

*Against youthful errors:
Literary palinodes and recantations
of the learned as academic self-criticism*

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1. The concept of the palinode

The word palinode is usually thought to stem from the Greek words *palin* and *ôdê*, meaning again and song. A palinode is a song or discourse recanting a previous one, a recantation. In ancient times the palinode was often understood as an apology written in poetic language, but in the early modern period the term was also used of apologetic prose narratives. In recantations, the author apologises for his former statement, sometimes simply saying «I am sorry that I wrote it». The first utterance may have included some kind of an insult, which is the reason for the speaker to apologise and retract the former statement. A palinode signals a formal public abandoning of a former belief, either taking place under compulsion to avoid punishment or being presented voluntarily (*suapte motu, spontanea voluntate*) as a true change of mind. Palinodes rely on the truth-value of two competing narratives, since a palinode typically denies the truth of the earlier version and negates its narrative or returns to the path of truth¹. However, a palinode does not necessarily imply any iconoclastic gestures, as it can also be a conservative statement that brings the story to a conventional resolution.

A palinode is a narrative of change and a form of refusal, since a person who has expressed some specific view in his earlier poem or other writing, now denies that view as being wrong. Someone presenting a palinode critically changes his or her views about the old world and its

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¹ J. Olearius, J. Schmid, *De palinodia eruditorum*, Leipzig 1697, § 7: «utrum [...] a veritatis tramite abeant, sive cum rei veritate convenient».

values by denying his or her previous views or sentiments. The change of mind is personal, but it can also signal more comprehensive and critical changes related to differing worldviews and traditions. There is a double perspective in the genre with a timely distance between the two stories. Another important feature of the palinode is that it expresses a public confession of wrongdoing and thus means a public communication of guilt and regret. In her studies on ancient poetry, Karen Bassi defines palinode succinctly as «a mode of self-conscious textual antagonism in which one text affirms its own authority or validity by contrastively representing the inadequacy, untruthfulness or insufficiency of another»². As Bassi notes, such recantations construct and destroy the earlier tradition at the same time.

2. *Early history from Stesichorus onwards*

The earliest recorded literary palinode is usually attributed to Stesichorus of Himera (630-553 BC), who was blinded by the gods after having composed a poem called 'Helen'. The poem contained unflattering details of Helen and proposed that the Trojan war was caused by her. Stesichorus famously regained his sight after the composition of another poem transmitted as fragmentary and usually known as 'The palinode' in which he claimed that what he had previously written was 'not a true story' and Helen did *not* embark in the broad-benched ships and she did *not* reach the citadel of Troy³. After having created his palinode and having purged himself by composing it, Stesichorus recovered his sight immediately. Stesichorus' palinode is not only the earliest recorded example of this genre, but it is also remarkable for the reason that it is an early example of a certain textual self-consciousness; the author shows an awareness of his audience, textual self-criticism and textual authority⁴.

Stesichorus' palinode was well recognised already in antiquity. Isocrates referred to it in his *Helen* (64), Pausanias told one version

² K. Bassi, *Helen and the Discourse of Denial in Stesichorus' Palinode*, in "Arethusa", 26, 1, 1993, pp. 51-75, quotation on p. 51; also quoted in A. J. Beecroft, "This is Not a True Story": Stesichorus's Palinode and the Revenge of the Epic, in "Transactions of the American Philological Association", 136, 2006, pp. 47-69: 66.

³ A. Beecroft, *Authorship and Cultural Identity in Early Greece and China*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2010, p. 144.

⁴ A. Obermeier, *The History and Anatomy of Auctorial Self-criticism in the European Middle Ages*, Rodopi, Amsterdam 1999, p. 25. See also Beecroft, *Authorship and Cultural Identity*, cit.

of Stesichorus' story in his *Description of Greece* (3.19.11-20.1), and Socrates invoked Stesichorus' palinode in his great second speech in Plato's *Phaedrus* (243a-b), in which he preaches against love and realises that by doing so he may have offended the god Eros. Socrates comes to the same conclusion as many later Christian writers after him that he may have been "buying honour from men at the price of sinning against the gods". Now he realises his error and transgression from a divine sign, as he says, and in this context Socrates brings up Stesichorus, saying that there is an ancient purification and he must make his recantation and revile love before he suffers. So while Stesichorus penned his palinode only after his punishment (the loss of sight) and the new poem expressed his repentance, Socrates claims to be wiser and uses recantation as a tool to avoid punishment altogether before it is inflicted upon him⁵. Palinodes were later often presented in such turning points where the author realised that he had only been looking for worldly honour and had been sinning against gods. Stesichorus was the most famous representative of this genre in ancient Greece, but palinodes reappeared in Greek poetry after him, for example, in Euripides' tragedies⁶.

In Rome, Horace wrote several palinodes in an ironic mode. For example, in his 'Epode 17', usually entitled 'A recantation', he begs on bended knee that Canidia leaves off her supernatural spells on the poet and delivers him from madness⁷. The poem includes the

⁵ See Obermeier, *The History and Anatomy of Auctorial Self-criticism in the European Middle Ages*, cit., p. 26.

⁶ It has been argued that in Euripides' *Medea* (410-20) the chorus of Corinthian women exemplified the self-conscious poetics of palinode by singing how «backward to their sources flow the streams of holy rivers, and the order of all things is reversed [...] The common talk will so alter that women's ways will enjoy good repute. Honor is coming to the female sex: no more will women be maligned by slanderous rumor» (trans. David Kovacs). Here women are blaming men in song and turning the traditional misogyny of poetic discourse around. As Nicholas Rynearson has claimed, the backward-running waters refer to a substitution of one song for another and a reversal of the movement of the song, a song in reverse. See N. Rynearson, *Creusa's Palinode: Gender, Genealogy and Intertextuality in the Ion*, in "Arethusa", 47, 1, 2014, pp. 39-69; quotation on p. 57. For the river as a metaphor of poetics, see, for example, Hor. *Carm.*, 4.2.1-12; E. Manolaraki, *Noscendi Nilum cupido: The Nile Digression in Book 10*, Brill, Leiden 2011, esp. 177ff; and C. McNelis, *Statius' Thebaid and the Poetics of Civil War*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007, esp. pp. 79, 113.

⁷ On Horace's 'Epode 17', see Obermeier, *The History and Anatomy of Auctorial Self-criticism in the European Middle Ages*, cit., pp. 30-3. Lucian's *Apology* for the "Salaried Posts in Great Houses" is another satirical palinode worth mentioning here; I thank an anonymous referee for this reminder.

gesture of kneeling; the kneeling pose was part of the language of ancient palinodes from the very beginning. Later in the Christian era kneeling was a gesture that expressed that a person steeped in prayer asks for forgiveness and acceptance to his changed life, and on his knees tries to reconcile his former secular life with his religious life and presents his life work to his God⁸. As Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger explains, genuflection was «a symbolic gesture of self-abasement» which demanded a specific reaction and appeared «generally with the intention of obtaining mercy – in the act of penance before the God, in the act of submission, *deditio*, before a temporal ruler»⁹. Kneeling can be a secular pose (kneeling before the king) or a religious pose (before the God). Kneeling was also a public performance, just like palinode is a public statement and not a silent one. When the person is seen kneeling before God or the king, he demands from the ruler that he acts mercifully and absolves the penitent from sin. The same expectation of mercy and forgiveness from sins and acceptance of one's life's work appears in religious and secular contexts in literary palinodes¹⁰.

In antiquity, palinodes thus appeared in contexts in which someone had offended against the gods. Although Stesichorus' and Horace's palinodes were ironical, the inherent power of palinodes to save and change lives was often taken seriously in later times. What is also noteworthy here is that palinodes give a considerable power to words, since even if they cannot perhaps change the past, they are capable of purifying the offender's reputation and returning him to his former position, thereby enhancing the performative power of literary statements.

3. *Motivation: from a true conversion to rhetorical devices*

Palinodes were studied in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century academic writings, when in order to encourage men to give up their wrong views several university scholars examined in their dissertations the palinodes and recantations of the learned, in which the author

⁸ S. Sobecki, *Lydgate's Kneeling Retraction*, in "The Chaucer Review", 49, 3, 2015, p. 268.

⁹ B. Stollberg-Rilinger, *Kneeling before God – Kneeling Before the Emperor: The Transformation of a Ritual during the Confessional Conflict in Germany*, in *Resonances: Historical Essays on Continuity and Change*, Brepols, Turnhout 2011, pp. 149-72. Also quoted in Sobecki, *Lydgate's Kneeling Retraction*, cit., p. 288.

¹⁰ Sobecki, *Lydgate's Kneeling Retraction*, cit., pp. 288-9; Stollberg-Rilinger, *Kneeling before God*, cit.

counter-balanced his earlier philosophical or religious statements and corrected his previous errors. In such cases, palinodes expressed the author's admission of his transgression against the truth, religious doctrines or social codes. Truth and truth-telling play an important role in this genre. As the story goes, Stesichorus was blinded because he sinned against the divine truth, and, as it sometimes happened, untruthful poets were punished by the gods through blinding¹¹.

Biographies of the eccentric learned were fashionable at the turn of the eighteenth century, and therefore German academics studying the genre of palinodes were also interested in historical *exempla*. In his dissertation *De palinodia eruditorum*, Johann Olearius mentioned several historical figures, mainly theologians, who had retracted their previous views as being wrong¹². Augustine was the most famous name on the list, since the genre of reconsiderations originated in his *Retractationes*, which he wrote at the end of his life. In his *Confessiones*, Augustine already repudiated his former literary sins, but in *Retractationes* his emphasis was on textual revisions. He aimed to correct all of his former works there and all those passages that he felt to be somehow dissatisfactory or offensive. He insisted on correcting his errors publicly in front of an audience, thereby endeavouring to rewrite both his works and himself. Augustine's humility was thought to become visible in his literary confessions and retractions, where he attributed nothing of his achievements to his own industry. Modern critics have proposed that Augustine's retractions should be understood as revisions, modifications and retreatments that give a second attention to his earlier texts, rather than considering them as palinodes that express a complete rejection of the former views¹³. Augustine claimed that some of his works were too obscure or complicated to be beneficial to the audience and he criticised himself for the use of pagan terms in his early works. Yet, as he did not reject his works as useless or harmful to future generations, he did not advise his audience not to read them¹⁴.

¹¹ Obermeier, *The History and Anatomy of Auctorial Self-criticism in the European Middle Ages*, cit., p. 27.

¹² In addition to Olearius's work, see also J. Neumann, *Ex historia literaria de retractationibus eruditorum*, Wittenberg 1685, and in Sweden, see M. Asp and N. Hackzell, *Dissertatio gradualis de retractatione eruditorum*, Uppsala 1734.

¹³ Obermeier, *The History and Anatomy of Auctorial Self-criticism in the European Middle Ages*, cit., pp. 53, 265.

¹⁴ Olearius, cit., § 14.

Writers of palinodes usually offered a narrative account or at least an explanation for how they came to do wrong in the past. They could explain their former views by appealing to ignorance or human fallibility. The opposition between youth and maturity was a frequently used formula of rejection in this context¹⁵. Jerome, Augustine and others complained their misspent years and errors committed in their curious youth, and regretted that their previous works had given pleasure to readers but not much else. Olearius quotes Jerome's *In Abdiam Praefatio*, in which he claims that in his youth he had talked and thought like a child, until he became a man and abandoned childish reasoning («Cum essem parvulus, ut parvulus loquebar, ut parvulus sapiebam, ut parvulus cogitabam, postquam factus sum vir, quae parvuli erant, deposui»)¹⁶. One should note that the reference to Jerome's youth also underlines the smallness of his error (*parvulus*). Porphyry was said of having changed some of his views when he was extremely old, and some poets and scholars, such as the French seventeenth-century classicist Claudius Salmasius, were recollected as having destroyed their early works as immature or harmful¹⁷. A youthful person had less credit than a mature adult in the narrative of palinodes, and authors introduced the topos of literary sins in conjunction with youthful mistakes, since youth was thought to be driven by heart's passions¹⁸. Thus, authors of palinodes polarised their careers as a movement from erroneous youthful assumptions to wisdom gained with age, and the final disposition counted for more than the previous misspent life, although it was often admitted that young hearts deserve forgiveness.

Michael Lilienthal, a seventeenth-century Lutheran divine from Pietistic Königsberg, suggested in his studies on scholarly vices that some intellectuals attacked their own writings, if their work went unnoticed, simply to increase their visibility¹⁹. Quoting Seneca's *De*

¹⁵ Since my paper is mainly concerned with the idea of the palinode, a discussion dedicated to the linguistic formulas of rejection and retraction must be left for another occasion.

¹⁶ Olearius, cit., § 13. On youthful errors in palinodes, see also Sobecki, *Lydgate's Kneeling Retraction*, cit., p. 291.

¹⁷ Neumann, *Ex historia literaria de retractationibus eruditorum*, cit., §§ xx, xxiii.

¹⁸ Cf. Obermeier, *The History and Anatomy of Auctorial Self-criticism in the European Middle Ages*, cit., pp. 32-3 on Horace's erotic palinode, 'Ode 1.16'.

¹⁹ M. Lilienthal, *De Machiavellismo literario, sive de perversis quorundam in Republica Literaria inclarescendi artibus dissertatio historico-moralis*, Königsberg, Leipzig 1713.

beneficiis (4.38), in which the philosopher observed that true stupidity resided in the refusal to withdraw previously uttered words, Lilienthal stressed that it was a sign of wisdom to avoid the vice of obstinacy (*pertinacia*) and to correct one's wrong views if the motivation behind these retractions was truth²⁰. But sometimes men did not retract their arguments even if they had clearly made a mistake. This stubbornness was explained by men's fear of losing their reputations and their wish to be seen as gods, not humans («Superbissimi hi hoc agunt, ut videri Dii, non homines, velint»)²¹. Lilienthal maintained that it was better to acknowledge mistakes than to deny them or invent excuses, as to err is human, but it was indefensible to refuse to correct errors once they were realised.

Lilienthal's understanding of literary palinodes reminds one of a repentance and confession of sin, in which a man humbly acknowledges his mistakes and turns away from them. But palinodes were sometimes mere rhetorical exercises and rehabilitating gestures, rather than genuine rejections of former opinions or careers. It is not always easy to judge whether a palinode expresses a sincere moral or religious conversion on the part of the author, or whether it is merely a rhetorical statement. Satirical authors knew that palinodes could also be used as narrative devices that disclaim responsibility while anticipating counterattacks and placating offended readers. For example, in Robert Burton's satirical *Anatomy of melancholy* the author has recourse to palinodes, in which he loudly rejects what seems he had previously passionately held as his firm conviction²². He begs for forgiveness from his audience in advance to pacify his potentially critical readers by repeating that he has spoken foolishly and having suddenly awakened he recants his words. As David Renaker has noted, Burton's book

²⁰ Lilienthal, *De Machiavellismo literario*, cit., § 14.

²¹ *Ibid.* The phenomenon of obstinacy was also known as "Pilatismus", a term based on the biblical account of Christ's crucifixion. When Jewish priests asked Pilate to change the text in a plaque he had ordered to be fastened to the cross, Pilate refused, replying that what he had written, he had written (John 19:22). "Pilatismus" of the learned men was discussed in the dissertation entitled *Disputatio logica de Pilatismo literario* by Christoph August Heumann and Johann Christian Theophilus Metius (Göttingen, 1730). Their definition of Pilatismus was the following (II): «... pervicaciae illi, quo magna pars doctorum hominum *sententias amat suas, non quia verae sunt, sed quia suae sunt*, nomen indo *Pilatismi*». The quotation embedded in the sentence was from Augustine.

²² On Burton's palinodes, see D. Renaker, *Robert Burton's Palinodes*, in "Studies in Philology", 76, 2, 1979, pp. 162-81.

consists of frequent palinodes in which he recants almost everything he has said, for example, that women find celibacy unendurable, suicide is permissible or that drunkenness is a good antidote to melancholy²³. Burton uses palinodes as protective devices, in the sense of saying that «I did not really mean what I said», but this happens less sincerely than if someone honestly asks for forgiveness. Begging for forgiveness and recantation are literary devices used to turn down possible accusations against the author who discusses controversial and sensitive religious issues, such as predestination, in his book.

Sometimes palinodes imply a form of textual criticism rather than a deeper reversal of attitudes. Early modern authors mentioned impatience as a reason for hurried publications with many typos and other mistakes; these publications were then later corrected or completely denied by their authors. Sometimes texts that were produced for private use only became public against the author's will, and had to be later withdrawn by the author²⁴. Textual emendations could of course also be made by later editors, who tried to identify the authorial textual form and for that purpose could modify the canonical text by omitting presumably erroneous statements or by adding something to the text. Palinodes remind us that in the case of religious or other authorities the reconstruction of the canonical text was crucially important. Textual critics could reject incoherence by emending texts and making their narratives more coherent and less contradictory. The canonical text was not allowed to contain signs of inconsistency, since passages that were somehow suspect were easily interpreted as being spurious and deleted from the edition. Retractions and palinodes were thus keenly connected with the issue of textual (or other) authority. Cicero already mentioned in his orations against Verres (2.1.158) that many men of high standing had learned precautions for their own safety and textual self-criticism was among these measures: «In this way has that fellow learnt to take care of himself and of his own safety, by entering both in his own private registers and in the public documents what had never happened; by effacing all mention of what had; and by continually taking away something, changing something (taking care that no erasure was visible), interpolating something»²⁵.

²³ Renaker, *Robert Burton's Palinodes*, cit., p. 181, argues that Burton's book includes 18 palinodes.

²⁴ Neumann, *Ex historia literaria de retractationibus eruditorum*, cit., §§ XVI, XXII.

²⁵ Trans. C. D. Yonge.

In case of canonical figures and religious authorities, such as the Church Fathers, it was also important to show that the person had held the same views throughout his life or at least at the end of it²⁶. *Constantia* was considered a personal virtue and men were expected to remain similar and stable throughout their lives or otherwise their thinking was considered unreliable²⁷. When editors were working on authoritative texts, they were at pains to consider which views were actually supported as true by the author. It was also sometimes difficult to know whether the author had written his works in youth or maturity²⁸.

4. Early modern examples

Authors dissociated themselves from suspect works and defended themselves against accusations of false views and doctrines by writing palinodes. Works that were thought to include heretical ideas or were not sufficiently reverent to God were suspect and often recalled by their authors. In the early modern period, stories were told of men who denied their earlier secular careers and demonstrated this change of mind in their retractions by displacing their former secular views by religious feelings. Or they might replace their earlier adherence to Catholicism by Protestant faith, or vice versa. Palinodes were composed in order to declare true faith and to claim that the author was no longer to be held accountable for his former dissident views, since he had acknowledged his errors. Often these discussions were related to controversies in the early Church, when men made confessions in order to reintegrate themselves into their religious communities, or return to orthodoxy.

In his dissertation, Olearius went through a number of theologians and other academics who were known for their spiritual conversions. Among the representatives of the early Church, Jerome was initially suspicious of Christianity²⁹, and Lucidus, a fifth-century presbyter in the Gallic church, defended predestination and other controversial doctrines of Augustine to the extent that in order to defend himself against accusations caused by his views on predestination he was

²⁶ Neumann, *Ex historia literaria de retractationibus eruditorum*, cit., § v.

²⁷ *Ibid.* On the virtue of *constantia*, see, e.g., L. Fulkerson, *Cicero's Palinode: Inconsistency in the Late Republic*, in "Greece & Rome", 60, 2, 2013, pp. 246-61.

²⁸ Neumann, *Ex historia literaria de retractationibus eruditorum*, cit., § v.

²⁹ Olearius, cit., § 13.

forced to write a public recantation entitled *Lucidi errorem emendantis libellus ad episcopos*. Lucidus described his palinodes as healing discourse (*salutifera confessio*)³⁰. Theodoret, an early Christian bishop, and Pope Vigilius, the first pope of the Byzantine papacy, also wrote famous palinodes and thereby tried to rehabilitate their power³¹. Eusebius of Nicomedeia angered the emperor by defending Arius and was sent into exile, but he regained the imperial favour by writing a palinode. However, Olearius suggests that Eusebius's palinode was insincere, like a lion in sheep's clothing³². Although palinodes included a poetic claim to truth, in principle nothing guaranteed that the author was giving a fully truthful account in his palinode. If someone was under the threat of being punished for speaking the truth, in the palinode he could falsify that truth in order to justify himself or to avoid punishment. Thus, as Olearius rightly notes, a palinode could also be a false and insincere statement, if it was too dangerous to take any firm position in some controversial issue.

Olearius's list of *exempla* also included the Spanish bishop Felix of Urgell who in the eighth century taught that Christ was not the Son of God in the proper sense of the term, but only by adoption. As this view prompted other parties to accuse the bishop of heretically dividing Christ into two persons, he had to recall his views³³. Berengar of Tours was another medieval theologian, who disputed with the Church on transubstantiation and was forced to write several recantations and their rewritings³⁴. Pope Pius II recited and censured numerous errors of his youth in his *Bulla retractionis*³⁵. Later *exempla* included Thomas of Aquinas who first denied but then accepted the Aristotelian view that *voluptas* belonged to the faculty of anger³⁶. Luther was often mentioned as a man who said that in his youthful writings he had followed papal doctrines in many issues, but in his later life he considered these earlier writings blasphemous and displaced his prior statements by new ones, thereby making a clear distinction between his early and more mature works³⁷.

³⁰ Olearius, cit., § 16.

³¹ Neumann, *Ex historia literaria de retractationibus eruditorum*, cit., § VIII (Theodoret), § IX (Vigilius).

³² Olearius, cit., § 12.

³³ Olearius, cit., § 19.

³⁴ Olearius, cit., § 20.

³⁵ Olearius, cit., § 22.

³⁶ Neumann, *Ex historia literaria de retractationibus eruditorum*, cit., § XIII.

³⁷ Olearius, cit., § 23; Neumann, *Ex historia literaria de retractationibus eruditorum*, cit., § XIV.

Many of the later names mentioned by Olearius were converts who wrote recantations to avoid punishments; for example, Jacob Reihing was originally a Jesuit, but turned to Lutheranism around 1621³⁸. Johannes Pistorius Niddanus turned from Lutheranism to Catholicism in 1558, and therefore Olearius compares him to a chameleon which continually changes its colours³⁹. A leader of English Reformation, Thomas Cranmer, also wrote several recantations⁴⁰. Johann Funck was another Lutheran theologian who participated in the Osiandrian controversy on divine justification that took place among the Lutherans around 1550, and he had to retract some of his former 'heresies' in the 1550s⁴¹. Francesco Patrizi, a sixteenth-century philosopher from Venice, was a defender of Platonism and in his *Discussionum peripateticorum libri* impugned the authenticity of Aristotle's works. Considering Aristotle's works as plagiarisms⁴² he attempted to refute Aristotle's doctrines from a Christian point of view; later he cancelled these views about Aristotle as being incorrect⁴³. Anecdotes were also told of Giovanni Ciampoli, a seventeenth-century humanist poet, who first praised and then attacked against Vergil and Horace; however, at his deathbed he withdrew his critical statements of these poets⁴⁴. The history of palinodes was almost endless and recantations were written under compulsion by many famous men from Abelard to Justus Lipsius⁴⁵.

These historical examples and many others were discussed in early modern academic works on palinodes and recantations. Stories were told of men who transgressed the boundaries of knowing and were severely punished for this transgression. In the stories of transgressions and their atonements there was usually some important power

³⁸ Olearius, cit., § 25.

³⁹ Olearius, cit., § 31.

⁴⁰ Olearius, cit., § 34.

⁴¹ Olearius, cit., § 26.

⁴² On early modern ideas on plagiarism, see S. Kivistö, *Legal Literary Thefts? Negotiating the Distinction between Imitation and Plagiarism in the Seventeenth Century*, in S. Isomaa, S. Kivistö et al. (eds.), *Rethinking Mimesis: Concepts and Practices of Literary Representation*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle 2012, pp. 287-306; Id., *The Vices of Learning. Morality and Knowledge at Early Modern Universities*, Brill, Leiden 2014, pp. 118-34.

⁴³ Neumann, *Ex historia literaria de retractationibus eruditorum*, cit., § XVIII.

⁴⁴ Olearius, cit., § 53.

⁴⁵ Olearius, cit., §§ 46-47; Neumann, *Ex historia literaria de retractationibus eruditorum*, cit., § XI.

involved that had made the offender conscious of his transgression. Stesichorus offended a powerful woman, Helen, who according to mythical accounts was responsible for blinding the poet. In early modern stories there were other powers, either secular or religious, who, while condemning the offender, advised him to compose a new literary statement that would reverse his previous statements and purify him of his former errors – or they simply punished him. Seventeenth-century religious authors told stories of transgressions where men were nastily punished by God for their various sins. For example, Simon Thurvaius Anglus (Simon von Tournay, ca. 1200), an astute dialectician and a teacher of Aristotelian philosophy at Paris, was a notorious example of the sin of pride. He boasted of knowing the teachings of Jesus thoroughly and of being able to refute them all. But after making this and other equally blasphemous claims, Thurvaius suddenly lost his memory and his basic reading skills, so that he was no longer able to pray. Colmanela was mentioned as another inflated character, presumably an early Irish bishop, who firmly believed that he knew everything, but who was buried in the deepest kind of ignorance that was portrayed as the divine punishment that followed from intellectual pride. These examples underscored the dangers of the false assumptions of knowing: it was fatal to believe in omniscience or in exceptional skills bestowed directly from heaven; God punished men for such hubris⁴⁶. The lesson here was that the offender should acknowledge the power exercised upon him and eagerly wish to atone before it is too late.

5. Conclusion

To sum up the previous discussion, the literary palinode can have several functions from a textual retreatment to the expression of personal conversion. Palinodes presuppose a sense of incoherence in one's life and thinking, and one of their aims is to attempt «to impress a sense of coherence onto a diverse body of works»⁴⁷. Often palinodes tell a story that bespeaks a movement from a vicious to a virtuous life and illustrates the narrator's reconciliation of his former secular life with his later religious life. For example, authors may reassess and reject their former poems as too secular or revolt against their former literary careers as being futile. The erasure of an earlier opinion or

⁴⁶ See Kivistö, *The Vices of Learning*, cit., p. 60.

⁴⁷ Sobiecki, *Lydgate's Kneeling Retraction*, cit., pp. 265, 268.

statement is often combined with self-erasure, when the author draws a distance to his former life path or even makes a radical break with his former narrated self, but at the same time paradoxically describes and reproduces the former self in literature⁴⁸. While retracting his secular writings the author often reiterates the former works in detail, thereby reproducing them, and thus what is meant to be a subversive revision is often also a rewriting of the former text. Thereby the radical narrative break does not really happen and although there is a clear discontinuity expressed in palinodes, retractions are sometimes used to construct a recognizable continuity of self. Thus, palinodes are one good example of the ways in which two competing worldviews or value systems can coexist in the work of a single author.

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⁴⁸ On the narrative of self-erasure in palinodes, see Sobecki, *Lydgate's Kneeling Retraction*, cit., p. 267.

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