the exceptions to, this simple model. One almost has the feeling that Boldrini's phrasing makes a conscious effort to contradict Leonhardt's views, but that is not possible, since I have been unable to find any reference at all to Leonhardt's monograph in Boldrini's publications.

There is no doubt that Niccolò Perotti's general treatise *De generibus metrorum* is a more independent and original text than its Horatian and Boethian counterpart. Perotti himself also makes high claims about this

⁵ Leonhardt 1989, 161: "*De metris Horatii et Boethii* können wir ... kurz übergehen, da sich darin kaum etwas findet, was über die Angaben in den entsprechenden Traktaten des Servius und des Lupus von Ferrières ... hinausgeht".

⁶ Boldrini 1998a, 404: "La parte oraziana presenta lo stesso impianto strutturale del *De metris Horatii* conservato nel cod. Paris. lat. 7530 sotto il nome di Servio (GL IV 468–72) e di una *expositio metrica* premissa a molti codici già altomedievali contenenti gli scoli dello Ps. Acrone a H. (Keller 1902, 4–12): in quest'ultimo opuscolo si individua il modello di P. che, comunque, utilizza in più parti altre fonti grammaticali antiche e in qualche punto mostra uno sforzo di personale interpretazione. L'idea di trattare insieme metrica oraziana e metrica boeziana deriva con tutta probabilità dalla conoscenza del lessicografo Papias (XI sec.) che, alla voce *carminum varietas*, abbina lo studio dei metri dei due autori antichi".

work in his epistolary preface, addressed to his old schoolmate Iacopo Schioppo; Perotti is talking about the art of metrics:

Ita enim iamdiu haec ars obsoleta erat penitusque restincta, ut uel nullus exstaret auctor qui de ea tractaret, uel si quis supererat, adeo mendosus corruptusque esset, ut multa in iis discerentur, quae nescisse rectius fuisset. ... Qua in re incredibile dictu est, quos sustinuimus labores. Adeo quippe omnia non solum praecepta artis, uerum etiam pedum ac metrorum nomina corrupta erant, ut necesse fuerit complures ad ea reperienda non solum latinos, uerum etiam graecos libros euoluere. Noua quoque exempla inuestiganda fuere, multa etiam nostro Marte componenda.⁷

This art has been out of use for so long a time and was so completely extinguished, that there was either no author extant who treated it, or if by chance anyone survived, he was so full of mistakes and corruptions that many things were taught in these writings that it would have been better not to know. ... It sounds incredible when I tell you about all the hardships I have borne in this matter. For not only all the rules of the art, but also the names of the feet and the metres were so corrupt that it became necessary to thump through a number of books to recover them, and not only Latin books, but Greek ones as well. I also had to track down new examples, and to compose many things without any assistance at all.

In this short quotation Perotti's entire humanist ideology becomes crystal clear: texts from antiquity are by nature full of corruptions, and it costs a highly-educated humanist like himself long labours to emend them. So far Perotti expresses run-of-the-mill humanist opinions. But Perotti also claims to have read Greek books in his endeavour to emend the rules of the art of metrics and the names of feet and metres. That is more precise information. As we heard earlier, Sesto Prete interprets this as a sign that Perotti has read through Greek lyric poets as a background to his work. That does not follow from the way Perotti expresses himself. He rather claims to have read treatises in Greek in order to emend something or other, which most naturally is understood as a main model in Latin. What have the scholars who have worked on Perotti's *De generibus metrorum* to say to that claim?

Jürgen Leonhardt is to my knowledge the first to substantiate Perotti's claim, in an article from 1981. Leonhardt's main task was to compare Conrad Celtis's metrical treatise with that of Perotti. However, during his inves-

⁷ From Niccolò Perotti's letter to Iacopo Schioppo (1453), which prefaces the treatise *De generibus metrorum*; the text is from the Perotti Letter Project, but the entire letter now exists in a critical edition, by Marianne Pade (Pade 2011, an article in the present volume of *Renaissanceforum*).

tigation he discovered some of Perotti's Greek models in the corpus of texts collected around Hephaestio's treatise on metrics. This was an important discovery, and the beginning of a more detailed investigation of this aspect of Perotti's treatise. This investigation was carried out both by Leonhardt himself in his later monograph, and by Sandro Boldrini, who refers to Leonhardt's article, but not to his monograph, which he seems not to know.

In his monograph Leonhardt points out that the central part of the treatise is an extended rewriting of Servius's treatise *De centrum metris*. This is no surprise, since Perotti himself refers to Servius in one passage, and deplors the many mistakes found in the manuscripts of this work which he has examined. However, according to Leonhardt the long introduction to the Servian part of the work is an independent text, with several ancient Greek and Byzantine models. Leonhardt's conclusion about Perotti's *De generibus metrorum* is much more laudatory than that on the metres of Horace and Boethius. Leonhardt says:

It was Perotti's achievement to read and to compare classical and medieval treatises on metrics with an alert and critical eye; he has in particular blazed a new trail by taking Greek metrical theory into consideration.⁸

Now we come to Sandro Boldrini. His main discussion of Perotti's sources in the *De generibus metrorum* is an article from 1998, which exists in two slightly different versions. I have chosen the one printed in *Maia* as my point of reference. Boldrini's third article on the same Perottian work from the year 2000 is an interesting investigation of textual variants in the three very early textual witnesses of the treatise; but that need not concern us here. To return to Boldrini's article in *Maia*: like Leonhardt, Boldrini identifies Servius as Perotti's model for the central part, and I quote:

We shall see that in the exposition and the exemplification of the metres our humanist uses Servius's *De centrum metris* as his basic model; Servius's name is explicitly quoted in the passage which surveys the choriambic metres.⁹

When we come to the question of Perotti's ancient Greek and Byzantine models, Boldrini has considerably enlarged the material he found in Leonhardt's article. Some of this new material is identical with some of the mate-

⁸ Leonhardt 1989, 163: "Seine [*i. Perotti's*] Leistung war es, antike und mittelalterliche Metrikschriften mit wachem und kritischem Auge zu lesen und zu vergleichen; insbesondere mit der Einbeziehung griechischer Metriktheorie hat er auch neue Bahnen beschritten".

⁹ Boldrini 1998b, 518: "Vedremo che nell'espone e nell'esemplificare i *metra* il nostro umanista ha come modello fondamentale il *De centrum metris* di Servio, il cui nome viene espressamente citato nell'ambito della trattazione sui versi coriambici".

rial found in Leonhardt's monograph, but both scholars present material that is exclusively their own discovery. Future investigations into Perotti's Greek models must therefore begin with a fusion of the results of both scholars. However, in addition to his source criticism Boldrini presents a very interesting hypothesis about the exact nature of Perotti's Greek models. It deserves to be quoted in full, also because it sums up nicely Boldrini's own views about the range of Greek sources utilised by Perotti. Boldrini says:

Hephaestio, the *Scholia A*, the *Scholia B* and the *Appendix Dionysiaca* are all found together in the manuscript Marciano Greco 483; it used to belong to Cardinal Bessarion, in whose entourage Perotti was living when he wrote his treatise on metrics: thus we believe, besides his source, to have identified the very manuscript he used.¹⁰

It seems to be an eminently reasonable assumption that Perotti took advantage of Cardinal Bessarion's library when they lived under the same roof in 1453 in Bologna. I am sure that Boldrini is going to investigate this attractive hypothesis further. Partly inspired by Boldrini and his articles on the sources of Perotti's *De generibus metrorum*, Francisco Fuentes Moreno has pursued further this quest for sources, both Latin and Greek (Fuentes Moreno 2000); in two other articles (Fuentes Moreno 1999 and 2001) he discusses the metrician Perotti's position in the works of the next generation of Renaissance writers on metrics.

As will be seen, we have now come to a more definite understanding of the question I raised at the beginning of my paper, about the quality and originality of Perotti's texts on metrics. Instead of the rather unspecified praise which former generations of scholars have lavished on Perotti's treatises, we have now found something much more definite and trustworthy. Two scholars who are both experts in metrical matters, one with a comprehensive knowledge of the entire tradition of treatises on metrics from antiquity to the Renaissance, the other a specialist in Italian humanism, actually agree on a verdict. According to them, Perotti's treatise on the metres of Horace and Boethius is on the whole rather derivative. On the other hand they also agree that Perotti's general treatise on metrics *De generibus metrorum* is truly critical and innovative, not least because Perotti as the first Renaissance writer on metrical theory has taken Greek theoretical sources

¹⁰ Boldrini 1998b, 520: "Efestione, gli *scolia A*, gli *scolia B* e la *Appendix Dyonisiaca* si trovano, tutti insieme, nel codice marciano greco 483, appartenuto al cardinal Bessarione, al cui seguito è Perotti quando scrive il trattato metrico: pensiamo, con ciò, di aver individuato, oltre la fonte, anche il preciso manoscritto da lui utilizzato".

into account. Accordingly, Perotti's *De generibus metrorum* actually deserves to the full all the praise that has been lavished on it.

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