

# Tesauro's *Il Cannocchiale aristotelico* in the Twenty-First Century

## In Light of the Recent Critical Edition

Angelo Lombardo\*

Ghent University

<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-1897-2363>

Teodoro Katinis\*

Ghent University

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2425-0250>

**Abstract:** The article examines the recent publication of the first critical edition of Emanuele Tesauro's *Cannocchiale aristotelico* (1670), edited by Maicol Cutrì for Fondazione Pietro Bembo / Ugo Guanda Editore. This major editorial achievement restores full visibility to a key work of seventeenth-century rhetorical theory and reaffirms its theoretical and literary stature within the European Baroque. The new edition is therefore taken as a critical vantage point from which to reconsider both the internal architecture of the treatise and the main interpretative lines developed in recent scholarship. Particular attention is devoted to the formal and conceptual features of Cutrì's edition and, above all, to the editor's introduction, read as a synthesis of his hermeneutic approach. From this perspective, the essay reconstructs major critical trajectories concerning metaphor and knowledge, rhetoric and dialectic, optics and scientific imagery, and the performative and stylistic dimensions of the work, mapping the most significant theoretical contributions devoted to the *Cannocchiale* over the last twenty-five years. Frare's 2000 monograph provides a natural starting point, while Cutrì's 2024–2025 edition offers a new basis for reassessing the field as a whole.

**Keywords:** Emanuele Tesauro; *Cannocchiale aristotelico*; Critical Edition; Rhetoric; Dialectic

\* **Contact:** [angelo.lombardo@ugent.be](mailto:angelo.lombardo@ugent.be); [teodoro.katinis@ugent.be](mailto:teodoro.katinis@ugent.be)

To approach Emanuele Tesauro's *Cannocchiale aristotelico* is, even for its most assiduous and devoted readers, a vertiginous experience. The work imposes itself first of all by virtue of its sheer scale: more than seven hundred long and exceedingly dense pages devoted to unveiling the "più sacri et arcani penetralia"<sup>1</sup> of wit, that art which, we are assured, enables us to produce wonder by connecting the most abstruse and disparate determinations of the world. The *Cannocchiale* cannot, in fact, be reduced either to a mere commentary on Aristotle's rhetorical elocution or, still less, to the formulation of an idiosyncratic systematic compendium of the techniques of persuasion. This prodigious offspring of seventeenth-century literature seems methodically to withdraw from any defining gesture that might reassure the modern interpreter before the shifting, unpredictable – yet profoundly reasoned – nature of Tesauro's exposition. The wonders of wit – of the playful composition and recomposition of empirical meanings – thus shift from subject to object throughout the prose of the *Cannocchiale*: from a profusion of *exempla* that ceaselessly proliferate, displaying both the breadth of Tesauro's erudition and the agility with which he draws upon it, to a body whose constituent elements are subjected to analytical scrutiny, so as to uncover the secret of those operations of human intelligence that govern every form of communicative pleasure. In this sense, the definitional difficulty concerns the possibility of effectively isolating from the *Cannocchiale* a theory of persuasion that invariably displays a tendency to resolve itself into persuasive practice.

It is the very theoretical horizon underpinning the work that proves elusive. Tesauro opens with a remarkably fine, and rightly celebrated, cosmological exposition of wit, presenting it as his own acknowledgement of the intrinsically signifying nature of the universe and of its Creator. Creation itself thus appears as the exemplary instance – the "idea", as Tesauro would have said – of that transposition of meaning, that saying "una cosa per l'altra",<sup>2</sup> at which human beings never cease either to marvel or to take delight. And yet this horizon is posited only to recede into oblivion, stifled by the subsequent course of the work, which gradually reduces it to a faint recollection, while the discussion comes to focus decisively upon "civil conversazione",<sup>3</sup> retracing the practical, psychological, and political implications of language.

The *Cannocchiale* thus presents itself as a cultural 'object' of difficult access, a space into which, by virtue of its labyrinthine and polycentric structure, one must be cautiously introduced – all the more so now that scholarly interest in the work has re-emerged. Both the object and, at the same time, the remedy for this condition is un-

<sup>1</sup> E. Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. M. Cutrì, 2 vols., Milano, Fondazione Pietro Bembo/Ugo Guanda Editore, 2024-2025, vol. I, p. 647.

<sup>2</sup> *Ivi*, p. 140.

<sup>3</sup> *Ivi*, p. 15.

doubtedly the brilliant study by Maicol Cutrì, who, through a rare philological sensitivity and a thoroughly secure grasp of the textual corpus of Tesauro's oeuvre as a whole, has at last brought out the first critical edition of the *Cannocchiale*.<sup>4</sup>

The work is issued in two handy volumes, probably in response to the 2000 facsimile edition, which, although it reproduces in full – and supplements with a number of introductory essays by distinguished scholars – Tesauro's final editorial intentions, can hardly be described as 'portable'.<sup>5</sup> The division into two tomes not only makes consultation easier, but also serves, by containing it within the first volume, to emphasise Tesauro's extensive exploration of metaphor and its eight species, thereby constituting that 'treatise on metaphor' which, by its sheer scale and conceptual density, appears almost as a work within the work. From this perspective, every compromise demanded by the requirements of a modern edition of the treatise is judiciously guided by a clear interpretative framework. Cutrì has in fact chosen to preserve the graphic layout of Tesauro's 1670 edition (based on the copy held in the Biblioteca Civica di Fossano, the same copy reproduced in facsimile in 2000), precisely because, from the introduction onwards, this layout is treated as a structural element internal to the content that the *Cannocchiale* seeks to convey.<sup>6</sup> More specifically, Cutrì's edition preserves the emphatic function of italics, as well as their use for direct speech and quotations; likewise, words printed entirely in capitals and the graphic schemes of chapters IV and VII are retained. As for the beautiful engraved frontispiece, which has been the object of considerable critical attention, the edition provides a full reproduction.

The editor's transcription achieves a refined balance between modernising the reading experience of the *Cannocchiale* and removing those features that burden its accessibility through orthographic usages that are now archaic or obsolete (for example, by adopting current conventions of punctuation and accentuation, separating adverbs and adverbial phrases otherwise printed in contracted form, distinguishing between *u* and *v*, and rendering the clusters *-ti-* and *-tti-* as *-zi-* and *-zzi-*, and so forth). In this same direction one should also understand the editor's direct intervention in the text, aimed at eliminating Tesauro's typographical errors through a comparative examination of the 1654 edition (*editio princeps*), those of 1663 and 1664, and finally

<sup>4</sup> Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. Cutrì, cit. For the significance of Cutrì's edition within the broader economy of Tesauro studies, see M.L. Doglio, 'Su una nuova edizione del «Cannocchiale aristotelico»', in: *Testo*, 90, 2 (2025), pp. 71–74, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.19272/202505502003>.

<sup>5</sup> E. Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico* (con contributi di M.L. Doglio, M. Guglielminetti, A. Penacini, F. Vuilleumier, P. Laurens, D. Vottero, G. Menardi; coordinamento di G. Menardi), Savigliano (Cuneo), Editrice Artistica Piemontese, 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. Cutrì, cit., vol. I, pp. XXXI–XXXII. For the hermeneutic significance of the typographical form of the *Cannocchiale*, and hence for the need not merely to read but also to 'look at' the treatise, see now P. Frare, 'Un libro da «mirar con gli occhi»: «Il Cannocchiale aristotelico» di Emanuele Tesauro', in: *Testo*, 90, 2 (2025), pp. 9–26, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.19272/202505502001>, which interprets the body of Tesauro's writing as an active component of the work's didactic function and conceptual construction.

that of 1670, thus exhausting the corpus of the *Cannocchiale* editions directly supervised by the author himself. In any case, this updating of the text does not claim to replace direct engagement with the sources; rather, it serves as a valuable aid to it, not least by indicating the page number of Tesauro's original edition, thereby encouraging direct comparison.

As has been said, Cutrì's edition is primarily intended to respond to the growing body of critical attention devoted to the *Cannocchiale* and to the renewed cultural fascination exerted by the work – a fascination that clearly echoes a broader contemporary interest in rhetoric, caught between the impulse to legitimise it and the contrary tendency to reaffirm its superfluity and its deceptions. Both within and beyond academia, a growing body of scholarship regards rhetoric as a form of knowledge to be recovered or even re-established.<sup>7</sup>

More generally, in the age of post-truth, cultural interest tends to privilege the pragmatic dimensions of persuasion and the ways in which they manifest themselves across every sphere of contemporary life, from politics to product marketing. In this sense, there is now a tendency to emphasize the presence within language of a technique capable of transforming the world and, in particular, the psyche that represents it to itself.

Tesauro's rhetorical conception, however, poses, from another angle, the challenge of accepting a certain disengagement from truth, which Tesauro prefers "vestita" rather than "nuda",<sup>8</sup> and whose presence in discourse he defines as an "ingombro" liable to compromise "diletto".<sup>9</sup> Yet beyond the various analogies that may be drawn with the current state of reflection on, and use of, rhetoric – analogies which undoubtedly testify to the continuing relevance of the concerns embodied in the *Cannocchiale* – Cutrì's contribution seeks to safeguard Tesauro's masterpiece from illegitimate projections that would distortively actualise its doctrine. The most substantial labour of this modern edition lies precisely in its dense apparatus of footnotes, a multifaceted commentary whose thematic articulation may be outlined as follows:

- **Critical notes:** these constitute the most original part of Cutrì's commentary, namely the section in which the author contributes to the unravelling of the most difficult thematic knots of the *Cannocchiale*. In particular, Cutrì assumes the role of a kind of omniscient narrator, intermittently broadening the reader's awareness of the macro-structures of Tesauro's work, which are often obscured by the sheer abundance of its contents.

<sup>7</sup> In this respect, one may take as exemplary the very recent contribution by M. Prandi, *Retorica. Una disciplina da rifondare*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2023.

<sup>8</sup> Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. Cutrì, cit., vol. I, p. 70.

<sup>9</sup> Ivi, vol. II, p. 33.

- **Historical-cultural notes:** these provide the tools necessary to situate the *Cannocchiale* in its historical context, not only as a brilliant expression of Baroque culture, but also as a distinctive articulation of the seventeenth-century concern with the poetics of *acutezze*, that cultural tendency which radicalises the elocutionary functions of *ingegno* and intellectualises pleasure.
- **Linguistic notes:** these are, in effect, 'translations' drawn from the *Vocabolario* of the Crusca (in its 1623 and 1691 editions)<sup>10</sup> elucidating for the modern reader the more obscure and sensitive archaisms of Tesauro's exposition.
- **Aristotelian notes:** these serve to bring out the dialogue between Tesauro and Aristotle in the *Cannocchiale*, highlighting both their theoretical convergences and their possible points of divergence, through precise reference not only to the Aristotelian *loci* in question, but also to the secondary critical scholarship on Aristotle's philosophical doctrine.
- **Notes of critical dialogue:** this is the section of the commentary devoted to the secondary scholarship on the *Cannocchiale* and, more broadly, on Tesauro's oeuvre. It is an apparatus of considerable importance, since it allows critical interest to be 'located' directly within the text itself, offering the reader a progressive excursus on the *status quaestionis* of Tesauro studies.
- **Citation notes:** these are concerned with identifying the sources of the corpus of explicit and implicit citations in the *Cannocchiale*. This is an enormous undertaking, if one considers that the index of names in the modern edition runs to approximately seventy pages. Particular attention should be given to the treatment of the Aristotelian citations, all in Latin, which appear in the margins of the work and which Cutrì identifies as genuinely oracular.<sup>11</sup> For editorial reasons, the critical edition reproduces them in an appendix – in both volumes – accompanied by an Italian translation and, where necessary, by specific supplementary commentary.

Besides, Cutrì offers an introduction to the *Cannocchiale* which guides the modern reader into the work by setting out its editorial vicissitudes, indicates the most pressing knots of Tesauro's argument, and constitutes a kind of compendium of Cutrì's hermeneutic sensibility. In particular, the introduction brings together the critical efforts brought to fruition in *Leggere il libro aperto*, which, after Frare's monograph,<sup>12</sup> remains the only contemporary monographic study devoted to the *Cannocchiale*.<sup>13</sup> The space available to us prevents any adequate retracing of the principal theses of

<sup>10</sup> *Vocabolario degli accademici della Crusca, in questa seconda impressione da' medesimi riveduto e ampliato [...], con tre indici delle voci, locuzioni, e proverbi latini e greci posti per entro l'opera [...]*, Venezia, Iacopo Sarzina, 1623. The second edition (Firenze, Stamperia dell'Accademia della Crusca, 1691) is consulted less frequently.

<sup>11</sup> Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. Cutrì, cit., vol. I, p. XXX.

<sup>12</sup> P. Frare, «Per istraforo di prospettiva». *Il «Cannocchiale Aristotelico» e la poesia del Seicento*, Pisa-Roma, Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali, 2000.

<sup>13</sup> M. Cutrì, *Leggere il «libro aperto»*. *Saggio sul «Cannocchiale aristotelico»*, Pisa, ETS, 2023.

Cutri's monograph, yet the choice of "libro aperto", which gives the study its title, may come to our aid.

The image of a reading experience that is intrinsically inconclusive presents itself at the very close of the *Cannocchiale*, in accordance with Tesauro's characteristic taste for antithesis. As the treatise reaches its final moments, Tesauro addresses an ultimate peroration to the reader: an invitation to contemplate the insufficiency of his witty arguments, as though in an open book, "che ad altri insegna quel che non sa". Reassured by the figurative register within which Tesauro's discourse persists, we find ourselves once again unseated, this time not by some abstruse metaphorical allusion, but by the literalness of Tesauro's reference. For the *Cannocchiale* is, quite literally, open:

Se tu volessi fabricare un'impresa sopra questo libro, potrestù pingere un *libro aperto*, che ad altri insegna quel ch'ei non sa. Ma [...] chi arà pazienza di legger tutto questo volume, sicuramente una cosa ottima, et piacevolissima ci troverà: cioè

#### IL FINE.<sup>14</sup>

"IL FINE" belongs to the very formatting of the *Cannocchiale*: it gives artificial form to the conclusion of a work that is itself brought to an equally artificial close through aposiopesis, through a dramatic convulsion of Tesauro's prose. The *Cannocchiale* thus leaves us at once exhilarated and disconcerted, moved by the tragedy of a curtain that is forcibly drawn over the diegesis of the work, yet which nonetheless impels readers of every age to renew its ingenious creativity, to explore its artifices and to initiate new ones. It is precisely this real and hermeneutic openness of the *Cannocchiale* that Cutri brings to light. The merit of Cutri's reading lies in his refusal to diminish Tesauro's literariness by absolutising a narrowly theoretical interpretation, one that would reduce the *Cannocchiale* to the mere implication of a meta-literary construct. Rather, Cutri prefers to understand its theorisation as the fruit of a living experience of style, the "concetto" of the *Cannocchiale* as dictated by the stylistic solutions it develops and, above all, as an exercise internal to the desire that the reader experiences, being so deeply engaged by the work, to become its continuator.

Before entering more fully into the introduction to the modern edition, however, a brief methodological note is in order. This article does not seek to provide a new annotated bibliography of scholarship on Tesauro, nor an exhaustive survey of criticism on the *Cannocchiale*, but rather to isolate, beginning from Cutri's recent edition, some of the principal theoretical lines that have emerged around the treatise over the last twenty-five years. Our starting point is Frare's monograph, the study that effectively relaunched modern critical interest in the *Cannocchiale*. By contrast, 2024–2025 marks the other end of the trajectory, with the publication of the first complete critical edition of the work. For a broader, and properly exhaustive, annotated bibliography

<sup>14</sup> Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. Cutri, cit., vol. II, pp. 618–619.

of Tesauro studies, and in particular for the two periods 1990–2009 and 2009–2025, one may turn respectively to the contributions by Bisi and Macor.<sup>15</sup>

The first issue with which Cutrì grapples in introducing the *Cannocchiale* is the complexity of its editorial history.<sup>16</sup> Critical scholarship is broadly agreed in attributing to the work a long gestation, reaching back to Tesauro's early years of Jesuit formation and rhetorical teaching, a phase during which the author undertook a commentary on Aristotle's rhetorical doctrine (with particular attention to the third book of the *Rhetoric*, devoted to elocution). From these studies there emerged some of the central nuclei of the *Cannocchiale*: a treatise on wit (*argutezze*), now lost, and a treatise on devices (*imprese*) – preserved in a single surviving copy, that of the Biblioteca Reale in Turin, edited and published in modern form by Doglio<sup>17</sup> – both of which would flow into the first edition of 1654, before being further expanded and integrated up to the definitive version of 1670. One element that receives particular emphasis in Cutrì's historiographical survey is the dialogue that Tesauro's work sustains with treatises on the *acutezze*, a poetic sensibility that found some resonance in northern Europe, but above all between Spain and Italy, and which constituted an important stimulus to the composition of the *Cannocchiale*.

In this respect, Frare's 2006<sup>18</sup> contribution offers a comparison between Tesauro and Gracián, bringing out their originality within the landscape of seventeenth-century conceptist theory. In both cases, *argutezza* emerges as an operation concerning figures, especially those which Tesauro defines as "ingegnose". These are *figurae dia-noeae*, grounded in discourse; that is to say, they express the capacity of rational language to constitute itself suggestively through pleasurable imaginative impressions. Metaphor is the category that gathers together the witty figures and, as Frare emphasises, it presents itself in a double conceptual sense: a broader one, encompassing all the metaphorical species that Tesauro distinguishes, and a narrower one, referring only to the metaphor of similarity.<sup>19</sup> This material is structured by *argutezza* as an inferential function of intelligence: *argutezza* is an "arguere",<sup>20</sup> a process of reasoning around metaphorical matter. The distinction of Tesauro and Gracián would therefore lie in having identified in *argutezza* an operation upon metaphor, though one to be

<sup>15</sup> M. Bisi, 'Natura, strumenti e uso della retorica negli ultimi vent'anni di studi su Emanuele Tesauro. Bibliografia ragionata 1990-2009', in: *Testo*, 58 (2009), pp. 93-124, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1400/121955>; L. Macor, 'Emanuele Tesauro. Bibliografia ragionata 2009-2025', in: *Testo*, 90, 2 (2025), pp. 79-99, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.19272/202505502005>.

<sup>16</sup> For further discussion of this matter, see M. Cutrì, 'Storia editoriale del «Cannocchiale aristotelico»', in: *Testo*, 80 (2020), pp. 63-86, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.19272/202005502004>.

<sup>17</sup> E. Tesauro, *Idea delle perfette imprese*, ed. M.L. Doglio, Firenze, Olschki, 1975.

<sup>18</sup> P. Frare, 'L'argutezza in Tesauro e in Gracián', in: A. Di Stefano (ed.), *Cyberletteratura: tra mondi testuali e mondi virtuali. Atti del convegno, Roma 9-10 giugno 2005*, Roma, Nuova Cultura, 2006, pp. 105-117.

<sup>19</sup> Ivi, p. 111. On a more detailed analysis of the relationship between metaphor and *argutezza* – one that comes to configure a kind of polycentrism within the *Cannocchiale* – see Frare, «Per istraforo di perspettiva», cit., pp. 55-84, and M. Bisi, 'Tesauro Emanuele', in: M. Ballarini (dir.), P. Frare, G. Frasso & G. Langella (eds.), *Dizionario biblico della letteratura italiana*, Milano, IPL, 2018, pp. 949-954.

<sup>20</sup> Frare, 'L'argutezza in Tesauro e in Gracián', cit., p. 110.

understood as an improper application of syllogism to figures, “un surplus di armatura (pseudo) logica”.<sup>21</sup> *Argutezza*, like Gracián’s *agudeza*, operates and is confined within the domain of the false; yet it finds its absolution there precisely because it knows how to “ben mentire”,<sup>22</sup> because it does so “scherzevolmente”, “sanza dolo malo”.<sup>23</sup> What renders the *acutezze* harmless, for Frare, is the anthropological perspective upon which both Tesauro and Gracián construct them: the indispensable human need – since man is at once mind and body – to resort to an apparatus of mediating forms of communication capable of externalising a thought that would otherwise remain not immediately manifest. *Argutezza* thus establishes itself as the self-disclosure of a linguistic technology, rather than as a denotative act.

Mazzocchi’s 2015 study,<sup>24</sup> likewise focused on comparing Tesauro’s *Cannocchiale* with Gracián’s *Agudeza*, instead proposes a reading that brings out their differences. Gracián’s work is to be understood as a decisive rejection of sixteenth-century elocutionary formalism, privileging instead those figures which, in Tesauro’s terms, “nascono dall’argomento”,<sup>25</sup> and which delight precisely by restoring to us the forms of wit with which the world is, in and of itself, replete. In Gracián, *argutezza* is thus elevated to an ontological consideration, whereas Tesauro approaches it from the side of the “produttore”,<sup>26</sup> that is, from the standpoint of its technical reproducibility. Mazzocchi therefore interprets the *Cannocchiale* as an exquisitely pedagogical and rhetorical device, emphasising that strong normative apparatus and abundance of examples from which Gracián’s treatise is, by contrast, free. It should be stressed that Cutrì, too, does not advance a properly ontological conception of Tesaurian *argutezza*; rather, he privileges the clear anthropological content underlying the *Cannocchiale*, thereby restoring the work as a coherent whole. For Cutrì, *argutezza* is to be understood as the counterpart of humanity’s creaturely status, of its needy constitution and its voracious desire to know much and to know it easily. The domain of meaning proper to Tesauro’s communicative inventiveness thus becomes the order of the infinite possibilities of our action, the realm of the “per lo più” within which we are called upon to operate, certain only that we do not truly know who we are.<sup>27</sup> What cannot be said, however, even in Cutrì’s case, is that Tesauro’s treatment lacks a self-conscious philosophical interest. For the *Cannocchiale* not only participates in the imaginary of modern science – the title of the work becomes witty only if one assumes that

<sup>21</sup> Ivi, p. 113.

<sup>22</sup> Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. Cutrì, cit., vol. II, p. 28.

<sup>23</sup> Ivi, p. 36.

<sup>24</sup> G. Mazzocchi, ‘El Góngora de Gracián (con Tesauro al fondo)’, in: *Bulletin Hispanique*, 117, 1 (2015), pp. 159-170, p. 165, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/bulletinhispanique.3798>.

<sup>25</sup> Ivi, p. 168.

<sup>26</sup> Ivi, pp. 168-169.

<sup>27</sup> “Il punto centrale è l’essere umano, che per natura possiede la facoltà dell’ingegno (comune anche a Dio e alle sue manifestazioni del Creato) ma che possiede anche un «cuore inquieto» (sant’Agostino [Conf. I I I: «inquietum est cor nostrum»]), che impedisce una rigida categorizzazione del pensiero e di quelli che nel mondo antico venivano definiti ‘moti dell’anima’”. Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. Cutrì, cit., vol. I, p. XIX.

Tesauro was aware of the epistemological perspective according to which the Galilean telescope and the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic paradigm prove incompatible – but is also in constant dialogue, at times polemical, with Aristotle and with the logical, ontological, practical, and gnoseological apparatus that Tesauro draws from the Aristotelian corpus. One need only think of the exposition of the “cagioni”<sup>28</sup> of *argutezza*, organised according to the five Aristotelian causes; or of Tesauro’s very conception of metaphor, which looks to Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* III.10–11 and *Poetics* 1457b 8–9;<sup>29</sup> or again of his classification of metaphorical species, which for Tesauro arises from considerations of a gnoseological nature,<sup>30</sup> just as the hierarchical arrangement of the witty figures retraces a cognitive progression corresponding to Aristotle’s *Organon* (from apprehension [metaphor], through judgement [allegory], to syllogism [*argutezza* or the metaphorical enthymeme]).<sup>31</sup> If, then, it is altogether problematic to reduce the *Cannocchiale* to a pedagogy of persuasion, Mazzocchi’s emphasis on the structural and normative coherence of the work undoubtedly finds substantial confirmation in Cutrì’s study.<sup>32</sup>

The Spanish sphere is not the only object of recent studies on the European influence of the *Cannocchiale*. In this respect, Holberton’s 2024 essay<sup>33</sup> offers an interesting comparison between Marvell’s lyric poetry and the poetics of the *Cannocchiale*. The study shows how engagement with Tesauro’s text – Marvell’s possession of the 1654 edition is taken as established – marked a stylistic development within the English poet’s oeuvre, one manifested essentially in two respects. The first is the use of laconicism as a device for dissimulating the author’s political commitment;<sup>34</sup> in this sense, the Marvellian reading presents the *Cannocchiale* as a politicised work, in which *argu-*

<sup>28</sup> Ivi, p. 61.

<sup>29</sup> The treatment of the witty “cagioni” unfolds from the second to the tenth chapter of the *Cannocchiale*.

<sup>30</sup> Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. Cutrì, cit., vol. I, p. 836.

<sup>31</sup> Ivi, pp. 608, 763.

<sup>32</sup> In this respect, one may now also recall M. Cutrì, ‘Postille inedite in difesa del «Cannocchiale aristotelico»’, in: *Testo*, 90, 2 (2025), pp. 27–69, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.19272/202505502002>, on the unpublished marginalia in a copy of Pierre Le Moyne’s *Art des devises*, from which it emerges a reception of the *Cannocchiale* strongly centred on its educational purpose, the clarity of its expository order, and the rigour of the Aristotelian method underpinning its theory of the *imprese*. Although tied above all to the context of anti-French polemic, the document usefully confirms the contemporary perception of the treatise as a work that is not merely repertorial, but systematic and explicitly designed to instruct.

<sup>33</sup> E. Holberton, ‘Metaphors and Telescopes: The Reception of Emanuele Tesauro’s *Il Cannocchiale Aristotelico* in Marvell’s Poetry’, in: *The Review of English Studies*, 75, 322 (2024), pp. 578–594, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/res/hgae042>.

<sup>34</sup> Ivi, pp. 591–594.

*tezza* appears as a socio-political category, productive of community through the deciphering of witty expressions.<sup>35</sup> The second concerns the use of the “*indice categorico*”, the system devised by Tesauro for generating new metaphors by means of Aristotle’s categories.

In his introduction, Cutrì underscores the pre-eminent role of the *indice* in the economy of the *Cannocchiale*, precisely because it represents the intrinsically dynamic character of the work’s *inventio*:<sup>36</sup> Tesauro, in fact, not only supplies innumerable examples, but also provides, through the index, the means by which the inventive basis of the *Cannocchiale* becomes capable of feeding itself almost indefinitely. Holberton understands the index as representative of a tendency within Marvell’s poetics that the *Cannocchiale* helps both to confirm and to intensify further.<sup>37</sup> In particular, the idea of the index is treated not merely as a generative mechanism of metaphor, but, more interestingly still, as an instrument for reworking the poetic tradition and the by then standardised images that characterise it. Holberton thus sees in the propensity to reinterpret the classical *loci* of poetry a distinctly Marvellian taste that finds in the *Cannocchiale* its fullest formulation. A further connection advanced by Holberton is that of the intersections between Marvell, Tesauro, and the influence exerted by modern science – and especially by the optical instruments it devised – upon the poetics of the seventeenth century. This is a point of considerable significance, and one that opens onto a broader critical reflection.<sup>38</sup>

Cutrì’s introduction makes explicit mention of Galileo Galilei only with reference to the conceptual overlap between the regressive method and the experimental method developed by Galileo.<sup>39</sup> By methodological regression, Cutrì means that cognitive procedure derived from the Peripatetic tradition and systematised within the Paduan school, based on the conjunction of induction and deduction. For Cutrì, this methodological principle would inspire the *inventio* and *dispositio* of the *Cannocchiale* as a whole: through the collection of particular cases bearing witness to the idea of *argutezza*, and then through a deductive descent from that idea, which is assumed as

<sup>35</sup> “Ogni istanza estetica in quanto istanza di ordine, in ultima analisi significa bisogno di accordo e di pace, di conciliazione delle facoltà dell’uomo e dell’uomo con il suo ambiente. Isolata, diviene estetistica e il suo autocompiacimento corrisponde all’autocompiacenza vanitosa di un ordine sociale. [...] Esteticità ed estetismo barocchi significano bisogno e vanità di distinzione che sono propri di una società portata a codificare culturalmente un privilegio di classe, il distacco dell’uomo raffinato dall’uomo naturale, plebeo”. G. Morpurgo-Tagliabue, ‘Aristotelismo e barocco’, in: E. Castelli (ed.), *Rhetorica e barocco. Atti del III Congresso internazionale di studi umanistici (Venezia, 15-18 giugno 1954)*, Roma, Bocca, 1955, p. 148.

<sup>36</sup> Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. Cutrì, cit., vol. I, pp. XXXI-XXXII.

<sup>37</sup> Holberton, ‘Metaphors and Telescopes’, cit., p. 587.

<sup>38</sup> Against this same background of problems, though from the more specifically rhetorical-visual side, one should at least recall A. Benassi, ‘«La eloquenza in iscorcio». Rhetorica visiva in Tesauro’, in: *Testo*, 58 (2009), pp. 9-20, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1400/121950>, which insists on the relationship between vision, perspective, and the figural construction of eloquence, showing how the optical metaphors of the *Cannocchiale* are not exhausted by a merely scientific suggestion, but directly engage the regime of decorum and the rhetorical disposition of images.

<sup>39</sup> Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. Cutrì, cit., vol. I, pp. XVIII-XIX.

the critical instrument of the multiplicity that originally occasioned the concept. According to Bisi's fruitful image, which Cutrì takes up, the *Cannocchiale* thus emerges as a genuine *mise en abyme* of *argutezza*, insofar as the expository order of witty matter is itself the very act of its production.<sup>40</sup> Yet by recognising in the method of *argutezza* a peculiar instance of regression, Cutrì rediscovers within it the very "funzionamento del 'cannocchiale aristotelico'",<sup>41</sup> that chimerical synthesis – which gives the treatise its title – between Peripatetic rhetoric (intensely mediated through Tesauro's reception of it) and Galileo's telescope. In this way, Cutrì situates himself within a broad critical horizon according to which the capacity of optical instruments to transfigure the ordinary, rendering visible details otherwise inaccessible, may be ascribed to the expressiveness of witty eloquence, which "di non-Ente fa Ente",<sup>42</sup> and thus produces wonder and astonishment through the bold recomposition even of the most colloquial meanings of experience.<sup>43</sup>

On this very threshold Joachim Harst's study<sup>44</sup> should also be placed. Harst interprets Tesauro's *Cannocchiale* as an original engagement with the epistemological questions opened up by Galilean science, and in contrast with them. The telescope, as an instrument for exploring the universe, is refunctionalised by Tesauro within an eminently rhetorical dispositif, becoming the model for an elocutionary practice devoted to the potentially indefinite production of metaphorical connections among the appearances of the world. In this sense, the optical machine ceases primarily to refer to the idea of a stable and intelligible structure of the cosmos, and instead resolves itself into a combinatory principle that suspends or reorganises the traditional hierarchies of Peripatetic cosmology. Particularly suggestive in Harst is the anthropological and soteriological consequence of this reading: wit, assimilated to the operation of the telescope itself, becomes the correlate of a human condition marked by the Fall, in which communication is constituted as pleasure and invention, but at the cost of a truth that never wholly exceeds the regime of surface.

As noted above, Holberton's contribution points to cultural tendencies of reciprocal reflection between science and literature, not only within Italy but beyond the Alps as well. In Marvell's poem *The Last Instructions to a Painter*, "several times [Marvell] liken this kind of penetrative optical ingenuity – building conceits around a microscope as well as a telescope – to the ability of satire to see beyond conventional

<sup>40</sup> M. Bisi, '«Mise-en-abîme» del dramma e abisso del linguaggio: l'allegoria tra ontologia e morale nelle tragedie di Emanuele Tesauro', in: E. Selmi & E. Zucchi (eds.), *Allegoria e teatro tra Cinque e Settecento: da principio compositivo a strumento esegetico*, Bologna, Emil di Odoya, 2016, pp. 209–225.

<sup>41</sup> Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. Cutrì, cit., vol. I, p. XVIII.

<sup>42</sup> *Ivi*, p. 250.

<sup>43</sup> For a survey of the scientific sources of the *Cannocchiale*, see M. Cutrì, 'Indagine sull'uso delle fonti scientifiche nel «Cannocchiale aristotelico»', in: A. Casadei, F. Fedi, A. Nacinovich & A. Torre (eds.), *Letteratura e Scienze. Atti del XXIII Congresso dell'ADI (Associazione degli Italianisti)*, Pisa, 12–14 settembre 2019, Roma, Adi editore, 2021, pp. 1–11.

<sup>44</sup> J. Harst, 'Metaphorische Teleskopie. Rhetorik, Logik und Optik bei Emanuele Tesauro', in: *Romanische Forschungen*, 135, 2 (2023), pp. 165–188, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3196/003581223837059239>.

idealizations of authority”.<sup>45</sup> Snyder offers a more articulated account of the structural synergies between the rhetoric of the *Cannocchiale* and modern science.<sup>46</sup> The image of the telescope directed towards the sun, so as to observe its spots under the supervision of Aristotle, would testify to the insufficiency of the categorical apparatus of the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic tradition, unless that apparatus is integrated into the image of the world delineated by the new technical-scientific instruments. We must therefore bear in mind that the images thematised by the tradition are to be treated in the light of the artificial nature assigned to them by scientific-mathematical thought. Snyder’s further contribution<sup>47</sup> remains within this line of enquiry, thematising the significance of the “macchia” not merely as a particular topos of Tesauro’s *Cannocchiale*, but as an emblematic expression of Baroque aesthetic sensibility. In the seventeenth century, the *macchia* comes to evoke the power of art to dominate the contingency of phenomena – that is, to render artificially appreciable those aspects of reality which, by virtue of their formal ambiguity and indeterminacy, would otherwise be ascribed to nature rather than to art. In this sense, the sunspots revealed by the telescope represent the desire to aestheticise the image of the world translated by science, and for which artifice guarantees the element of delight.<sup>48</sup>

Bisi’s 2011 study<sup>49</sup> likewise turns to the question of images in the *Cannocchiale*, grasping their significance on the ontological and epistemological plane. Images, understood as phenomena of the world, exhaust the domain upon which Tesauro operates in order artificially to devise his metaphorical audacities. This is made possible through the mediation of modern science, and in particular through the Galilean distinction, set out in the *Saggiatore*, between primary and secondary qualities. The former pertain to the quantitative properties of entities in the world, those that are measurable and reducible to geometrico-mathematical models; the latter are properly relational, that is, grounded in our relation to the world, in the fact that we are sensibly affected by it. Since they concern not the world as it is in itself, but only as it appears, these secondary qualities prove ontologically inconsistent, thereby constituting the material that lends itself plastically to the combinatory force of Tesauro’s metaphor.<sup>50</sup> Bisi therefore suggests that one attend to the ontological and epistemological devices that animate the poetics of the *Cannocchiale* from within.

<sup>45</sup> Holberton, ‘Metaphors and Telescopes’, cit., p. 584.

<sup>46</sup> J.R. Snyder, ‘Art and Truth in Baroque Italy, or the Case of Emanuele Tesauro’s *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*’, in: *MLN*, 131, 1 (2016), pp. 74–96, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/mln.2016.0014>.

<sup>47</sup> J.R. Snyder, ‘Strokes of Wit: Theorizing Beauty in Baroque Italy’, in: P.A. Kottman (ed.), *The Insistence of Art: Aesthetic Philosophy after Early Modernity*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2017, pp. 194–226, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/97808023275823-009>.

<sup>48</sup> “By incorporating its discoveries and instruments into a discourse that is almost entirely focused on the domain of contemporary high culture, Tesauro aims to aestheticize the New Science, thus transforming it into a fundamentally Baroque phenomenon”. Ivi, p. 198.

<sup>49</sup> M. Bisi, *Il velo di Alceste. Metafora, dissimulazione e verità nell’opera di Emanuele Tesauro*, Pisa, Edizioni ETS, 2011, pp. 9–61.

<sup>50</sup> Ivi, pp. 17–30.

Whether or not the truth of the *Cannocchiale* is authentically scientific, the relation between truth and illusion is unquestionably crucial to the work. For Cutrì, the *mise en abyme* into which Tesauro directs us, before being the very form in act of *argutezza*, entails recognising within the *Cannocchiale* the living acquisition of its own contents. The *Cannocchiale* is thus the active progress of its reader within the truth of *argutezza*, a contribution to truth that Cutrì once again articulates in practical-anthropological terms:

L'“eleganza” della figura mira a un “nobile” effetto nel lettore, sia per risvegliare la sua attenzione in un clima da conversazione civile o conviviale, sia per rendere concisi e concreti concetti astratti che richiederebbero altrimenti spiegazioni troppo lunghe e vacue.<sup>51</sup>

The truth of *argutezza* would thus seem to be reduced to the pragmatic conditions of knowledge, to those conditions that guarantee a pleasurable abiding within *theosis*. What follows from this is an instrumental understanding of *argutezza* in relation to truth, not least through the Augustinian reading of figurative speech that Cutrì brings to his argument.<sup>52</sup> One who expresses oneself *argutamente* does not provide an autonomous contribution to truth, but merely serves, by contrast, to underscore the truth that underlies the false.

Lorusso,<sup>53</sup> by contrast, seeks, through a comparison between the Aristotelian lesson and the Tesaurian one, to emphasise – despite their divergences from the example of the Stagirite – the properly cognitive status of Tesauro's metaphor, which is the “gran madre”<sup>54</sup> of *argutezza*. Tesauro's metaphor is a principle both of the analysis and of an unusual synthesis of the real, corresponding respectively to “perspicacia” and “versatilità,” the dispositions that Tesauro identifies as underlying the creation of simple witty figures.<sup>55</sup> In this sense, it constitutes itself as a radical overturning of the ontological structure of reality as Aristotle describes it. Metaphor is therefore not the reflection of a real proportionality among beings – which the figure has the merit of “porre sotto agli occhi”<sup>56</sup> – but is, as Lorusso argues, a “semiotica” action of producing new meanings, thereby nullifying, in relation to metaphorical creation, every residual trace of the Aristotelian concern for verisimilitude.

<sup>51</sup> Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. Cutrì, cit., vol. I, p. XXXIV.

<sup>52</sup> “Perciò queste parole sono coperte come sotto il velo delle figure, perché muovano il pensiero del ricercatore devoto e perché nude ed esposte non inviliscano. [...] Nascoste si desiderano più ardentemente, e le cose più desiderate si scoprono con maggior godimento. Comunque sono dette cose vere, non false: poiché significano cose vere, non false”. Ivi, p. XXXV. For a comparison between the *Cannocchiale* and the Augustinian lesson, see Frare, «Per istraforo di prospettiva», cit., pp. 131-155.

<sup>53</sup> A.M. Lorusso, ‘Tra cannocchiali, lenti, riflessi e specchi: la lezione aristotelica nel *Cannocchiale* del Tesauro’, in: A.M. Lorusso (ed.), *Metafora e conoscenza*, Milano, Bompiani, 2005, pp. 213-234.

<sup>54</sup> Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. Cutrì, cit., vol. I, p. 763.

<sup>55</sup> Ivi, pp. 247-249.

<sup>56</sup> Lorusso, ‘Tra cannocchiali, lenti, riflessi e specchi’, cit., pp. 224-228. One can find this image in *Rhet.*, III, 1405b.

An important contribution by Bisi<sup>57</sup> may also be situated within this line of enquiry, since it confronts head-on the problem of metaphorical knowledge in the *Cannocchiale*. Proceeding from the nexus between the senses, imagination, intellect, and *ingegno*, Bisi shows that Tesauro's metaphor cannot be reduced either to a mere elocutionary ornament or to an adequate reflection of reality. Rather, it produces a distinctive cognitive increment, since, by arranging objects through a "istraforo di prospettiva",<sup>58</sup> it allows them to be perceived within one another according to an instantaneous and imagistic synthesis that expands the possibilities of understanding without thereby resolving itself into the capture of the universal. In Bisi's account, therefore, the truth of *argutezza* does not consist in a peaceful coincidence between word and thing, but in the opening up of new perspectives upon the real, in a transformation of its regime of visibility; hence the only apparently sophistic character of metaphor, which does not oppress the true, but allows it to show through as by a veil, within the very pleasure of *imparamento*.

That *argutezza* defines a form of knowledge *sui generis* is the view advanced by Fiorani,<sup>59</sup> to whom we owe a formidable philological survey of the Aristotelian citations present in the *Cannocchiale*, undertaken in order to identify their reference translations. This contribution also promotes an analysis of Tesauro's concept of *ingegno* through comparison with classical and early modern categorizations; what emerges is that *ingegno*, which is the faculty of *argutezza*, cannot simply be superimposed upon intellect, but appears rather as a "forza", a vital instinct.<sup>60</sup> Fiorani also grasps the importance, in this connection, of comparison with dialectic, in order to show how logical categories become transfigured within rhetoric, though her study does not often move beyond paraphrase of Tesauro's text. Tedesco,<sup>61</sup> by contrast, offers a particularly striking analysis of the relation between logical and rhetorical thought in the *Cannocchiale*. *Argutezza*, which for Tesauro consists in syllogising on the basis of a metaphorical construct, is certainly defined in the *Cannocchiale* as an *entimema*; yet unlike the Aristotelian enthymeme, it is not essentially characterised by being a 'truncated' argument lacking one premise. Tesauro, Tedesco argues, merely "sfiora" the lesson of Aristotle, but the substance of his metaphorical argument lies not in brevity, as it does for Aristotle, but in its fallacious character.<sup>62</sup> Rhetoric thus distinguishes itself from dialectic insofar as it positively inhabits contradiction, thereby anticipating in Tesauro the aesthetic systems of the following century.

<sup>57</sup> M. Bisi, 'Visione e invenzione. La conoscenza per via di metafora nel *Cannocchiale aristotelico* di Emanuele Tesauro', in: *Studi Secenteschi*, XLVII (2006), pp. 57-87.

<sup>58</sup> Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. Cutrì, cit., vol. I, p. 828.

<sup>59</sup> M. Fiorani, 'Aristotelismo e innovazione barocca nel concetto di ingegno del *Cannocchiale aristotelico* di Tesauro', in: *Studi Secenteschi*, XLVI (2005), pp. 91-129.

<sup>60</sup> Ivi, p. 107.

<sup>61</sup> S. Tedesco, 'Tesauro: teoria della conoscenza tramite paralogismo', in: idem, *Le Sirene del Barocco: il nuovo spazio dell'estetico nel dibattito barocco italiano su dialettica e retorica*, Palermo, Centro internazionale di studi di estetica, 2003, pp. 33-70.

<sup>62</sup> Ivi, p. 61.

Our recent contribution<sup>63</sup> sought to problematise further the relationship between rhetoric and dialectic in Tesauro's treatise. More specifically, it showed how the fallacious character of the *entimema urbano* can indeed be organised through Aristotle's paralogical *loci*, but only as the mechanical result of constructing the syllogism upon metaphor. The enthymeme rediscovers in metaphor its own paralogical matrix: it is the product of a spontaneous, instinctive discourse that does not consciously deploy the logical technicalities through which it intervenes upon the new meanings generated by metaphor. This also explains the distance between rhetoric and dialectic. Unlike Tedesco, we argue that the contrast between rhetoric and dialectic cannot be reduced simply to that between falsehood and truth, but must be referred to the differing psychological disposition of the one who makes use of them. The rhetorician knows that he is instrumentalising meanings in order to please; the dialectician believes that he is merely stating the truth of things, yet fails to recognise that this truth is itself an instrument of his will to self-assertion in dispute.

A further element within this constellation is supplied by Benassi's 2006 contribution,<sup>64</sup> which brings attention back to a point often neglected in the theoretical construction of the *Cannocchiale*: namely, the general definition of rhetorical figures and their division into harmonic, pathetic, and witty ones. Benassi shows, in fact, how Tesauro grafts the *officia oratoris* onto a psychological framework of Aristotelian derivation, so that distinct and hierarchically ordered expressive forms correspond to the faculties of the soul. Hence, on the one hand, the subordinate status of the harmonic figures, confined to the domain of sensible proportion; and, on the other, the primacy of the witty figures, in which Tesauro's theory of elocution finds its true centre. What follows is a reading of the *Cannocchiale* as a rhetoric essentially concentrated on elocution, or, more precisely, as a device designed to distinguish, within the general field of figurative speech, the eminent place of *argutezza* as the expression of the highest operation of the intellect.

Katinis's 2024 study<sup>65</sup> has recognised the fruitful nexus between the *Cannocchiale* and sophistry. Arnaudo's 2009 contribution<sup>66</sup> had already shown how the image of *argutezza* as the prestidigitation of a juggler was connected to the repertoire through which classical thought had defined sophistic discourse. Katinis's analysis not only places Tesauro's treatment in clear continuity with the sixteenth-century debate concerning the epistemological status of poetic and rhetorical contents, paying particular

<sup>63</sup> A. Lombardo & T. Katinis, 'Retorica e dialettica nel *Cannocchiale aristotelico* (1670) di Emanuele Tesauro. Una prima indagine', in: *Fabrica Litterarum Polono-Italica*, 11 (2026), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31261/FLPI.2026.11.16>.

<sup>64</sup> A. Benassi, 'Lo scherzevole inganno: figure ingegnose e argutezza nel *Cannocchiale aristotelico* di Emanuele Tesauro', in: *Studi Secenteschi*, XLVII (2006), pp. 9-55, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1400/177426>.

<sup>65</sup> T. Katinis, 'The Ancient Greek Sophists in Emanuele Tesauro's *Il cannocchiale aristotelico* (1670): Thrasymachus and Gorgias', in: *Humanities*, 13, 1 (2024), art. 33, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/h13010033>.

<sup>66</sup> M. Arnaudo, 'Sul significato del giocoliere nel *Cannocchiale aristotelico* di Emanuele Tesauro', in: *Studi Secenteschi*, L (2009), pp. 3-14.

attention to the case of Speroni, but also identifies the apologetic force with which Tesauro treats sophistry as encouraging a positive reassessment internal to the elocutionary sensibility of the *Cannocchiale*. More specifically, it shows how Tesauro recognises in the first sophistic movement, and especially in Gorgias and Thrasyarchus, the origin of the summit of Latin rhetoric, namely Cicero. In continuity with the spirit of the work, the root of such a relationship – that is, the praise of the sophists – is reinvented as already present within Aristotle's *Rhetoric*.

As has already been suggested, one of the most appreciable features of Cutrì's interpretative contribution is his attention to Tesauro's style in the *Cannocchiale*. On the one hand, this invites a disinterested engagement with the work, since it is first and foremost a work of exquisite literature; on the other, it recognises in Tesauro's writing not a mere ornament, but rather the vivid enactment of its own contents. This is an aspect that Cutrì emphasises under the influence of Padula, who had already, in the nineteenth century, identified the "forma drammatica" of Tesauro's thought, that style which, by exciting sense, affect, and mind, proves capable of addressing the human being in his totality.<sup>67</sup> The very device of the triangulation between Aristotle, Tesauro, and the reader – *personae* whom the *Cannocchiale* evokes so that, as if upon a theatrical stage, they may actively disclose the secret of *argutezza* – continues this radical impulse of thought to correspond to itself in image, that tendency running throughout the work to complicate subject and object of narration, theory and praxis, thought and action.

Zanlonghi's 2002 study<sup>68</sup> takes up the intrinsic performativity of Tesauro's treatment, departing from the customary perspective from which it has traditionally been approached – namely, the psychological-cognitive one – and privileging instead its ethical-practical value. Zanlonghi thus attends to Tesauro's ordering of forms of knowledge, to the primacy that morality holds over speculation – a point that Tedesco's contribution also has the merit of bringing out – and to the way in which this primacy destines *argutezza* and *civile conversazione* to the self-exploration of consciences, to their own emotional self-awareness.<sup>69</sup>

Merola's 2007 study,<sup>70</sup> within a broader survey of Tesauro's *Filosofia morale*, likewise thematises the relationship between ethics and rhetoric in the *Cannocchiale*, discerning in the discrepancy between truth and appearance the same distance that separates moral judgement, which comments upon action from without, from inner disposition, which contemplates the goodness or otherwise of action through the authenticity of its motives. Yet the distinctive interest of Zanlonghi's study, beyond its

<sup>67</sup> Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. Cutrì, cit., vol. I, pp. XXXII-XXXIV. For Padula, see Cutrì, *Leggere il «libro aperto»*, cit., pp. 124-135.

<sup>68</sup> G. Zanlonghi, *Teatri di formazione. Actio, parola e immagine nella scena gesuitica del Sei-Settecento a Milano*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 2002.

<sup>69</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 17-54.

<sup>70</sup> V. Merola, *La messinscena delle idee. Emanuele Tesauro e il «Teatro di meraviglie»*, Manziana, Vecchiarelli, 2007, pp. 161-213.

more assured command of the theoretical relations between the *Filosofia* and the *Cannocchiale*, lies in the emphasis it places upon the emotional matrix of Tesauro's image-thinking. For Zanolghi, the "macchine" devised by Tesauro for the obsequies of Philip III in Milan – that congeries of allegories and epigrams which introduced the faithful to the monarch's bier – represents the practical transcription of the ecstatic wonder of *argutezza*. Those images are not simply pleasurable because they ingeniously translate a thought; rather, they express the thoroughly human need to give form to the congeries of movements of the soul.

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Through this brief critical itinerary, which seeks to acknowledge Cutrì's labour in having finally secured the cultural significance of the *Cannocchiale aristotelico* by restoring it in a modern critical edition, we have attempted, however summarily, to convey the richness of the interpretative perspectives that Tesauro's work has recently stimulated. If great art, following Lessing's lesson, possesses the privilege of an inexhaustible approximation to its meaning, so that it may be regarded almost as an effigy of the historical process itself, then in the case of the *Cannocchiale* this openness to interpretation becomes programmatic. The performative character of the work thus appears in its most radical form, precisely because it is conceived essentially with a view to its reception.

Stimulated both by the dignity and density of the treatise and by its explicit exhortations, we may therefore conclude by briefly suggesting a number of possible lines of enquiry.<sup>71</sup> First of all, it is necessary to 'liberate' the *Cannocchiale* from the culture of the 'Baroque', ideally by taking our cue from the regressive method that Tesauro himself sets out. The 'Baroque' is certainly a fruitful concept, grounded in a broad body of cases and the subject of studies of the highest importance; yet it is imperative that the *Cannocchiale* itself become a critical instrument for that historical-hermeneutic superstructure, precisely because Tesauro is not a passive executor of the 'Baroque', but one of its protagonists. In this sense, Tesauro's attention to the domain of poetic and elocutionary illusions is not simply the product of his time, but rather the result of a distinctive interaction between Tesauro and the early modern tradition that established its presuppositions. The *Cannocchiale* was moreover published at a moment when conceptism had already entered a phase of decline, and it explicitly presents itself as its *apologia*; it therefore manifests a retroactive tendency that has not yet been sufficiently investigated, and which would seem to define its novelty in reactionary rather than progressive terms. Another possible line of enquiry is the one mentioned above, concerning the eminently practical dignity of the *Cannocchiale*. What is urgently required in this respect is a fully comprehensive understanding of the *Filosofia morale*, published in 1670, since it is there that "civile conversazione", the field in

<sup>71</sup> In the same direction, see also M. Maggi, '«Il Cannocchiale aristotelico»: bilanci e prospettive', in: *Testo*, 90, 2 (2025), pp. 75-78, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.19272/202505502004>.

which the *argutezze* operate, is systematised. The radical hedonism through which Tesauro and his teaching are often approached must take the *Filosofia morale* into account if *argutezza* is to be understood not as a merely intellectual amusement, but as grounded in *pathos*.

To approach Emanuele Tesauro's *Cannocchiale aristotelico* is, even for its most assiduous and devoted readers, a vertiginous experience. The work imposes itself first of all by virtue of its sheer scale: more than seven hundred long and exceedingly dense pages devoted to unveiling the "più sacri et arcani penetralia"<sup>1</sup> of wit, that art which, we are assured, enables us to produce wonder by connecting the most abstruse and disparate determinations of the world. The *Cannocchiale* cannot, in fact, be reduced either to a mere commentary on Aristotle's rhetorical elocution or, still less, to the formulation of an idiosyncratic systematic compendium of the techniques of persuasion. This prodigious offspring of seventeenth-century literature seems methodically to withdraw from any defining gesture that might reassure the modern interpreter before the shifting, unpredictable – yet profoundly reasoned – nature of Tesauro's exposition. The wonders of wit – of the playful composition and recomposition of empirical meanings – thus shift from subject to object throughout the prose of the *Cannocchiale*: from a profusion of *exempla* that ceaselessly proliferate, displaying both the breadth of Tesauro's erudition and the agility with which he draws upon it, to a body whose constituent elements are subjected to analytical scrutiny, so as to uncover the secret of those operations of human intelligence that govern every form of communicative pleasure. In this sense, the definitional difficulty concerns the possibility of effectively isolating from the *Cannocchiale* a theory of persuasion that invariably displays a tendency to resolve itself into persuasive practice.

It is the very theoretical horizon underpinning the work that proves elusive. Tesauro opens with a remarkably fine, and rightly celebrated, cosmological exposition of wit, presenting it as his own acknowledgement of the intrinsically signifying nature of the universe and of its Creator. Creation itself thus appears as the exemplary instance – the "idea", as Tesauro would have said – of that transposition of meaning, that saying "una cosa per l'altra",<sup>2</sup> at which human beings never cease either to marvel or to take delight. And yet this horizon is posited only to recede into oblivion, stifled by the subsequent course of the work, which gradually reduces it to a faint recollection, while the discussion comes to focus decisively upon "civil conversazione",<sup>3</sup> retracing the practical, psychological, and political implications of language.

The *Cannocchiale* thus presents itself as a cultural 'object' of difficult access, a space into which, by virtue of its labyrinthine and polycentric structure, one must be cautiously introduced – all the more so now that scholarly interest in the work has re-emerged. Both the object and, at the same time, the remedy for this condition is un-

<sup>1</sup> E. Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. M. Cutrì, 2 vols., Milano, Fondazione Pietro Bembo/Ugo Guanda Editore, 2024-2025, vol. I, p. 647.

<sup>2</sup> *Ivi*, p. 140.

<sup>3</sup> *Ivi*, p. 15.

doubtedly the brilliant study by Maicol Cutrì, who, through a rare philological sensitivity and a thoroughly secure grasp of the textual corpus of Tesauro's oeuvre as a whole, has at last brought out the first critical edition of the *Cannocchiale*.<sup>4</sup>

The work is issued in two handy volumes, probably in response to the 2000 facsimile edition, which, although it reproduces in full – and supplements with a number of introductory essays by distinguished scholars – Tesauro's final editorial intentions, can hardly be described as 'portable'.<sup>5</sup> The division into two tomes not only makes consultation easier, but also serves, by containing it within the first volume, to emphasise Tesauro's extensive exploration of metaphor and its eight species, thereby constituting that 'treatise on metaphor' which, by its sheer scale and conceptual density, appears almost as a work within the work. From this perspective, every compromise demanded by the requirements of a modern edition of the treatise is judiciously guided by a clear interpretative framework. Cutrì has in fact chosen to preserve the graphic layout of Tesauro's 1670 edition (based on the copy held in the Biblioteca Civica di Fossano, the same copy reproduced in facsimile in 2000), precisely because, from the introduction onwards, this layout is treated as a structural element internal to the content that the *Cannocchiale* seeks to convey.<sup>6</sup> More specifically, Cutrì's edition preserves the emphatic function of italics, as well as their use for direct speech and quotations; likewise, words printed entirely in capitals and the graphic schemes of chapters IV and VII are retained. As for the beautiful engraved frontispiece, which has been the object of considerable critical attention, the edition provides a full reproduction.

The editor's transcription achieves a refined balance between modernising the reading experience of the *Cannocchiale* and removing those features that burden its accessibility through orthographic usages that are now archaic or obsolete (for example, by adopting current conventions of punctuation and accentuation, separating adverbs and adverbial phrases otherwise printed in contracted form, distinguishing between *u* and *v*, and rendering the clusters *-ti-* and *-tti-* as *-zi-* and *-zzi-*, and so forth). In this same direction one should also understand the editor's direct intervention in the text, aimed at eliminating Tesauro's typographical errors through a comparative examination of the 1654 edition (*editio princeps*), those of 1663 and 1664, and finally

<sup>4</sup> Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. Cutrì, cit. For the significance of Cutrì's edition within the broader economy of Tesauro studies, see M.L. Doglio, 'Su una nuova edizione del «Cannocchiale aristotelico»', in: *Testo*, 90, 2 (2025), pp. 71–74, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.19272/202505502003>.

<sup>5</sup> E. Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico* (con contributi di M.L. Doglio, M. Guglielminetti, A. Penacini, F. Vuilleumier, P. Laurens, D. Vottero, G. Menardi; coordinamento di G. Menardi), Savigliano (Cuneo), Editrice Artistica Piemontese, 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. Cutrì, cit., vol. I, pp. XXXI–XXXII. For the hermeneutic significance of the typographical form of the *Cannocchiale*, and hence for the need not merely to read but also to 'look at' the treatise, see now P. Frare, 'Un libro da «mirar con gli occhi»: «Il Cannocchiale aristotelico» di Emanuele Tesauro', in: *Testo*, 90, 2 (2025), pp. 9–26, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.19272/202505502001>, which interprets the body of Tesauro's writing as an active component of the work's didactic function and conceptual construction.

that of 1670, thus exhausting the corpus of the *Cannocchiale* editions directly supervised by the author himself. In any case, this updating of the text does not claim to replace direct engagement with the sources; rather, it serves as a valuable aid to it, not least by indicating the page number of Tesauro's original edition, thereby encouraging direct comparison.

As has been said, Cutrì's edition is primarily intended to respond to the growing body of critical attention devoted to the *Cannocchiale* and to the renewed cultural fascination exerted by the work – a fascination that clearly echoes a broader contemporary interest in rhetoric, caught between the impulse to legitimise it and the contrary tendency to reaffirm its superfluity and its deceptions. Both within and beyond academia, a growing body of scholarship regards rhetoric as a form of knowledge to be recovered or even re-established.<sup>7</sup>

More generally, in the age of post-truth, cultural interest tends to privilege the pragmatic dimensions of persuasion and the ways in which they manifest themselves across every sphere of contemporary life, from politics to product marketing. In this sense, there is now a tendency to emphasize the presence within language of a technique capable of transforming the world and, in particular, the psyche that represents it to itself.

Tesauro's rhetorical conception, however, poses, from another angle, the challenge of accepting a certain disengagement from truth, which Tesauro prefers "vestita" rather than "nuda",<sup>8</sup> and whose presence in discourse he defines as an "ingombro" liable to compromise "diletto".<sup>9</sup> Yet beyond the various analogies that may be drawn with the current state of reflection on, and use of, rhetoric – analogies which undoubtedly testify to the continuing relevance of the concerns embodied in the *Cannocchiale* – Cutrì's contribution seeks to safeguard Tesauro's masterpiece from illegitimate projections that would distortively actualise its doctrine. The most substantial labour of this modern edition lies precisely in its dense apparatus of footnotes, a multifaceted commentary whose thematic articulation may be outlined as follows:

- **Critical notes:** these constitute the most original part of Cutrì's commentary, namely the section in which the author contributes to the unravelling of the most difficult thematic knots of the *Cannocchiale*. In particular, Cutrì assumes the role of a kind of omniscient narrator, intermittently broadening the reader's awareness of the macro-structures of Tesauro's work, which are often obscured by the sheer abundance of its contents.

<sup>7</sup> In this respect, one may take as exemplary the very recent contribution by M. Prandi, *Retorica. Una disciplina da rifondare*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2023.

<sup>8</sup> Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. Cutrì, cit., vol. I, p. 70.

<sup>9</sup> Ivi, vol. II, p. 33.

- **Historical-cultural notes:** these provide the tools necessary to situate the *Cannocchiale* in its historical context, not only as a brilliant expression of Baroque culture, but also as a distinctive articulation of the seventeenth-century concern with the poetics of *acutezze*, that cultural tendency which radicalises the elocutionary functions of *ingegno* and intellectualises pleasure.
- **Linguistic notes:** these are, in effect, 'translations' drawn from the *Vocabolario* of the Crusca (in its 1623 and 1691 editions)<sup>10</sup> elucidating for the modern reader the more obscure and sensitive archaisms of Tesauro's exposition.
- **Aristotelian notes:** these serve to bring out the dialogue between Tesauro and Aristotle in the *Cannocchiale*, highlighting both their theoretical convergences and their possible points of divergence, through precise reference not only to the Aristotelian *loci* in question, but also to the secondary critical scholarship on Aristotle's philosophical doctrine.
- **Notes of critical dialogue:** this is the section of the commentary devoted to the secondary scholarship on the *Cannocchiale* and, more broadly, on Tesauro's oeuvre. It is an apparatus of considerable importance, since it allows critical interest to be 'located' directly within the text itself, offering the reader a progressive excursus on the *status quaestionis* of Tesauro studies.
- **Citation notes:** these are concerned with identifying the sources of the corpus of explicit and implicit citations in the *Cannocchiale*. This is an enormous undertaking, if one considers that the index of names in the modern edition runs to approximately seventy pages. Particular attention should be given to the treatment of the Aristotelian citations, all in Latin, which appear in the margins of the work and which Cutrì identifies as genuinely oracular.<sup>11</sup> For editorial reasons, the critical edition reproduces them in an appendix – in both volumes – accompanied by an Italian translation and, where necessary, by specific supplementary commentary.

Besides, Cutrì offers an introduction to the *Cannocchiale* which guides the modern reader into the work by setting out its editorial vicissitudes, indicates the most pressing knots of Tesauro's argument, and constitutes a kind of compendium of Cutrì's hermeneutic sensibility. In particular, the introduction brings together the critical efforts brought to fruition in *Leggere il libro aperto*, which, after Frare's monograph,<sup>12</sup> remains the only contemporary monographic study devoted to the *Cannocchiale*.<sup>13</sup> The space available to us prevents any adequate retracing of the principal theses of

<sup>10</sup> *Vocabolario degli accademici della Crusca, in questa seconda impressione da' medesimi riveduto e ampliato [...], con tre indici delle voci, locuzioni, e proverbi latini e greci posti per entro l'opera [...]*, Venezia, Iacopo Sarzina, 1623. The second edition (Firenze, Stamperia dell'Accademia della Crusca, 1691) is consulted less frequently.

<sup>11</sup> Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. Cutrì, cit., vol. I, p. XXX.

<sup>12</sup> P. Frare, «Per istraforo di prospettiva». *Il «Cannocchiale Aristotelico» e la poesia del Seicento*, Pisa-Roma, Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali, 2000.

<sup>13</sup> M. Cutrì, *Leggere il «libro aperto»*. *Saggio sul «Cannocchiale aristotelico»*, Pisa, ETS, 2023.

Cutri's monograph, yet the choice of "libro aperto", which gives the study its title, may come to our aid.

The image of a reading experience that is intrinsically inconclusive presents itself at the very close of the *Cannocchiale*, in accordance with Tesauro's characteristic taste for antithesis. As the treatise reaches its final moments, Tesauro addresses an ultimate peroration to the reader: an invitation to contemplate the insufficiency of his witty arguments, as though in an open book, "che ad altri insegna quel che non sa". Reassured by the figurative register within which Tesauro's discourse persists, we find ourselves once again unseated, this time not by some abstruse metaphorical allusion, but by the literalness of Tesauro's reference. For the *Cannocchiale* is, quite literally, open:

Se tu volessi fabricare un'impresa sopra questo libro, potrestù pingere un *libro aperto*, che ad altri insegna quel ch'ei non sa. Ma [...] chi arà pazienza di legger tutto questo volume, sicuramente una cosa ottima, et piacevolissima ci troverà: cioè

#### IL FINE.<sup>14</sup>

"IL FINE" belongs to the very formatting of the *Cannocchiale*: it gives artificial form to the conclusion of a work that is itself brought to an equally artificial close through aposiopesis, through a dramatic convulsion of Tesauro's prose. The *Cannocchiale* thus leaves us at once exhilarated and disconcerted, moved by the tragedy of a curtain that is forcibly drawn over the diegesis of the work, yet which nonetheless impels readers of every age to renew its ingenious creativity, to explore its artifices and to initiate new ones. It is precisely this real and hermeneutic openness of the *Cannocchiale* that Cutri brings to light. The merit of Cutri's reading lies in his refusal to diminish Tesauro's literariness by absolutising a narrowly theoretical interpretation, one that would reduce the *Cannocchiale* to the mere implication of a meta-literary construct. Rather, Cutri prefers to understand its theorisation as the fruit of a living experience of style, the "concetto" of the *Cannocchiale* as dictated by the stylistic solutions it develops and, above all, as an exercise internal to the desire that the reader experiences, being so deeply engaged by the work, to become its continuator.

Before entering more fully into the introduction to the modern edition, however, a brief methodological note is in order. This article does not seek to provide a new annotated bibliography of scholarship on Tesauro, nor an exhaustive survey of criticism on the *Cannocchiale*, but rather to isolate, beginning from Cutri's recent edition, some of the principal theoretical lines that have emerged around the treatise over the last twenty-five years. Our starting point is Frare's monograph, the study that effectively relaunched modern critical interest in the *Cannocchiale*. By contrast, 2024–2025 marks the other end of the trajectory, with the publication of the first complete critical edition of the work. For a broader, and properly exhaustive, annotated bibliography

<sup>14</sup> Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. Cutri, cit., vol. II, pp. 618–619.

of Tesauro studies, and in particular for the two periods 1990–2009 and 2009–2025, one may turn respectively to the contributions by Bisi and Macor.<sup>15</sup>

The first issue with which Cutrì grapples in introducing the *Cannocchiale* is the complexity of its editorial history.<sup>16</sup> Critical scholarship is broadly agreed in attributing to the work a long gestation, reaching back to Tesauro's early years of Jesuit formation and rhetorical teaching, a phase during which the author undertook a commentary on Aristotle's rhetorical doctrine (with particular attention to the third book of the *Rhetoric*, devoted to elocution). From these studies there emerged some of the central nuclei of the *Cannocchiale*: a treatise on wit (*argutezze*), now lost, and a treatise on devices (*imprese*) – preserved in a single surviving copy, that of the Biblioteca Reale in Turin, edited and published in modern form by Doglio<sup>17</sup> – both of which would flow into the first edition of 1654, before being further expanded and integrated up to the definitive version of 1670. One element that receives particular emphasis in Cutrì's historiographical survey is the dialogue that Tesauro's work sustains with treatises on the *acutezze*, a poetic sensibility that found some resonance in northern Europe, but above all between Spain and Italy, and which constituted an important stimulus to the composition of the *Cannocchiale*.

In this respect, Frare's 2006<sup>18</sup> contribution offers a comparison between Tesauro and Gracián, bringing out their originality within the landscape of seventeenth-century conceptist theory. In both cases, *argutezza* emerges as an operation concerning figures, especially those which Tesauro defines as "ingegnose". These are *figurae dia-noeae*, grounded in discourse; that is to say, they express the capacity of rational language to constitute itself suggestively through pleasurable imaginative impressions. Metaphor is the category that gathers together the witty figures and, as Frare emphasises, it presents itself in a double conceptual sense: a broader one, encompassing all the metaphorical species that Tesauro distinguishes, and a narrower one, referring only to the metaphor of similarity.<sup>19</sup> This material is structured by *argutezza* as an inferential function of intelligence: *argutezza* is an "arguere",<sup>20</sup> a process of reasoning around metaphorical matter. The distinction of Tesauro and Gracián would therefore lie in having identified in *argutezza* an operation upon metaphor, though one to be

<sup>15</sup> M. Bisi, 'Natura, strumenti e uso della retorica negli ultimi vent'anni di studi su Emanuele Tesauro. Bibliografia ragionata 1990-2009', in: *Testo*, 58 (2009), pp. 93-124, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1400/121955>; L. Macor, 'Emanuele Tesauro. Bibliografia ragionata 2009-2025', in: *Testo*, 90, 2 (2025), pp. 79-99, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.19272/202505502005>.

<sup>16</sup> For further discussion of this matter, see M. Cutrì, 'Storia editoriale del «Cannocchiale aristotelico»', in: *Testo*, 80 (2020), pp. 63-86, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.19272/202005502004>.

<sup>17</sup> E. Tesauro, *Idea delle perfette imprese*, ed. M.L. Doglio, Firenze, Olschki, 1975.

<sup>18</sup> P. Frare, 'L'argutezza in Tesauro e in Gracián', in: A. Di Stefano (ed.), *Cyberletteratura: tra mondi testuali e mondi virtuali. Atti del convegno, Roma 9-10 giugno 2005*, Roma, Nuova Cultura, 2006, pp. 105-117.

<sup>19</sup> Ivi, p. 111. On a more detailed analysis of the relationship between metaphor and *argutezza* – one that comes to configure a kind of polycentrism within the *Cannocchiale* – see Frare, «Per istraforo di perspettiva», cit., pp. 55-84, and M. Bisi, 'Tesauro Emanuele', in: M. Ballarini (dir.), P. Frare, G. Frasso & G. Langella (eds.), *Dizionario biblico della letteratura italiana*, Milano, IPL, 2018, pp. 949-954.

<sup>20</sup> Frare, 'L'argutezza in Tesauro e in Gracián', cit., p. 110.

understood as an improper application of syllogism to figures, “un surplus di armatura (pseudo) logica”.<sup>21</sup> *Argutezza*, like Gracián’s *agudeza*, operates and is confined within the domain of the false; yet it finds its absolution there precisely because it knows how to “ben mentire”,<sup>22</sup> because it does so “scherzevolmente”, “sanza dolo malo”.<sup>23</sup> What renders the *acutezze* harmless, for Frare, is the anthropological perspective upon which both Tesauro and Gracián construct them: the indispensable human need – since man is at once mind and body – to resort to an apparatus of mediating forms of communication capable of externalising a thought that would otherwise remain not immediately manifest. *Argutezza* thus establishes itself as the self-disclosure of a linguistic technology, rather than as a denotative act.

Mazzocchi’s 2015 study,<sup>24</sup> likewise focused on comparing Tesauro’s *Cannocchiale* with Gracián’s *Agudeza*, instead proposes a reading that brings out their differences. Gracián’s work is to be understood as a decisive rejection of sixteenth-century elocutionary formalism, privileging instead those figures which, in Tesauro’s terms, “nascono dall’argomento”,<sup>25</sup> and which delight precisely by restoring to us the forms of wit with which the world is, in and of itself, replete. In Gracián, *argutezza* is thus elevated to an ontological consideration, whereas Tesauro approaches it from the side of the “produttore”,<sup>26</sup> that is, from the standpoint of its technical reproducibility. Mazzocchi therefore interprets the *Cannocchiale* as an exquisitely pedagogical and rhetorical device, emphasising that strong normative apparatus and abundance of examples from which Gracián’s treatise is, by contrast, free. It should be stressed that Cutrì, too, does not advance a properly ontological conception of Tesaurian *argutezza*; rather, he privileges the clear anthropological content underlying the *Cannocchiale*, thereby restoring the work as a coherent whole. For Cutrì, *argutezza* is to be understood as the counterpart of humanity’s creaturely status, of its needy constitution and its voracious desire to know much and to know it easily. The domain of meaning proper to Tesauro’s communicative inventiveness thus becomes the order of the infinite possibilities of our action, the realm of the “per lo più” within which we are called upon to operate, certain only that we do not truly know who we are.<sup>27</sup> What cannot be said, however, even in Cutrì’s case, is that Tesauro’s treatment lacks a self-conscious philosophical interest. For the *Cannocchiale* not only participates in the imaginary of modern science – the title of the work becomes witty only if one assumes that

<sup>21</sup> Ivi, p. 113.

<sup>22</sup> Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. Cutrì, cit., vol. II, p. 28.

<sup>23</sup> Ivi, p. 36.

<sup>24</sup> G. Mazzocchi, ‘El Góngora de Gracián (con Tesauro al fondo)’, in: *Bulletin Hispanique*, 117, 1 (2015), pp. 159-170, p. 165, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/bulletinhispanique.3798>.

<sup>25</sup> Ivi, p. 168.

<sup>26</sup> Ivi, pp. 168-169.

<sup>27</sup> “Il punto centrale è l’essere umano, che per natura possiede la facoltà dell’ingegno (comune anche a Dio e alle sue manifestazioni del Creato) ma che possiede anche un «cuore inquieto» (sant’Agostino [Conf. I I I: «inquietum est cor nostrum»]), che impedisce una rigida categorizzazione del pensiero e di quelli che nel mondo antico venivano definiti ‘moti dell’anima’”. Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. Cutrì, cit., vol. I, p. XIX.

Tesauro was aware of the epistemological perspective according to which the Galilean telescope and the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic paradigm prove incompatible – but is also in constant dialogue, at times polemical, with Aristotle and with the logical, ontological, practical, and gnoseological apparatus that Tesauro draws from the Aristotelian corpus. One need only think of the exposition of the “cagioni”<sup>28</sup> of *argutezza*, organised according to the five Aristotelian causes; or of Tesauro’s very conception of metaphor, which looks to Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* III.10–11 and *Poetics* 1457b 8–9;<sup>29</sup> or again of his classification of metaphorical species, which for Tesauro arises from considerations of a gnoseological nature,<sup>30</sup> just as the hierarchical arrangement of the witty figures retraces a cognitive progression corresponding to Aristotle’s *Organon* (from apprehension [metaphor], through judgement [allegory], to syllogism [*argutezza* or the metaphorical enthymeme]).<sup>31</sup> If, then, it is altogether problematic to reduce the *Cannocchiale* to a pedagogy of persuasion, Mazzocchi’s emphasis on the structural and normative coherence of the work undoubtedly finds substantial confirmation in Cutrì’s study.<sup>32</sup>

The Spanish sphere is not the only object of recent studies on the European influence of the *Cannocchiale*. In this respect, Holberton’s 2024 essay<sup>33</sup> offers an interesting comparison between Marvell’s lyric poetry and the poetics of the *Cannocchiale*. The study shows how engagement with Tesauro’s text – Marvell’s possession of the 1654 edition is taken as established – marked a stylistic development within the English poet’s oeuvre, one manifested essentially in two respects. The first is the use of laconicism as a device for dissimulating the author’s political commitment;<sup>34</sup> in this sense, the Marvellian reading presents the *Cannocchiale* as a politicised work, in which *argu-*

<sup>28</sup> Ivi, p. 61.

<sup>29</sup> The treatment of the witty “cagioni” unfolds from the second to the tenth chapter of the *Cannocchiale*.

<sup>30</sup> Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. Cutrì, cit., vol. I, p. 836.

<sup>31</sup> Ivi, pp. 608, 763.

<sup>32</sup> In this respect, one may now also recall M. Cutrì, ‘Postille inedite in difesa del «Cannocchiale aristotelico»’, in: *Testo*, 90, 2 (2025), pp. 27–69, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.19272/202505502002>, on the unpublished marginalia in a copy of Pierre Le Moyne’s *Art des devises*, from which it emerges a reception of the *Cannocchiale* strongly centred on its educational purpose, the clarity of its expository order, and the rigour of the Aristotelian method underpinning its theory of the *imprese*. Although tied above all to the context of anti-French polemic, the document usefully confirms the contemporary perception of the treatise as a work that is not merely repertorial, but systematic and explicitly designed to instruct.

<sup>33</sup> E. Holberton, ‘Metaphors and Telescopes: The Reception of Emanuele Tesauro’s *Il Cannocchiale Aristotelico* in Marvell’s Poetry’, in: *The Review of English Studies*, 75, 322 (2024), pp. 578–594, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/res/hgae042>.

<sup>34</sup> Ivi, pp. 591–594.

*tezza* appears as a socio-political category, productive of community through the deciphering of witty expressions.<sup>35</sup> The second concerns the use of the “*indice categorico*”, the system devised by Tesauro for generating new metaphors by means of Aristotle’s categories.

In his introduction, Cutrì underscores the pre-eminent role of the *indice* in the economy of the *Cannocchiale*, precisely because it represents the intrinsically dynamic character of the work’s *inventio*:<sup>36</sup> Tesauro, in fact, not only supplies innumerable examples, but also provides, through the index, the means by which the inventive basis of the *Cannocchiale* becomes capable of feeding itself almost indefinitely. Holberton understands the index as representative of a tendency within Marvell’s poetics that the *Cannocchiale* helps both to confirm and to intensify further.<sup>37</sup> In particular, the idea of the index is treated not merely as a generative mechanism of metaphor, but, more interestingly still, as an instrument for reworking the poetic tradition and the by then standardised images that characterise it. Holberton thus sees in the propensity to reinterpret the classical *loci* of poetry a distinctly Marvellian taste that finds in the *Cannocchiale* its fullest formulation. A further connection advanced by Holberton is that of the intersections between Marvell, Tesauro, and the influence exerted by modern science – and especially by the optical instruments it devised – upon the poetics of the seventeenth century. This is a point of considerable significance, and one that opens onto a broader critical reflection.<sup>38</sup>

Cutrì’s introduction makes explicit mention of Galileo Galilei only with reference to the conceptual overlap between the regressive method and the experimental method developed by Galileo.<sup>39</sup> By methodological regression, Cutrì means that cognitive procedure derived from the Peripatetic tradition and systematised within the Paduan school, based on the conjunction of induction and deduction. For Cutrì, this methodological principle would inspire the *inventio* and *dispositio* of the *Cannocchiale* as a whole: through the collection of particular cases bearing witness to the idea of *argutezza*, and then through a deductive descent from that idea, which is assumed as

<sup>35</sup> “Ogni istanza estetica in quanto istanza di ordine, in ultima analisi significa bisogno di accordo e di pace, di conciliazione delle facoltà dell’uomo e dell’uomo con il suo ambiente. Isolata, diviene estetistica e il suo autocompiacimento corrisponde all’autocompiacenza vanitosa di un ordine sociale. [...] Esteticità ed estetismo barocchi significano bisogno e vanità di distinzione che sono propri di una società portata a codificare culturalmente un privilegio di classe, il distacco dell’uomo raffinato dall’uomo naturale, plebeo”. G. Morpurgo-Tagliabue, ‘Aristotelismo e barocco’, in: E. Castelli (ed.), *Retorica e barocco. Atti del III Congresso internazionale di studi umanistici (Venezia, 15-18 giugno 1954)*, Roma, Bocca, 1955, p. 148.

<sup>36</sup> Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. Cutrì, cit., vol. I, pp. XXXI-XXXII.

<sup>37</sup> Holberton, ‘Metaphors and Telescopes’, cit., p. 587.

<sup>38</sup> Against this same background of problems, though from the more specifically rhetorical-visual side, one should at least recall A. Benassi, ‘«La eloquenza in iscorcio». Retorica visiva in Tesauro’, in: *Testo*, 58 (2009), pp. 9-20, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1400/121950>, which insists on the relationship between vision, perspective, and the figural construction of eloquence, showing how the optical metaphors of the *Cannocchiale* are not exhausted by a merely scientific suggestion, but directly engage the regime of decorum and the rhetorical disposition of images.

<sup>39</sup> Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. Cutrì, cit., vol. I, pp. XVIII-XIX.

the critical instrument of the multiplicity that originally occasioned the concept. According to Bisi's fruitful image, which Cutrì takes up, the *Cannocchiale* thus emerges as a genuine *mise en abyme* of *argutezza*, insofar as the expository order of witty matter is itself the very act of its production.<sup>40</sup> Yet by recognising in the method of *argutezza* a peculiar instance of regression, Cutrì rediscovers within it the very "funzionamento del 'cannocchiale aristotelico'",<sup>41</sup> that chimerical synthesis – which gives the treatise its title – between Peripatetic rhetoric (intensely mediated through Tesauro's reception of it) and Galileo's telescope. In this way, Cutrì situates himself within a broad critical horizon according to which the capacity of optical instruments to transfigure the ordinary, rendering visible details otherwise inaccessible, may be ascribed to the expressiveness of witty eloquence, which "di non-Ente fa Ente",<sup>42</sup> and thus produces wonder and astonishment through the bold recomposition even of the most colloquial meanings of experience.<sup>43</sup>

On this very threshold Joachim Harst's study<sup>44</sup> should also be placed. Harst interprets Tesauro's *Cannocchiale* as an original engagement with the epistemological questions opened up by Galilean science, and in contrast with them. The telescope, as an instrument for exploring the universe, is refunctionalised by Tesauro within an eminently rhetorical dispositif, becoming the model for an elocutionary practice devoted to the potentially indefinite production of metaphorical connections among the appearances of the world. In this sense, the optical machine ceases primarily to refer to the idea of a stable and intelligible structure of the cosmos, and instead resolves itself into a combinatory principle that suspends or reorganises the traditional hierarchies of Peripatetic cosmology. Particularly suggestive in Harst is the anthropological and soteriological consequence of this reading: wit, assimilated to the operation of the telescope itself, becomes the correlate of a human condition marked by the Fall, in which communication is constituted as pleasure and invention, but at the cost of a truth that never wholly exceeds the regime of surface.

As noted above, Holberton's contribution points to cultural tendencies of reciprocal reflection between science and literature, not only within Italy but beyond the Alps as well. In Marvell's poem *The Last Instructions to a Painter*, "several times [Marvell] liken this kind of penetrative optical ingenuity – building conceits around a microscope as well as a telescope – to the ability of satire to see beyond conventional

<sup>40</sup> M. Bisi, '«Mise-en-abîme» del dramma e abisso del linguaggio: l'allegoria tra ontologia e morale nelle tragedie di Emanuele Tesauro', in: E. Selmi & E. Zucchi (eds.), *Allegoria e teatro tra Cinque e Settecento: da principio compositivo a strumento esegetico*, Bologna, Emil di Odoya, 2016, pp. 209–225.

<sup>41</sup> Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. Cutrì, cit., vol. I, p. XVIII.

<sup>42</sup> *Ivi*, p. 250.

<sup>43</sup> For a survey of the scientific sources of the *Cannocchiale*, see M. Cutrì, 'Indagine sull'uso delle fonti scientifiche nel «Cannocchiale aristotelico»', in: A. Casadei, F. Fedi, A. Nacinovich & A. Torre (eds.), *Letteratura e Scienze. Atti del XXIII Congresso dell'ADI (Associazione degli Italianisti)*, Pisa, 12–14 settembre 2019, Roma, Adi editore, 2021, pp. 1–11.

<sup>44</sup> J. Harst, 'Metaphorische Teleskopie. Rhetorik, Logik und Optik bei Emanuele Tesauro', in: *Romanische Forschungen*, 135, 2 (2023), pp. 165–188, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3196/003581223837059239>.

idealizations of authority”.<sup>45</sup> Snyder offers a more articulated account of the structural synergies between the rhetoric of the *Cannocchiale* and modern science.<sup>46</sup> The image of the telescope directed towards the sun, so as to observe its spots under the supervision of Aristotle, would testify to the insufficiency of the categorical apparatus of the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic tradition, unless that apparatus is integrated into the image of the world delineated by the new technical-scientific instruments. We must therefore bear in mind that the images thematised by the tradition are to be treated in the light of the artificial nature assigned to them by scientific-mathematical thought. Snyder’s further contribution<sup>47</sup> remains within this line of enquiry, thematising the significance of the “macchia” not merely as a particular topos of Tesauro’s *Cannocchiale*, but as an emblematic expression of Baroque aesthetic sensibility. In the seventeenth century, the *macchia* comes to evoke the power of art to dominate the contingency of phenomena – that is, to render artificially appreciable those aspects of reality which, by virtue of their formal ambiguity and indeterminacy, would otherwise be ascribed to nature rather than to art. In this sense, the sunspots revealed by the telescope represent the desire to aestheticise the image of the world translated by science, and for which artifice guarantees the element of delight.<sup>48</sup>

Bisi’s 2011 study<sup>49</sup> likewise turns to the question of images in the *Cannocchiale*, grasping their significance on the ontological and epistemological plane. Images, understood as phenomena of the world, exhaust the domain upon which Tesauro operates in order artificially to devise his metaphorical audacities. This is made possible through the mediation of modern science, and in particular through the Galilean distinction, set out in the *Saggiatore*, between primary and secondary qualities. The former pertain to the quantitative properties of entities in the world, those that are measurable and reducible to geometrico-mathematical models; the latter are properly relational, that is, grounded in our relation to the world, in the fact that we are sensibly affected by it. Since they concern not the world as it is in itself, but only as it appears, these secondary qualities prove ontologically inconsistent, thereby constituting the material that lends itself plastically to the combinatory force of Tesauro’s metaphor.<sup>50</sup> Bisi therefore suggests that one attend to the ontological and epistemological devices that animate the poetics of the *Cannocchiale* from within.

<sup>45</sup> Holberton, ‘Metaphors and Telescopes’, cit., p. 584.

<sup>46</sup> J.R. Snyder, ‘Art and Truth in Baroque Italy, or the Case of Emanuele Tesauro’s *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*’, in: *MLN*, 131, 1 (2016), pp. 74–96, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/mln.2016.0014>.

<sup>47</sup> J.R. Snyder, ‘Strokes of Wit: Theorizing Beauty in Baroque Italy’, in: P.A. Kottman (ed.), *The Insistence of Art: Aesthetic Philosophy after Early Modernity*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2017, pp. 194–226, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/97808023275823-009>.

<sup>48</sup> “By incorporating its discoveries and instruments into a discourse that is almost entirely focused on the domain of contemporary high culture, Tesauro aims to aestheticize the New Science, thus transforming it into a fundamentally Baroque phenomenon”. Ivi, p. 198.

<sup>49</sup> M. Bisi, *Il velo di Alceste. Metafora, dissimulazione e verità nell’opera di Emanuele Tesauro*, Pisa, Edizioni ETS, 2011, pp. 9–61.

<sup>50</sup> Ivi, pp. 17–30.

Whether or not the truth of the *Cannocchiale* is authentically scientific, the relation between truth and illusion is unquestionably crucial to the work. For Cutrì, the *mise en abyme* into which Tesauro directs us, before being the very form in act of *argutezza*, entails recognising within the *Cannocchiale* the living acquisition of its own contents. The *Cannocchiale* is thus the active progress of its reader within the truth of *argutezza*, a contribution to truth that Cutrì once again articulates in practical-anthropological terms:

L'“eleganza” della figura mira a un “nobile” effetto nel lettore, sia per risvegliare la sua attenzione in un clima da conversazione civile o conviviale, sia per rendere concisi e concreti concetti astratti che richiederebbero altrimenti spiegazioni troppo lunghe e vacue.<sup>51</sup>

The truth of *argutezza* would thus seem to be reduced to the pragmatic conditions of knowledge, to those conditions that guarantee a pleasurable abiding within *theosis*. What follows from this is an instrumental understanding of *argutezza* in relation to truth, not least through the Augustinian reading of figurative speech that Cutrì brings to his argument.<sup>52</sup> One who expresses oneself *argutamente* does not provide an autonomous contribution to truth, but merely serves, by contrast, to underscore the truth that underlies the false.

Lorusso,<sup>53</sup> by contrast, seeks, through a comparison between the Aristotelian lesson and the Tesaurian one, to emphasise – despite their divergences from the example of the Stagirite – the properly cognitive status of Tesauro's metaphor, which is the “gran madre”<sup>54</sup> of *argutezza*. Tesauro's metaphor is a principle both of the analysis and of an unusual synthesis of the real, corresponding respectively to “perspicacia” and “versatilità,” the dispositions that Tesauro identifies as underlying the creation of simple witty figures.<sup>55</sup> In this sense, it constitutes itself as a radical overturning of the ontological structure of reality as Aristotle describes it. Metaphor is therefore not the reflection of a real proportionality among beings – which the figure has the merit of “porre sotto agli occhi”<sup>56</sup> – but is, as Lorusso argues, a “semiotica” action of producing new meanings, thereby nullifying, in relation to metaphorical creation, every residual trace of the Aristotelian concern for verisimilitude.

<sup>51</sup> Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. Cutrì, cit., vol. I, p. XXXIV.

<sup>52</sup> “Perciò queste parole sono coperte come sotto il velo delle figure, perché muovano il pensiero del ricercatore devoto e perché nude ed esposte non inviliscano. [...] Nascoste si desiderano più ardentemente, e le cose più desiderate si scoprono con maggior godimento. Comunque sono dette cose vere, non false: poiché significano cose vere, non false”. Ivi, p. XXXV. For a comparison between the *Cannocchiale* and the Augustinian lesson, see Frare, «Per istraforo di prospettiva», cit., pp. 131-155.

<sup>53</sup> A.M. Lorusso, ‘Tra cannocchiali, lenti, riflessi e specchi: la lezione aristotelica nel *Cannocchiale* del Tesauro’, in: A.M. Lorusso (ed.), *Metafora e conoscenza*, Milano, Bompiani, 2005, pp. 213-234.

<sup>54</sup> Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. Cutrì, cit., vol. I, p. 763.

<sup>55</sup> Ivi, pp. 247-249.

<sup>56</sup> Lorusso, ‘Tra cannocchiali, lenti, riflessi e specchi’, cit., pp. 224-228. One can find this image in *Rhet.*, III, 1405b.

An important contribution by Bisi<sup>57</sup> may also be situated within this line of enquiry, since it confronts head-on the problem of metaphorical knowledge in the *Cannocchiale*. Proceeding from the nexus between the senses, imagination, intellect, and *ingegno*, Bisi shows that Tesauro's metaphor cannot be reduced either to a mere elocutionary ornament or to an adequate reflection of reality. Rather, it produces a distinctive cognitive increment, since, by arranging objects through a "istraforno di prospettiva",<sup>58</sup> it allows them to be perceived within one another according to an instantaneous and imagistic synthesis that expands the possibilities of understanding without thereby resolving itself into the capture of the universal. In Bisi's account, therefore, the truth of *argutezza* does not consist in a peaceful coincidence between word and thing, but in the opening up of new perspectives upon the real, in a transformation of its regime of visibility; hence the only apparently sophistic character of metaphor, which does not oppress the true, but allows it to show through as by a veil, within the very pleasure of *imparamento*.

That *argutezza* defines a form of knowledge *sui generis* is the view advanced by Fiorani,<sup>59</sup> to whom we owe a formidable philological survey of the Aristotelian citations present in the *Cannocchiale*, undertaken in order to identify their reference translations. This contribution also promotes an analysis of Tesauro's concept of *ingegno* through comparison with classical and early modern categorizations; what emerges is that *ingegno*, which is the faculty of *argutezza*, cannot simply be superimposed upon intellect, but appears rather as a "forza", a vital instinct.<sup>60</sup> Fiorani also grasps the importance, in this connection, of comparison with dialectic, in order to show how logical categories become transfigured within rhetoric, though her study does not often move beyond paraphrase of Tesauro's text. Tedesco,<sup>61</sup> by contrast, offers a particularly striking analysis of the relation between logical and rhetorical thought in the *Cannocchiale*. *Argutezza*, which for Tesauro consists in syllogising on the basis of a metaphorical construct, is certainly defined in the *Cannocchiale* as an *entimema*; yet unlike the Aristotelian enthymeme, it is not essentially characterised by being a 'truncated' argument lacking one premise. Tesauro, Tedesco argues, merely "sfiora" the lesson of Aristotle, but the substance of his metaphorical argument lies not in brevity, as it does for Aristotle, but in its fallacious character.<sup>62</sup> Rhetoric thus distinguishes itself from dialectic insofar as it positively inhabits contradiction, thereby anticipating in Tesauro the aesthetic systems of the following century.

<sup>57</sup> M. Bisi, 'Visione e invenzione. La conoscenza per via di metafora nel *Cannocchiale aristotelico* di Emanuele Tesauro', in: *Studi Secenteschi*, XLVII (2006), pp. 57-87.

<sup>58</sup> Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. Cutrì, cit., vol. I, p. 828.

<sup>59</sup> M. Fiorani, 'Aristotelismo e innovazione barocca nel concetto di ingegno del *Cannocchiale aristotelico* di Tesauro', in: *Studi Secenteschi*, XLVI (2005), pp. 91-129.

<sup>60</sup> Ivi, p. 107.

<sup>61</sup> S. Tedesco, 'Tesauro: teoria della conoscenza tramite paralogismo', in: idem, *Le Sirene del Barocco: il nuovo spazio dell'estetico nel dibattito barocco italiano su dialettica e retorica*, Palermo, Centro internazionale di studi di estetica, 2003, pp. 33-70.

<sup>62</sup> Ivi, p. 61.

Our recent contribution<sup>63</sup> sought to problematise further the relationship between rhetoric and dialectic in Tesauro's treatise. More specifically, it showed how the fallacious character of the *entimema urbano* can indeed be organised through Aristotle's paralogical *loci*, but only as the mechanical result of constructing the syllogism upon metaphor. The enthymeme rediscovers in metaphor its own paralogical matrix: it is the product of a spontaneous, instinctive discourse that does not consciously deploy the logical technicalities through which it intervenes upon the new meanings generated by metaphor. This also explains the distance between rhetoric and dialectic. Unlike Tedesco, we argue that the contrast between rhetoric and dialectic cannot be reduced simply to that between falsehood and truth, but must be referred to the differing psychological disposition of the one who makes use of them. The rhetorician knows that he is instrumentalising meanings in order to please; the dialectician believes that he is merely stating the truth of things, yet fails to recognise that this truth is itself an instrument of his will to self-assertion in dispute.

A further element within this constellation is supplied by Benassi's 2006 contribution,<sup>64</sup> which brings attention back to a point often neglected in the theoretical construction of the *Cannocchiale*: namely, the general definition of rhetorical figures and their division into harmonic, pathetic, and witty ones. Benassi shows, in fact, how Tesauro grafts the *officia oratoris* onto a psychological framework of Aristotelian derivation, so that distinct and hierarchically ordered expressive forms correspond to the faculties of the soul. Hence, on the one hand, the subordinate status of the harmonic figures, confined to the domain of sensible proportion; and, on the other, the primacy of the witty figures, in which Tesauro's theory of elocution finds its true centre. What follows is a reading of the *Cannocchiale* as a rhetoric essentially concentrated on elocution, or, more precisely, as a device designed to distinguish, within the general field of figurative speech, the eminent place of *argutezza* as the expression of the highest operation of the intellect.

Katinis's 2024 study<sup>65</sup> has recognised the fruitful nexus between the *Cannocchiale* and sophistry. Arnaudo's 2009 contribution<sup>66</sup> had already shown how the image of *argutezza* as the prestidigitation of a juggler was connected to the repertoire through which classical thought had defined sophistic discourse. Katinis's analysis not only places Tesauro's treatment in clear continuity with the sixteenth-century debate concerning the epistemological status of poetic and rhetorical contents, paying particular

<sup>63</sup> A. Lombardo & T. Katinis, 'Retorica e dialettica nel *Cannocchiale aristotelico* (1670) di Emanuele Tesauro. Una prima indagine', in: *Fabrica Litterarum Polono-Italica*, 11 (2026), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31261/FLPI.2026.11.16>.

<sup>64</sup> A. Benassi, 'Lo scherzevole inganno: figure ingegnose e argutezza nel *Cannocchiale aristotelico* di Emanuele Tesauro', in: *Studi Secenteschi*, XLVII (2006), pp. 9-55, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1400/177426>.

<sup>65</sup> T. Katinis, 'The Ancient Greek Sophists in Emanuele Tesauro's *Il cannocchiale aristotelico* (1670): Thrasymachus and Gorgias', in: *Humanities*, 13, 1 (2024), art. 33, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/h13010033>.

<sup>66</sup> M. Arnaudo, 'Sul significato del giocoliere nel *Cannocchiale aristotelico* di Emanuele Tesauro', in: *Studi Secenteschi*, L (2009), pp. 3-14.

attention to the case of Speroni, but also identifies the apologetic force with which Tesauro treats sophistry as encouraging a positive reassessment internal to the elocutionary sensibility of the *Cannocchiale*. More specifically, it shows how Tesauro recognises in the first sophistic movement, and especially in Gorgias and Thrasyarchus, the origin of the summit of Latin rhetoric, namely Cicero. In continuity with the spirit of the work, the root of such a relationship – that is, the praise of the sophists – is reinvented as already present within Aristotle's *Rhetoric*.

As has already been suggested, one of the most appreciable features of Cutrì's interpretative contribution is his attention to Tesauro's style in the *Cannocchiale*. On the one hand, this invites a disinterested engagement with the work, since it is first and foremost a work of exquisite literature; on the other, it recognises in Tesauro's writing not a mere ornament, but rather the vivid enactment of its own contents. This is an aspect that Cutrì emphasises under the influence of Padula, who had already, in the nineteenth century, identified the "forma drammatica" of Tesauro's thought, that style which, by exciting sense, affect, and mind, proves capable of addressing the human being in his totality.<sup>67</sup> The very device of the triangulation between Aristotle, Tesauro, and the reader – *personae* whom the *Cannocchiale* evokes so that, as if upon a theatrical stage, they may actively disclose the secret of *argutezza* – continues this radical impulse of thought to correspond to itself in image, that tendency running throughout the work to complicate subject and object of narration, theory and praxis, thought and action.

Zanlonghi's 2002 study<sup>68</sup> takes up the intrinsic performativity of Tesauro's treatment, departing from the customary perspective from which it has traditionally been approached – namely, the psychological-cognitive one – and privileging instead its ethical-practical value. Zanlonghi thus attends to Tesauro's ordering of forms of knowledge, to the primacy that morality holds over speculation – a point that Tedesco's contribution also has the merit of bringing out – and to the way in which this primacy destines *argutezza* and *civile conversazione* to the self-exploration of consciences, to their own emotional self-awareness.<sup>69</sup>

Merola's 2007 study,<sup>70</sup> within a broader survey of Tesauro's *Filosofia morale*, likewise thematises the relationship between ethics and rhetoric in the *Cannocchiale*, discerning in the discrepancy between truth and appearance the same distance that separates moral judgement, which comments upon action from without, from inner disposition, which contemplates the goodness or otherwise of action through the authenticity of its motives. Yet the distinctive interest of Zanlonghi's study, beyond its

<sup>67</sup> Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, ed. Cutrì, cit., vol. I, pp. XXXII-XXXIV. For Padula, see Cutrì, *Leggere il «libro aperto»*, cit., pp. 124-135.

<sup>68</sup> G. Zanlonghi, *Teatri di formazione. Actio, parola e immagine nella scena gesuitica del Sei-Settecento a Milano*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 2002.

<sup>69</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 17-54.

<sup>70</sup> V. Merola, *La messinscena delle idee. Emanuele Tesauro e il «Teatro di meraviglie»*, Manziana, Vecchiarelli, 2007, pp. 161-213.

more assured command of the theoretical relations between the *Filosofia* and the *Cannocchiale*, lies in the emphasis it places upon the emotional matrix of Tesauro's image-thinking. For Zanolonghi, the "macchine" devised by Tesauro for the obsequies of Philip III in Milan – that congeries of allegories and epigrams which introduced the faithful to the monarch's bier – represents the practical transcription of the ecstatic wonder of *argutezza*. Those images are not simply pleasurable because they ingeniously translate a thought; rather, they express the thoroughly human need to give form to the congeries of movements of the soul.

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Through this brief critical itinerary, which seeks to acknowledge Cutri's labour in having finally secured the cultural significance of the *Cannocchiale aristotelico* by restoring it in a modern critical edition, we have attempted, however summarily, to convey the richness of the interpretative perspectives that Tesauro's work has recently stimulated. If great art, following Lessing's lesson, possesses the privilege of an inexhaustible approximation to its meaning, so that it may be regarded almost as an effigy of the historical process itself, then in the case of the *Cannocchiale* this openness to interpretation becomes programmatic. The performative character of the work thus appears in its most radical form, precisely because it is conceived essentially with a view to its reception.

Stimulated both by the dignity and density of the treatise and by its explicit exhortations, we may therefore conclude by briefly suggesting a number of possible lines of enquiry.<sup>71</sup> First of all, it is necessary to 'liberate' the *Cannocchiale* from the culture of the 'Baroque', ideally by taking our cue from the regressive method that Tesauro himself sets out. The 'Baroque' is certainly a fruitful concept, grounded in a broad body of cases and the subject of studies of the highest importance; yet it is imperative that the *Cannocchiale* itself become a critical instrument for that historical-hermeneutic superstructure, precisely because Tesauro is not a passive executor of the 'Baroque', but one of its protagonists. In this sense, Tesauro's attention to the domain of poetic and elocutionary illusions is not simply the product of his time, but rather the result of a distinctive interaction between Tesauro and the early modern tradition that established its presuppositions. The *Cannocchiale* was moreover published at a moment when conceptism had already entered a phase of decline, and it explicitly presents itself as its *apologia*; it therefore manifests a retroactive tendency that has not yet been sufficiently investigated, and which would seem to define its novelty in reactionary rather than progressive terms. Another possible line of enquiry is the one mentioned above, concerning the eminently practical dignity of the *Cannocchiale*. What is urgently required in this respect is a fully comprehensive understanding of the *Filosofia morale*, published in 1670, since it is there that "civile conversazione", the field in

<sup>71</sup> In the same direction, see also M. Maggi, '«Il Cannocchiale aristotelico»: bilanci e prospettive', in: *Testo*, 90, 2 (2025), pp. 75-78, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.19272/202505502004>.

which the *argutezze* operate, is systematised. The radical hedonism through which Tesauro and his teaching are often approached must take the *Filosofia morale* into account if *argutezza* is to be understood not as a merely intellectual amusement, but as grounded in *pathos*.