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PART III  
READING THE FATHERS READING THEMSELVES



## CHAPTER 6

### TEXT AND CONTEXT: THE IMPORTANCE OF SCHOLARLY READING. GREGORY OF NYSSA, *CONTRA EUNOMIUM*<sup>1</sup>

*Matthieu Cassin*

Between 379 and 383, Gregory, bishop of Nyssa in Cappadocia, wrote three books aimed at answering the successive parts of the *Apologia Apologiae* published by Eunomius of Cyzicus. The *Apologia Apologiae*, as its title indicates, was the defence of a previous apologetic work (the *Liber Apologeticus*) published by Eunomius in 360 or 361, in response to a critique of it written around 364 by Basil of Caesarea, the elder brother of Gregory of Nyssa. It is noteworthy that we have so many texts from this polemical series: *Liber Apologeticus* by Eunomius, the three books *Contra Eunomium* by Basil and three volumes of *Contra Eunomium* by Gregory of Nyssa.<sup>2</sup> Only the *Apologia Apologiae* of Eunomius is missing, surviving only in fragments recorded in Nyssen's *Contra Eunomium*. Two texts, written a little later and in a slightly different literary genre, completed this series: the *Expositio Fidei* (*Profession of Faith*) by Eunomius, proposed during the 'synod of heresies' summoned by the Emperor Theodosius in 383,<sup>3</sup> and Gregory's answer, the *Refutatio Confessionis Eunomii* (*Refutation of the Profession of Faith of Eunomius*).<sup>4</sup> We may add to this list a speech delivered by Gregory in Constantinople, *De deitate filii et spiritus sancti et in Abraham*, just before the opening of this 'synod of heresies'.<sup>5</sup>

Many other works were devoted to the refutation of Eunomius's theses which, for the most part, have not survived. In contrast, having all the Cappadocian texts just mentioned supplies us with a complete organic set from which to follow the various stages of the controversy, nearly step by step. Because this is so rare for this period, one might expect that access to such a complete grouping of texts would arouse readings that differ substantially from that of other Patristic texts equally concerned with controversies. In effect, the situation here is very similar to the study of modern religious controversies in which researchers are able to study the writing strategies, or even the publishing strategies, specific to each of the protagonists; the answers or voluntary omissions of one step or another of the controversy; and the relations, confessed or not, which go through the various steps and successive texts.<sup>6</sup> Until these elements are separated and clarified, it is impossible to explain and describe the theological and

philosophical positions of the protagonists. Such a complete survey draws a map of religious history, literary history, history of the book, intellectual practices, social networks and so on.

However, Gregory of Nyssa's *Contra Eunomium* was most often read, at least until the modern era, through a single frame: research on the history of Christian doctrine – the history of dogma, according to an older name. Such a context implies a distinct orientation of reading and a clear limitation of its objectives: the work was studied in order to find elements of a coherent, even systematic, theology specific to Gregory of Nyssa<sup>7</sup> – which would also allow Gregory to be used as a source to reconstruct the doctrinal positions of his heretical opponent, Eunomius. The book, in such a reading, is no longer seen as an organic whole inserted in a larger series but only as a source from which to draw isolated elements, fragments, each to illustrate this or that point of the systematic scheme. One must note, in particular, that since the *Contra Eunomium* was generally categorized as a Trinitarian work, its Christological content was most often left aside; the book was isolated from its editorial context and its paratext, whether authorial or editorial;<sup>8</sup> and it was cut off from its belonging both to a tradition and to contemporaneous history, that is to say, to the ongoing dispute. Even when the history of the tradition was taken into account in the history of dogma, the immediate history of a controversy as dense as this one disappears almost entirely because the history of doctrine favours the characteristic features of the doctrinal position of an author or a work and leaves aside the fluctuations and adaptations of positions in a given controversy.

In order to be exempt from these important limitations and so as to unfold more possible readings of a text as rich as Gregory of Nyssa's *Contra Eunomium*, a method that would take into account the requirements of literary and Patristic history seems to be more appropriate and more promising. Without pretending to be exhaustive, I will proceed in three steps:

- Study the paratext of the work in order to distinguish the different stages and the different times of its composition and connect it to the paratext of other works in the same controversy in order to clarify the links that are no longer evident for a modern reader.<sup>9</sup>
- Set the book back in its own literary genre so as to underline the generic features and the author's adaptation of some traditional elements – such a perspective may indeed help to read the book not only as a technical, theological work, but also as literature.
- Explore the history of *Contra Eunomium*'s reception in order to show how some readings did gradually stand out and how others have been forgotten.

I do not claim I have reached a neutral and exhaustive reading of Nyssen's texts, nor a reading that would enable us to reach the original book, freed from the layers of successive interpretations. Such a hope would only lead to a new fabric as artificial as the former. I do not want to bleach the text of Gregory, as the German archaeology at the end of the nineteenth century did with Greek temples. But if hermeneutic work implies that the reader gets involved in his work and approaches it with his own prejudices, tools and the span of history that separates him from the text, it does not imply that we must merely record these facts and, thus, freely interpret ancient texts. The degree of elaboration found in the works of the Cappadocians, and in particular those by Gregory of Nyssa, forbids all straight reading as well as any attempt of reduction. If it is not impossible to apply tools borrowed from contemporary philosophy to these texts, for example, or to confront them with thinkers from different eras, it is first necessary, I think, to use the tools of a historical and literary reading in order to emphasize the elements hidden to our modern eyes, so as to display the complexity of the texts.

### *The Paratext of Gregory of Nyssa's Contra Eunomium: Nyssen's Hints about How to Read His Text*

#### *Author*

The study of the *paratext* of a recent document is, in general, not too difficult if it is not extended to the concerns of a history of reception (*epitext*). It is different, however, for an ancient text because of its long transmission and the devices characteristic of an ancient edition. Although the question of the name of the author of *Contra Eunomium* is not a problem – 'Gregory, bishop of Nyssa' – the elements added later ('our father among the saints', etc.), which are not without interest, must be considered using a separate approach.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Title*

The title of the work (or rather the titles of the three works) is not as simple to define because the variations in the manuscripts are greater than the various indications of the author. It is particularly difficult to determine how far the formulation can be attributed to the actual author. One can establish that the text is characterized as a *λόγος ἀντιρρητικός*,<sup>11</sup> not only through manuscripts but also by Gregory himself in his *Letter 29*: the text

is a refutation, an element of a controversy.<sup>12</sup> The work, therefore, was presented as an answer to the λόγοι of Eunomius and, more precisely, to those he had published. This means Gregory's text was not an answer to doctrinal positions held by Eunomius, but to a well-defined written piece, the *Apologia Apologiae*. Finally, the succession of Gregory's books and titles suggest that the refutation of Eunomius's work follows each part, book by book; the *Apologia Apologiae* is not taken by Gregory as a whole.

*Internal divisions of the Contra Eunomium  
(Books, Parts, Chapters)*

Each of the three books is granted a proper title, which is not constituted by a simple numerical variation within a fixed model, unlike modern designations (*Contra Eunomium* I, II and III). They were three distinct entities, tied together but circulating separately for at least some time.

Book III is the only one that also has main internal divisions, called τόμοι (parts). The whole manuscript tradition has seen them as if they were on the same level as the division between Book I, II and the *Refutatio*. But the indirect tradition and some elements of internal commentary have allowed F. Diekamp<sup>13</sup> and then W. Jaeger to restore the original structure of the work. One text, extant only in Syriac, which had not yet been edited when W. Jaeger was working, allows us to trace back to the first half of the sixth century the difficulties and confusions we find in the manuscripts.<sup>14</sup> The incoherencies that this division introduces suggest that the organization of Book III into ten parts was not due to Gregory himself.<sup>15</sup>

Besides the division of Book III, the different manuscripts present a list of titles for the different chapters (κεφάλαια). A large number of manuscripts indicate the chapters of Book I in the margins, proposing converging positions for them.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, it is acknowledged that the chapters of Book I are by Gregory himself,<sup>17</sup> and I have shown that their position goes back at least to the sixth century. If this is accurate, it would be a very valuable testimony to the way Gregory understood his own text. However, the chapters of the other books are obviously not by the same hand.

These elements of paratext confirm, therefore, the division of the work into three books, each of them belonging to a much larger but relatively autonomous group. They also provide us, at least for Book I, with a reading aid by or proximate to the author himself, thanks to the titles of the chapters and their positions in the text. This first series of elements

provides readers with hints of the literary genre and reminds them of the genealogy of the work, written over almost five years, in three (or four if we take the *Refutatio* into account) distinct steps.

### *Preface(s)*

If the first elements listed above give only clues about the possible readings of Nyssen's tract, some associated texts provide more significant tools. An actual preface or a dedication for any of the three books of the *Contra Eunomium* did not exist. If each book starts with an exordium, it does not seem that there is any proper introductory paratext inside the books. On the other hand, the manuscripts, in most cases, interpreted a letter from Gregory and the answer from his brother Peter as a kind of preface to the three books. Almost all the manuscripts put the two letters just before the table of contents or before the first book *Contra Eunomium*.<sup>18</sup> However, this fact remained largely unnoticed, since W. Jaeger had preferred not to edit the letters with *Contra Eunomium*. As a result, they only appear in the editions of the letters of Gregory.

*Letter 29* is a cover letter for the first book *Contra Eunomium* and was sent to Gregory's brother Peter.<sup>19</sup> It was on his advice that Gregory had undertaken the refutation of Eunomius's books. In the second part of the letter, Gregory expressed some doubts about how appropriate it was to publish his work because he had answered Eunomius's attacks against Basil so violently. In the third part, the bishop of Nyssa presented the structure of his first book: a first section that dealt with the accusations against Basil – it is what the modern critics have called the 'historical section' – and a second that dealt with doctrine.

Peter's answer<sup>20</sup> did not bring any new elements, but it confirmed the relevance of Gregory's text and the legitimacy of his anger, justified by Biblical patterns. The two letters have been, therefore, since late antiquity, a kind of preface, whether or not this was Gregory's intention. They confirmed the nature of the text – it is a refutation of a given book by Eunomius – and underlined the long history of the controversy and the place held by the paternal figure of Basil. Above all, though, a large part of *Letter 29* is dedicated to the justification of polemic (μάχη).<sup>21</sup> Gregory said that he had tried to confine polemic within a delimited place, the first part of Book I, in which he refuted the slanders against Basil. Even if the first part of Book I shows more polemical content than the rest of the book, the oratorical violence is not completely absent from the second part of Book I, and is widely present in Books II and III. One can notice, however, that

Gregory tried to separate the debate about doctrine from the possibly violent answers to Eunomius's personal attacks.

There is another letter by Gregory, however, concerning the *Contra Eunomium*, even though it has never been used to throw light on the nature of the books or their possible readings. It is *Letter 15*,<sup>22</sup> addressed to two unknown young people, John and Maximianos, students of an unknown sophist.<sup>23</sup> In this letter, Gregory clearly distinguished two purposes of the book. For John and Maximianos, who were Christians, the book was an 'invitation meant to hearten those who are in the full vigour of youth to do battle with our adversaries';<sup>24</sup> for the sophist, certain passages will be read with pleasure. The first reading was plain and Gregory did not add any more details: it was the obvious reading of the book in its original context, a refutation of a heretical text to be read by Christians. The second reading, on the other hand, demanded more explanations from the letter's author. Gregory specified, in fact, which parts of the book may especially interest the master of the young men. He first mentioned τὰ πρὸ τῶν ἀγώνων, specifying the chosen style. He then suggested reading some passages taken from doctrinal parts which were elegantly explained. With these indications, even if the sophist – who was the master of the two young men – was not a Christian, the reading proposed by Gregory involves a literary and rhetorical approach, without taking too much into account the doctrinal or properly Christian content.

If the doctrinal reading of the *Contra Eunomium* was for Gregory himself the most evident one, which asks neither for explanation nor justification, it was also possible to read the books in another way which belonged more properly to the literary sphere and overtakes the confessional frontiers. The second reading required putting forth specific passages because the whole work cannot be read in such a way. The book is at once composed of elements dealing with Christian doctrine and, more precisely, refutation of the heresy of Eunomius, as well as passages where anger and ill humour are prominent. In the first book, Gregory wanted a strict distinction between the two elements: refutation of Eunomius's accusations first, then a response to his theology. The text of Book I, however, shows that the two threads were woven together and alternated in the framework of the three books.

Considering this double bipartition, it is tempting to think these elements correspond to each other, at least in part. We would thus have some polemical parts, which require literary skill on the part of the reader, and some doctrinal parts, needing above all a Christian interpretation. However, as we have discussed, we also find literary elements in the doctrinal parts and Christian references being utilized in the polemical sections. These three

letters, however, open new perspectives for reading the *Contra Eunomium* that scholarly studies have, up until now, barely mentioned.

### *Cover letter of Basil's Contra Eunomium*

These letters are of even greater interest in light of a correspondence by Basil, a letter that directly concerns the *Contra Eunomium* and was addressed to a sophist, Leontios (*Ep.* 20).<sup>25</sup> The letter is quite different from the one Gregory sent several years later to John and Maximianos. In particular, Basil clearly emphasized the doctrinal content, and the sophist addressed was obviously Christian. We find here, however, some points which make one wonder if Basil sent his work to this man not only because he was a Christian but also because he was a teacher of rhetoric. The recipient is named at the beginning of the letter by his profession, a sophist. This title suggests that the work was not written exclusively for a Christian reader or, at the very least, that it can be evaluated by a specialist of literature and rhetoric.

If the Basilian paratext does not permit a separation of the two spheres of reading as clearly as Gregory's letters, it should not greatly surprise us. In fact, the pure literary elements, mainly the polemical elements, are much more discreet in Basil's *Contra Eunomium*; they do not form polemical clusters as in Gregory's work.

### *Conclusion*

This study of paratext confirms the nature of Nyssen's books: a refutation that follows Eunomius's text through several books written by both adversaries. It also provides us with indications as how to read the first book which may go back to Gregory himself. At last, and above all, the cover letters emphasize the multiplicity of readings: one that is more doctrinal, and another one, more literary; each fit in some passages of the books. However, both interpretations are interwoven through the main part of *Contra Eunomium*.

What new light do these elements shed on the text? First of all, it is essential not to neglect the literary components in the interpretation of the *Contra Eunomium*. Gregory himself emphasized this point. In the second place, we should not neglect the indications given by the different manuscripts, above all when the relative unanimity of the accounts confirms that these elements are ancient enough. If they do not bring us to

Nyssen's understanding of the text, they at least support a historical interpretation of the book, which is of some significance to a true hermeneutical approach.

### *Doctrinal Controversy, Secular References and Elaboration of a Christian Satire*

We must therefore pay attention not only to the theological content but also to the process of refutation, its tools and the actual polemic. A close reading of the three books *Contra Eunomium* allows us to make the following point: if Gregory did not hesitate to sprinkle his text with more or less insulting terms to his opponent, gathering his main polemical attack in some specific passages, these *loci* are the most elaborate, on a literary level, of the whole book. Here we find the richest vocabulary, the most elaborated images, the most numerous secular references. If indeed the two threads, theological and polemical, are closely woven together throughout the three books, they nonetheless alternate in the framework of the *Contra Eunomium*. The theology is clearly influenced by the polemic that surrounded it, and this last point plays an important role in the actual refutation of Eunomius's positions. However, their relative separation points to an interpretation that differentiates one from the other and aims to bring to light the proper functions of the two levels of writing and their reciprocated ties.

#### *The Elaboration of a Christian Polemic*

Long before Gregory, other Christian authors had already developed literary tools designed for fighting adversaries within the church itself. These tools and their historical and doctrinal conceptions during the first three centuries of our era have been masterfully studied by A. Le Boulluc.<sup>26</sup> Such a study has not been undertaken about authors of subsequent centuries, though the material is at least as rich as any in the first three centuries. I will study here several examples – mainly, three passages from the third book of *Contra Eunomium* – paying particular attention to the literary tools and to the literary references that support Gregory's text.

#### *Eunomius, New Circe*

The first text, which takes place in the second part of the third book (*CE* III.2.75–81), is built upon a series of images whose thematic unity is

supported by what immediately precedes it:<sup>27</sup> Gregory had just compared two fragments from Eunomius to show that his opponent contradicted himself. The bishop of Nyssa said he was surprised that men could follow Eunomius's doctrine when he so obviously contradicted himself. Here is the sequence: quotation of Eunomius's fragment; emphasis on the contradiction; colourful attack against the misleading master, Eunomius; theological refutation of the quoted fragment. The polemical segment of this sequence occurs therefore as a preparation of the actual refutation; it is meant to be a tool capable of discrediting the opponent before entering into the actual discussion of ideas. The reader, thus warned against Eunomius, will be more easily convinced that Gregory's refutation is sound.

The clearly polemical passage is built on a rational chain of images, most of which rely on secular references rather than Biblical quotations or allusions. The attack is opened with a quotation from Psalms 34.15: 'They were divided but they had no compunction'. It is the only Biblical reference in the whole section. Here is a short list of arguments used in the passage, combined in such a way as to emphasize the weakness of those who follow Eunomius, while also asserting their relative innocence:

- First, 'being pulled by ear, like amphorae' is a proverbial formula that goes back to Bion of Borysthenes<sup>28</sup> and is used several times by Plutarch.<sup>29</sup>
- 'Drowsy people who agree with contradictory proposals' is a theme common since the Classical era. One can find a close parallel in Lucian's *Necyomania siue Menippus*,<sup>30</sup> in which the main character is confronted with contradictory philosophical proposals.
- Eunomius's followers are compared with shadows that automatically follow the movements of bodies. The origin of this image is more difficult to establish.<sup>31</sup>
- The heart of the passage is a rather long comparison between Eunomius's disciples and Odysseus's companions turned into beasts by Circe's spells.<sup>32</sup> Leaning on previous interpretations of the Homeric episode, Gregory represents Eunomius as a sorcerer who belittles men to the bestial level of passions. The development of this connection finishes with a new formulation of the famous theme of the relationship between the respective positions of human and animal, and their relation to the divine: one is the face turned up to the sky, and the other is the snout lowered to its food.<sup>33</sup>
- Eunomius's companions are then likened to those put to sleep by a mandrake; here again, the image has clear Platonic sources (*Republic*, VI, 488c), but is also present in Demosthenes.<sup>34</sup>

- Finally, they are compared to fish that, fooled by bait, also swallow the hooks because of their gluttony. This is one of Gregory's favourite images;<sup>35</sup> it allows variations in the way the dangerous element is concealed (bread and poison, honey and poison<sup>36</sup>).

One can observe several common elements in this list. First of all, most of the colourful attacks are supported by secular sources whose images had already been used in a satirical or polemical context before their Christian usage. In order to fight Eunomius, Gregory reused literary tools developed by secular authors and he adapted them without apparent difficulty to a controversy internal to Christianity. Secondly, such a text shows great skill in composition and writing, able to hold the attention of a literate reader, whether pagan or Christian. Finally, such a series seems to have a clear goal in the controversy with Eunomius: it belittles and depreciates the opponent, but presents those who follow him as unwilling victims to deception who have at least partially escaped. Therefore, it would be enough for Gregory to open their eyes so that they can get back to the church's bosom and abandon the opposing party. The intended audience of Gregory's book included, therefore, Eunomius's followers, not only Eunomius himself. The literary means used here cleared them of responsibility for their adherence to doctrinal error and prompted them to recover their full use of reason, their rational abilities, which are a distinctive characteristic of men, in order to escape the one who had deceived them.

The various functions, therefore, of such a passage are as follows: discrediting the main opponent, who does not seem to be the essential addressee of this section; winning back his followers, who are the supposed readers of such a text; and gaining the reader's respect with the literary and rhetorical skill displayed here by Gregory. As a result, there is evidence in the text of social and cultural concerns, while the text is at the same time a polemical weapon.

### *Critique of Eunomius's Style: Heresiological and Comic Background*

The structural situation is almost identical in the text to which I shall now turn. In the fifth part of the third book (*CE* III.5.18–26),<sup>37</sup> Gregory first quoted a passage from Eunomius. He then introduced an initial series of attacks against him, focused on one of Basil's passages which he had slandered. After quoting Basil's entire text, Gregory presented a second series of attacks. After these consecutive polemical passages, a new passage

from Eunomius is quoted, which is then refuted on both theological and philosophical grounds. Gregory's virulence is undoubtedly excited here by the attack Eunomius had directly made against Basil – true to his habits, the bishop of Nyssa did not explicitly quote Eunomius's passage that contained the insults and slanders, but only mentioned its existence.

The two polemical passages differ a bit in their construction. In the first one, Gregory, addressing Eunomius for attacking Basil, used a technique close to the one previously analysed from the second part of Book III. The series opened with a Biblical reference: 1 Cor. 3.19, citing Job 5.13, 'he who seizes the wise men in their cleverness'. This sequence of attacks followed:

- Eunomius's attacks are compared to someone who fights his own shadow; the image, which is well known in secular literature,<sup>38</sup> was already used by Basil in his *Contra Eunomium*<sup>39</sup> to describe the fictional situation of Eunomius's *Apologia*.
- Gregory then compares the struggle with trampling an opponent already on the ground; the image is already a proverb in that time and well documented in secular literature.<sup>40</sup>
- The next image is developed at length: Gregory compares Eunomius's attacks against Basil with children who throw clods of earth towards the stars and, when the dirt falls back down, think they have hit the stars. Here again, the classical literary source is clear: a passage from Herodotus<sup>41</sup> which, along with some other texts, had given birth to a proverb, εἰς οὐρανὸν τοξεύεις, pointing out the vacuity and the vanity of an action.<sup>42</sup>
- This image is reinforced by the common representation of a child as a being whose reason is unachieved and imperfect. One finds several parallels, including similar images, in Plutarch.<sup>43</sup>

Several of these images were reused with variations in other parts of the *Contra Eunomium*, whether in combination with others or alone. Whereas the images of fighting shadows or trampling those who are already on the ground reappeared without great change, interesting variations appeared in the case of the children and the sky. In *Contra Eunomium* I.74–5, children throw stones towards the sun or reproach him for shining – again, it is Basil who is the sun, as he was the stars in *Contra Eunomium* III.5. In a context that no longer concerned Basil, Gregory likened Eunomius's action to children who try to trap a ray of sun in their hands and are disappointed when nothing remains (*CE* II.79–81). Because of such echoes, it is very important to read these three books as a whole and pay attention to

theological parallels as well as to literary parallels in order to understand precisely their construction and meaning.

I have already studied the main part of this section elsewhere and I shall not repeat my demonstration here.<sup>44</sup> It may be enough to say that Gregory picked up some features of ancient literary criticism, particularly as far as corrupted and artificial styles were concerned, and propped them up with heresiological Christian features – in particular, the accusation of composing a cento. He gave fresh new colours to these Christian abuses with the help of references borrowed from comic or satiric secular literature. This section ends on a very beautiful image, dear to Gregory: drops of air in the water that pop up as soon as they arrive at the surface;<sup>45</sup> this image figured the vacuity of Eunomius's reasoning.

Even though Gregory's text did not immediately lose its polemic tone, the paragraphs which came after the violent attack dealt again with the debate of ideas. Gregory put forward a distinction between God and creation, studying the names that correspond to the two realities. The refutation went on but left aside for a time the almost complete focus on the polemic, itself.

The two main functions considered above remain: discrediting the opponent prior to the examination of a doctrinal point, and asking for literary recognition for those who could identify Gregory's sources and recognize his skill. The fact is clearer here, because Gregory precisely accuses Eunomius of not knowing how to write properly.

### *Demosthenes: Parodic Eulogy and Cappadocian Reference*

Gregory's critique of Eunomian style naturally leads to my last example. Nyssen concluded his third book with a new but short attack. Eunomius was depicted as another Demosthenes, with all the features that such a literary critique attributed to the orator. Gregory, by contrast, showed himself as a poor provincial man – not very clever – speaking in a local dialect. The charge is violent, but this is a short ending for the immense corpus of the three books against Eunomius. As is usual in the works of the bishop of Nyssa, there is no actual conclusion, at least no conclusion proportionate to the size of the book, especially if we compare it to the size of the exordium that opens it.<sup>46</sup>

Gregory played again with literary practices, excessive eulogies that named any orator 'a new Demosthenes', and every poet 'a new Homer'. Long before the fourth century, such eulogies were already parodied and used in a satirical mode.<sup>47</sup> Gregory was also playing with the origin of his

opponent. In fact, Basil had called Eunomius a ‘Galatian’ in his refutation;<sup>48</sup> Eunomius rebuked this accusation of quasi-barbarianism and specified the place of his birth. Gregory, who had already answered him in *Contra Eunomium* I.105, mentioned again his origin to contrast it with Demosthenes’ birthplace: Eunomius is the new prince of orators, born not in Attica but in the fringes of Cappadocia. By contrast, Gregory used old prejudices against the Cappadocians and their language to better show his competence as a writer and a speaker. So, a theological book ends with a literary game.

This section on Demosthenes is split into two passages, which surrounded the last doctrinal point, and the last quotation from Eunomius. But this last quotation is no more refuted than those that precede it. There is no doctrinal conclusion to the debate, no recapitulation of the main subjects, no reminder of a Credo. We cannot know whether Gregory had refuted the whole third book of Eunomius or if he had stopped long before the end.<sup>49</sup>

### *Literary Polemic and Doctrinal Refutation*

The points I have just elaborated may be clearer if we compare them with the elements of the letters that stand out as an informal preface to the *Contra Eunomium*. To begin with, I noted the relative isolation of the polemical passages, their relative autonomy considering the theological sections that surround them. Secondly, most of the secular literary references and most of the rare and unusual words are found in these polemical passages. Lastly, they are mainly located at the beginning of the argument, before the theological discussion. This position fits, therefore, exactly what is indicated in *Letter 15* to John and Maximianos: the passages that may interest a sophist, that is to say, the passages with some literary work, are isolated, placed before the debates (πρὸ τῶν ἀγώνων) and show the main elaboration.<sup>50</sup>

The composition of the book fits well with the program outlined in the letter to Peter of Sebasteia (*Letter 29*). Sometimes, Gregory’s anger was brought to the foreground, especially when Basil was directly attacked by Eunomius. These passages, however, are quite clearly separated from the main theological stream of the book. The polemic, of course, is not missing in these other pages and is an integral part of some of the methods used to refute Eunomius. Gregory, nonetheless, tried to persuade his reader that his book, except the openly polemical sections, was free from any bias against Eunomius, that the refutation ran only at a theological or philosophical level.

Furthermore, these sections of literary elaboration, rare but well chosen vocabulary and, sometimes, beautiful images – in particular the children and the stars, or the children and the light – created some pauses and occasions for rest in a long and arduous book. Besides, the frequent references to secular literature supported Gregory's self-representation as a cultivated bishop, belonging to the same cultural elite as the pagans. Eunomius, by contrast, was set apart, among men of drudgery and little learning. A little later, Simplicius disparaged John Philoponus with the same insults.<sup>51</sup>

Such a reading cannot be neglected: the theological and philosophical problems of this controversy must be seen in the context of the literary polemic. The literary weapons are all as essential as the theological discussions. The cultural and social setting is important in order to convince the addressees of the book. Even though Eunomius was not the fugitive slave that Gregory pictured, in order to understand properly Gregory's undertaking, we should take into account his being so keen on showing the inanity of Eunomius's pretensions to learning and speech.

It must also be noted that Basil's *Contra Eunomium* shows very few marks of literary elaboration, in particular, very few references to secular literature. There is no large polemical section such as the one in Gregory's book. Of course, there are several attacks against Eunomius, but they are scattered throughout the book and always very brief and sketchy. So, Gregory's writing seems specific, distinct from his brother's way; this comparison reinforces the potential importance of my conclusions.

The literary genre of the book is not enough to define all its potentialities, even to provide a secure guide to exploit the content of *Contra Eunomium*. It is a literary work – thus a complex work – which implies a multiplicity of interpretations, projects and envisioned perspectives. A limited reading of the book, as that of the history of dogma, if it is partially valid, would not be enough to offer a complete or satisfactory approach to Gregory's work. Furthermore, some important elements of Nyssen's theology and exegesis would pass unnoticed. The importance given to the literary elements, the playing with literate secular culture, the elaboration of images and entire passages devoted to an extremely worked polemic show that the *Contra Eunomium* is not a purely doctrinal text, fully absorbed in a church controversy without any opening to literature or the secular world.

Such remarks must prompt us to be very cautious when using isolated passages of *Contra Eunomium* in order to illustrate one aspect or another of the thought of Gregory, or of the Cappadocians. It is difficult to think of an interpretation for the whole book, or for Gregory's thoughts, without

doing first the slow work of identification of the sources, references and links to the various theological, philosophical and literary traditions. To put it differently, a work of global interpretation cannot be completed before a critical approach to the Greek text is complete. Furthermore, this patient work of elucidating what is not clear to our eyes more than sixteen centuries after the original writing is already a fruitful part of interpretation: it should open forgotten perspectives.

### *The Byzantine Reception of Gregory of Nyssa's Contra Eunomium*

The last part of my paper shall deal with the Byzantine reception of Gregory's book. The most fruitful approach is also the most difficult, namely studying the reception of the thought and theology of Gregory in later literature. But an initial and easier survey should be done first: which passages of Nyssen's *Contra Eunomium* did the Byzantines quote? Is there some direct reading of the book or a tradition of anthologies, second-hand quotations? I offer here the results of a first investigation, which is far from complete.<sup>52</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the passages that subsequent authors quoted were selected according to the theological interests of their readers. During the Christological debates of the sixth century, texts dealing with union and distinction of natures – human and divine – were used; the texts from the palamite dispute quoted passages about divine substance, human knowledge of God and manifestation of divinity in a created world; in the fifteenth century, and in the context of the Union of Churches, we find quotations dealing with the relation of the Holy Ghost to Father and Son. Furthermore, the exegetical *catenae* used important parts of *Contra Eunomium* III, even if these texts did not deal directly with the relevant part of Biblical text the *catena* commented upon.<sup>53</sup> So, we have both a use of Gregory's text in direct relation to the theological concerns of the time and an extended usage that suggests a deep knowledge of Nyssen's works. We must also mention a very important testimony on the *Contra Eunomium*:<sup>54</sup> Peter of Callinicus, at the end of the sixth century, used Gregory's books throughout his debate with Damian of Alexandria. In the context of the tritheist controversy, the Trinitarian debates from the end of the fourth century were of direct interest.<sup>55</sup>

Beside theological uses of Nyssen's books against Eunomius, we should also speak of some literary links between the Cappadocian and some authors of the palamite controversy. They not only quoted theological

passages from *Contra Eunomium*, but they also reused some polemical elements of the books. We are sure then that they had read Gregory's work thoroughly and had not just used some older anthologies. Theodore Dexios reused in his *Appellatio* Gregory's mention of Circe's potion in order to describe the effect of the book of his adversary.<sup>56</sup> Nicephorus Gregoras rewrote in the first books of his *Antirrhetics* a passage of Nyssen's *Contra Eunomium* III in order to add allusions to contemporary theological debate (ἐνέργειαι) and to Palamas himself, whose name was added to Eunomius's name (τοιοῦτος ὁ Εὐνομίου καὶ Παλαμᾶ θεός).<sup>57</sup> This precise text was used because Gregory had established a link between Eunomius's doctrine and the Judaic doctrine of Philo of Alexandria; Gregoras reused it in order to link Palamas and the Jews. So the text of Gregory was not only used as a theological source, but also as a literary – and polemical – model that could be adapted to new patterns.

Contrary to this pattern, Nyssen's *Contra Eunomium* does not seem to have been used in Byzantine theological compendia such as Euthymios Zygabenos's *Panoplia Dogmatica*. This author prolifically quoted Nyssen's *On the Divinity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* for his section on Trinitarian doctrine, and he used Basil's *Contra Eunomium*, but he nowhere mentioned Gregory's *Contra Eunomium*.<sup>58</sup> We find a somewhat similar situation in the manuscripts: there are few annotations in the margins of Nyssen's books against Eunomius. For example, a codex (*Vaticanus gr.* 424) that was used by Isidore of Kiev bears notes by him in the margins of Basil's book, but there are none in the margins of Gregory's.

A larger survey will, of course, bring more elements and correct some of these conclusions, but we have already here a first idea of the way Nyssen's *Contra Eunomium* was read in a Byzantine context. The further reception of this text will require a proper investigation: the *Contra Eunomium* was not translated in Latin before the first edition of the Greek text, together with a Latin translation, in 1615 and 1618. How was Gregory's book used in the modern era? We should find some partial answers in the book of M. Ludlow,<sup>59</sup> but a comprehensive study is still needed.

These preliminary results, however, bring two points to the front: first, the perspective of the history of dogma, which picks up some separate elements from the continuous text, is not new; it was already the way that some of the Byzantine readers read the text by Gregory, collecting the passages that could be seen as evidence for their own theological positions. Yet these readers were not interested solely by the Trinitarian content; they found material about Christology, the Holy Spirit and so on. In addition to this, we get a testimony to another way of reading which takes

into consideration both the theological core of Nyssen's book *and* the literary and polemical way of writing it.

### Conclusion

My conclusion is to be placed on two different grounds: first, my investigations around Gregory's *Contra Eunomium* have shown that this book should not be read as a solely technical, theological tract. The author himself suggested that other readings were not only possible but also necessary. Literature had its place in the writing of such a book and shapes the theological content: it is prominent in polemical sections and present throughout the book. If Gregory of Nyssa pretended to a strict separation between theology and polemic, a closer reading shows that they are actually thoroughly intertwined. It is almost impossible to pull apart a theological aspect of the books without first investigating the way this theological reflection is colored by polemic. On the other hand, a reading that only takes into account the properly theological section, leaving aside the polemical ones, will remain unaware of a major part of Gregory's work: this tract, polemical and theological as it is, should also be read as part of the creation of a Christian literature.

Secondly, with a more panoramic view, I hope I showed that philological, historical and literary methods – what I have called a 'scholarly reading' – do not lead to sterility of interpretation, but open up new vistas. Or, rather, open up new vistas *again*: the quick survey of the history of the reception of Gregory's *Contra Eunomium* has shown that Byzantine readers already used this tract as a theological *and* literary model for their own work, for example. These methods also point out to modern readers who would be glad to have direct access to texts from late antiquity that, without the tools and methods proper to philological and historical reading, they risk being blind to decisive aspects of the works they comment upon. We may also remember that, before putting a work in the drawer of a given literary genre and historical setting, we must investigate with fresh eyes the eventually divergent directions the author put into this particular tract. Of course, Gregory of Nyssa's *Contra Eunomium* deals with the Trinitarian theology of his opponent, Eunomius, but this is not the only relevant aspect of the books. A first step may be to read it as an organic whole, looking for hints inside rather than in our own literary or theological concerns, not in order to recover the original Gregory, but only to have the chance to hear what has not been heard for many years or even centuries.

## Notes

- 1 The initial translation of this text from the French was done by Takako Hirokawa, junior studying engineering physics, and Erik Bergal, sophomore studying civil engineering, both at the University of Colorado at Boulder; subsequent revisions were made by the editors in consultation with the author.
- 2 Editions of Greek texts: Eunomius, *The Extant Works* (R. Vaggione (ed. & trans.); Oxford Early Christian Texts; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); Basil of Caesarea, *Contra Eunomium: Contre Eunome: Basile de Césarée* (Bernard Sesboüé, Georges-Matthieu de Durand and Louis Doutreleau (eds); Bernard Sesboüé (trans.); Sources Chrétiennes, 299, 305; Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1982–1983); Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* (Werner Jaeger (ed.); Gregorii Nysseni Opera [henceforth GNO], I–II; Leiden: Brill, 1960). For translations of works by Gregory of Nyssa, see the General Bibliography.
- 3 See M. Wallraff, ‘Il “Sinodo de tutte le eresie” a Costantinopoli (383)’ in *Vescovi e Pastori in Epoca Teodosiana: In Occasione del 16 Centenario de la Consecrazione Episcopale di S Agostino, 396–1996: 25 Incontro di Studiosi dell’Antichità Cristiana, Roma, 8–11 maggio 1996, vol.2* (Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum, 58; Roma, 1998), 271–9.
- 4 Eunomius, *Profession of Faith* in *The Extant Works* (Vaggione (ed.); Gregory of Nyssa, *Refutation* (W. Jaeger (ed.); GNO II; Leiden: Brill, 1960).
- 5 *On the Divinity of the Son and the Holy Spirit and on Abraham* (Ernestus Rhein and Friedhelm Mann (eds.); GNO, X/2; Leiden: Brill, 1996).
- 6 For a modern example, see Mathilde Bombart, *Guez de Balzac et la querelle des “Lettres”, écriture, polémique et critique dans la France du premier XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Lumière Classique, 76 ; Paris: Honoré Champion, 2007).
- 7 See Bernard Pottier, *Dieu et le Christ selon Grégoire de Nysse. Étude systématique du Contre Eunome avec traduction inédite des extraits d’Eunome* (Ouvertures; Namur, Belgium: Culture et Vérité, 1994).
- 8 Cf. Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes: la littérature au second degré* (Paris: Seuil, 1982) and *Seuils* (Paris: Seuil, 1987).
- 9 Some modern editorial choices may explain that the links between paratext and main text have been missed: Gregory’s *Letter 29* and his brother’s answer, *Letter 30*, had been cut off from *Contra Eunomium* until W. Jaeger’s publication. But *Letter 15* seems to have never been linked to *Contra Eunomium* until it was written.
- 10 In particular, the titles in the manuscripts clearly pit the saintliness of Gregory against the heretical status of his opponent (κατὰ τοῦ δυσεβοῦς Εὐνομίου [Eun. I, mss. BT] / πρὸς τὸν Εὐνομίου τοῦ δυσσεβοῦς . . . [Eun. II, ms. M], πρὸς τὸν Εὐνομίου τοῦ ἀσεβοῦς . . . [Eun. II, mss. CTS]).
- 11 Unanimously for *Eun. I*, by ms. M for *Eun. II*, and apparently not for *Eun. III*.
- 12 Gregory of Nyssa, *Letter 29.3, Lettres. Grégoire de Nysse* (Pierre Maraval (ed. & trans.); Sources Chrétiennes, 363; Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1990), 310–11. Gregory designates his book in the same way in *Letter 15.2*: τῆς πρὸς τὴν ἀρεσιν ἀντιρρήσεως (ibid., 208–9).
- 13 F. Diekamp, ‘Literargeschichtliches zu der Eunomianischen Kontroverse’, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 18 (1909), 1–13.

- 14 Peter of Callinicus, *Petri Callinicensis Patriarchae Antiocheni Tractatus contra Damianum II–III* (Rifaat Y. Ebied, Lionel R. Wickham and Albert van Roey (eds); Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca, 29, 32, 35, 54; Turnhout; Leuven: Brepols; Leuven University Press, 1994–2003).
- 15 Pottier, *Dieu et le Christ selon Grégoire de Nysse*, 40. On internal divisions in Byzantine writings, see the stimulating perspectives of A. Failler, ‘Origine et authenticité des titres dans l’*Histoire* de Georges Pachymérés’, *Revue des études byzantines* 66 (2008), 95–123.
- 16 Matthieu Cassin, *L’écriture de la polémique à la fin du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle: Grégoire de Nysse, Contre Eunome III* (Thèse de doctorat, Université Paris IV – Sorbonne, 2009), vol. I, 135–7.
- 17 See J. A. Röder, *Gregor von Nyssa, Contra Eunomium I, 1–146, eingeleitet, übersetzt und kommentiert* (Patrologia 2; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1993), 73–4.
- 18 Cassin, *L’écriture de la polémique*, vol. I, 130–1.
- 19 Gregory of Nyssa, *Lettres. Grégoire de Nysse* (Pierre Maraval (ed. & trans); Greek text with French translation), 308–15; English translation in *Gregory of Nyssa: The letters: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Anna Silvas (trans.); Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 83; Boston: Brill, 2007), 206–8.
- 20 Gregory, *Lettres*, 314–19; *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 208–10.
- 21 Gregory, *Letter 29*, 7.
- 22 Gregory, *Lettres*, 208–11; *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 158–9.
- 23 I will not deal here with the discussion about the identity of the sophist. Giorgio Pasquali, ‘Le Lettere di Gregorio di Nissa’ in *Studi Italiani di Filologia Classica* n.s. 3 (1923), 111–12, thinks it was Libanios, but there is no definitive evidence.
- 24 Gregory of Nyssa, *Letter 15.3: προτροπή, ὥστε σφριγῶντας τῇ ἀκμῇ τῆς νεότητος καταθαροῦσαι τῆς πρὸς τοὺς ἐναντίους μάχης* (*Lettres*, 208–11; *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 159).
- 25 Basil of Caesarea, *Saint Basile, Lettres* (Yves Courtonne (ed. & trans.); Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1957), Vol. I, 50–1.
- 26 Alain Le Boulluec, *La notion d’hérésie dans la littérature grecque, II<sup>e</sup>–III<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Études Augustiniennes, Série Antiquité 110–111; Paris: Institut d’études Augustiniennes, 1985).
- 27 For a fuller analysis, see Cassin *L’écriture de la polémique*, vol. I, 260–8.
- 28 Bion of Borysthenes, *Bion of Borysthenes: A Collection of the Fragments with Introduction and Commentary* (Jan Fredrik Kindstrand (ed.); Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis; Studia Graeca Upsaliensia, 11; Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1976), frag. 51, with commentary, 259–60.
- 29 Plutarch, *De Vitioso Pudore* [On Compliancy] 536A in *Plutarch Moralia, Volume VII* (Phillip H. de Lacy and Benedict Einarson (trans); Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959); *Quaestiones Conviviales VII.5 (705D–E)* in *Plutarch Moralia, Volume IX: Table-Talk, Books 7–9, Dialogue on Love* (Edwin L. Minar Jr., F. H. Sandbach and W. C. Helmbold (trans); Loeb Classical Library, 425; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959); cf. also *Vita Aesopi Westermanni* 98:11–13 in *Aesopica. A Series of Texts Relating to Aesop or Ascribed to Him or Closely Connected with the Literary Tradition that Bears his Name. Collected and Critically Edited, in Part Translated from Oriental Languages, with*

- a Commentary and Historical Essay* (B. E. Perry (ed.), Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1952).
- 30 Lucian, *Necyomancia sive Menippus*, 4 in *Luciani Opera* II (M. D. MacLeod (ed.); Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).
- 31 See, for example, Clement of Alexandria, *Stromates*, VII.13.82.7 (A. Le Boulluec (ed. and trans.); Sources Chrétiennes, 428; Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1997), 254–5.
- 32 Homer, *Odyssey* (A. T. Murray and George Dimock (trans); Loeb Classical Library, 104–5; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1919), X:208–319.
- 33 Cf., for example, Plato, *Republic*, IX, 586a–b (Paul Shorey (trans.); Loeb Classical Library, 237, 276; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1930–5); *Timaeus*, 91e–92a (R. G. Bury (trans.); Loeb Classical Library, 234; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1929); Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, I.4.11–12 in *Xenophon Volume IV: Memorabilia. Oeconomicus. Symposium. Apology* (E. C. Marchant and O. J. Todd (trans); Loeb Classical Library, 168; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1923); Cicero, *De legibus*, I. 27 in *Cicero Volume XVI: On the Republic. On the Laws*. (Clinton W. Keyes (trans.); Loeb Classical Library, 213; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1928); *De Natura Deorum*, II. 140 in *Cicero Volume XIX: On the Nature of the Gods. Academics* (H. Rackham (trans.); Loeb Classical Library, 268; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1933); Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, I. 76–88 (Frank Justus Miller and G. P. Goold (trans); Loeb Classical Library, 42–3; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1916). See also, Gregory of Nyssa, *De Hominis Opificio*, VIII, Patrologia Graeca [henceforth PG], 44:144B.
- 34 Demosthenes, *Philippics*, IV.6 in *Demosthenes Orations, Volume I* (J. H. Vince (trans.); Loeb Classical Library, 238; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1930). See also, Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus*, X.103.1–2 in *The Exhortation to the Greeks. The Rich Man's Salvation. To the Newly Baptized* (G. W. Butterworth (trans.); Loeb Classical Library, 92; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1919).
- 35 For its Christological usage, cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *Oratio Catechetica* (Ekkehard Mühlberg (ed.); GNO III/4; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 62.8–10; *De Tridui Spatio in Sermones Pars I* (Gunther Heil et al. (eds); GNO IX; Leiden: Brill, 1992), 281.12–16; and the indications of R. Goulet in *Macarios de Magnésie. Le Monogénès. Édition et Traduction* (Richard Goulet (ed. & trans.); Textes et Traditions, 7; Paris: J. Vrin, 2003), 208–209 and n. 3. Cf. also some other uses in Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Usurarios in Sermones Pars I* (E. Gebhardt (ed.); GNO IX; Leiden: Brill, 1967), 197.27–198.1; 207.1–7; *In Ecclesiasten Homiliae in In Inscriptiones Psalmorum; In Sextum Psalmum; In Ecclesiasten Homiliae* (J. McDonough and P. Alexander (eds); GNO V; Leiden: Brill, 1962), 345.12–16; *De vita Moysis*, II. 297, *The Life of Moses* (Abraham Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (trans); The Classics of Western Spirituality; New York: Paulist Press, 1978); *Oratio Catechetica*, GNO III.4 56.22–57.1; *De Instituto Christiano in Opera Ascetica* (W. Jaeger, J. P. Cavarnos

- and V. W. Callahan (eds); *GNO VIII/1*; Leiden: Brill, 1952), 75.22–76.2; *De Oratione Dominica V* (Johannes F. Callahan (ed.); *GNO VII/2*; Leiden: Brill, 1992), 73.9–12, 26–8; *Contra Eunomium*, I.53.
- 36 See Gregory, *Contra Eunomium*, II.57; III.2.132; *Refutatio Confessionis Eunomii* 75, *GNO II.116*; and *De Hominis Opificio* XX PG 44.200A–201A.
- 37 See the full analysis in Cassin, *L'écriture de la polémique*, 268–87.
- 38 Cf. Plato, *Apologia Socratis* 18d (Harold North Fowler (trans.); Loeb Classical Library, 36; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1914); *Republic VII*, 520c–d; *Laws VIII*, 830c (R. G. Bury (trans.); Loeb Classical Library, 187, 192; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1926); Plutarch, *Quaestiones Conviviales*, 735C; *De Tuenda Sanitate Praecepta* in *Plutarch Moralia, Volume II* (F. C. Babbitt (trans.); Loeb Classical Library, 222; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1928), 130F; *De Garrulitate*, 514D in *Plutarch Moralia, Volume VI* (W. C. Helmbold (trans.); Loeb Classical Library, 337; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1939); *Adversus Colotem*, 1114A (*Reply to Colotes in Defence of the Other Philosophers*) in *Plutarch Moralia, Volume XIV* (Benedict Einarson and Phillip H. De Lacy (trans.); Loeb Classical Library, 428; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), etc.
- 39 Basil of Caesarea, *Contra Eunomium*, II.1.12–24.
- 40 Cf. Aristophanes, *Nubes (Clouds)* 549–50 in *Aristophanes Volume II* (Jeffrey Henderson (trans.); Loeb Classical Library, 488; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998); Aelius Aristides, *Or.* 3 (46), 498 in *Works* (C. A. Behr (trans.); Loeb classical library, 458–61; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973); Philostratus, *Vitae Sophistarum* II, 31, 2 (C. L. Kayser (ed.); Hildesheim, N.Y.: G. Olms, 1971), 116.24 [English translation: *Lives of the Sophists in Philostratus Volume IV* (Wilmer C. Wright (trans.); Loeb Classical Library, 134; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1921)]; Libanius, *Orationes* I.91 in *Orations* (Jean Martin (ed.) and Paul Petit (trans.); Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1979); *Progymnasmata* IX.2.16; XI.5.6 (Richard Foerster (ed.); Libanii Opera 8; Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana; Leipzig: Teubner, 1903–27); Choricus of Gaza, *Orationes* 35, 61 in *Choricii Gazaei Opera* (Richard Foerster and Eberhard Richtsteig (eds); Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana; Stuttgart: Teubner, 1972). See also, Basil of Caesarea, *Homilia in Martyrem Julittam*, PG, 31.257.23.
- 41 Herodotus, *Historiae*, IV.94 (Haiim B. Rosén (ed.); Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana; Leipzig: Teubner, 1987–1997). English translation: *The Histories* (Carolyn Dewald (ed.); Robin Waterfield (trans.); Oxford World's Classics; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
- 42 Cf. Zenobius in *Paroemiographi Graeci* III.46 (E. L. Leutsch and F. G. Schneidewin (eds); Göttingen: Vandenhoeck et Ruprecht, 1839–51), vol. I, 68–9.
- 43 Cf. Plutarch, *Amatorius*, 766A (*Dialogue on Love*) in *Plutarch Moralia, Volume IX* (Edwin L. Minar Jr., F. H. Sandbach and W. C. Helmbold (trans.); Loeb Classical Library, 425; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press,

- 1965); *De Pythiae Oraculis*, 409C–D (*The Oracles at Delphi No Longer Given in Verse*) in *Plutarch Moralia, Volume V* (Frank Cole Babbitt (trans.); Loeb Classical Library, 306; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1936).
- 44 Matthieu Cassin, “Plumer Isocrate”: usage polémique du vocabulaire comique chez Grégoire de Nysse’, *Revue des études grecques*, 121 (2008), 783–96.
- 45 See Henri-Dominique Saffrey, ‘Homo bulla, une image épicurienne chez Grégoire de Nysse’ in *Epektasis, mélanges patristiques offerts au cardinal Jean Daniélou* (Jacques Fontaine and Charles Kannengiesser (eds); Paris: Beauchesne, 1972), 533–44.
- 46 See a fuller analysis in Cassin, *L’Écriture de la Polémique*, vol. I, 288–97.
- 47 See Louis Robert, ‘Une épigramme satirique d’Automédon et Athènes au début de l’empire’, *Revue des études grecques* 94 (1981), 338–61; R. Merkelbach, ‘Der neue Euphranor in Bargylia und Euphranor, der Admiral von Caesars rhodischem Geschwader’, *Epigraphica Anatolica* 1 (1981), 29–32.
- 48 Basil of Caesarea, *Contra Eunomium*, I.1.32–3.
- 49 It is to be noted, however, that Basil ended his *Contra Eunomium* in a similar manner: there is no proper conclusion and it ends with the refutation of the last quotation, which is not the end of Eunomius’s *Apologia*. But Basil had not used here a particularly elaborate image nor a reference to the secular culture; his development ends with the evocation of the eschatological knowledge of God, which seems a more proper ending for a theological tract than a reference to Demosthenes and comedy.
- 50 It is true that other passages, among doctrinal developments, use a rare vocabulary and develop particularly elaborate images, like the comparison with the feathers and tail of a peacock (Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* III.1.25–7). They are not, however, as common as in the polemical sections.
- 51 See Phillippe Hoffmann, ‘Sur quelques aspects de la polémique de Simplicius contre Jean Philopon: de l’invective à la réaffirmation de la transcendence du ciel’, in *Simplicius, sa vie, son œuvre, sa survie : actes du colloque international de Paris (28 sept.–1<sup>er</sup> oct. 1985)* (Ilsetraut Hadot (ed.); Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 1987), 183–221.
- 52 See the survey in Cassin, *L’écriture de la polémique* vol. I, 169–214.
- 53 Cf., for example, Nicetas of Heraclea, *Catena Nicetae in Lucam*, extract 371, in *Synagôgê Paterôn eis to kata Loukan Euangelion* (Christou Th. Krikônê (ed.); Vyzantina keimena kai meletai, 9; Thessalonike: Kentron Vyzantinou Ereunôn, 1973), citing Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* III.2.45–57 on the Christological title of ‘First-Born’.
- 54 This text, Peter of Callinicus, *Tractatus contra Damianum II–III* (see n. 14), brings us back before the archetype of the Greek manuscript tradition and supplies some sections now lost in Greek.
- 55 For the context of this debate, see the introduction of the first volume: Peter of Callinicus, *Tractatus contra Damianum II–III* (R. Y. Ebied, Lionel R. Wickham and Albert van Roey (eds); Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca, 29; Turnhout; Leuven: Brepols; Leuven University Press, 1994).
- 56 Theodore Dexios, *Appellatio aduersus Iohannem Cantacuzenum* 37.23–25, in *Theodori Dexii Opera Omnia* (Ioannis D. Polemis (ed.); Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca, 55; Turnhout; Leuven: Brepols; Leuven University Press, 2003).

- 57 Nicephor Gregoras, *Antirrhetica* I.II.1.13 (Hans V. Beyer (ed. & trans.); Wiener Byzantinische Studien, 12; Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1976).
- 58 See Jacob Wickert, 'Die *Panoplia dogmatica* des Euthymios Zygabenos. Untersuchung ihrer Anlage und ihrer Quellen, ihres Inhaltes und ihrer Bedeutung', *Oriens Christianus* 8 (1908), 278–388, here 303–4 and A. N. Papavasileiou (Papavasileiou), *Euthymios-Iōannēs Zygadenōs: Vios, Syngraphai* (Leukōsia: Papavasileiou, 1979), 108–9.
- 59 M. Ludlow, *Gregory of Nyssa, Ancient and (Post)Modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

**Tamsin Jones:** The apologetic aim to ‘rescue’ Gregory from the overly broad application of a critique of Christian logocentric readings of Scripture does *not* challenge the basic parameters of the critique of logocentrism. On one level it is an attempt to be traditionally responsible by setting straight an inaccurate inclusion of Gregory within a critique of Christian logocentrism. And simply on this level, Gregory is surely not the only Christian writer/reader deserving of rescue – one thinks of Origen at the very least. However, I am not challenging the need for such a critique. In fact, the way I read Gregory and Levinas involves making a normative claim about how one ought to read authoritative texts in general (whether authoritative because ‘word of God’ or authoritative because part of, and representative of, a tradition/discourse in which one places oneself), namely, with a *lecture infinie*.<sup>1</sup>

There is a lot at stake in intervening in this debate on a number of levels. Most basically the accusation of a logocentric tendency of Christian readers of Scripture by Jewish readers of Scripture serves as a valuable and necessary corrective. It guards against a too-simple and too-univocal Christian identification with the signification of all the scriptural texts and Christ – as the founding ‘Logos’. Thus it is a necessary intervention into a history of hermeneutical violence.

However, on another level, it is important to guard against an unhelpful binary which enables the dismissal of the writings of the early Christians as simply ‘logocentric’. These texts, especially in the case of one like Gregory, cannot be reduced to simplistic equivocations of all words with the ‘Word’. They are more complex, and more *diverse*, than such a binary presupposes.

### *A Conversation with Matthieu Cassin (Sorbonne University)*

**Question:** Are you saying that previous conceptions of what has constituted a ‘historical’ reading have been too narrow? Or are you trying to criticize the very notion of a ‘historical’ reading?

**Matthieu Cassin:** I surely say here that some previous conceptions of ‘historical reading’ are too narrow if they are only concerned with reconstructing the *historical* and *theological* context of a book – perhaps even editing the best text we can now reconstruct – without also taking great care to be attentive to the literary form of the writing. This is true in so far as the text is seen mainly as a theological work whose interest to the modern reader is as a testimony to past theology.

Because the theological writings from the Patristic era have not been written for the most part in the same scientific way as modern theological writings, a reading that does not take into account the specific literary form and tools of such works seems too narrow. I'm trying here to widen reading from inside *historical reading* by adding a literary perspective that is not a simple gimmick in order to criticize other readings, but rather the introduction of a real twist to our reading perspective. That is, because the very nature of literature is to be not enclosed in the past but to go through subsequent eras, such a literary reading should open up new vistas, even theological.

**Question:** Is a literary reading, therefore, of a text like the *Contra Eunomium* III necessary or just *better* than the usual historical reading? In many ways, your analysis is very concerned with the 'how' of Gregory's theological production – bringing a more historical light on his choice of allusions, intertwining of genres, etc. What do you think are the implications for moving from a more sophisticated rhetorical understanding of *how* to a more sophisticated understanding of *what* he is saying? In particular, does your distinction between the literary and the theological aspects of Gregory's writing risk losing the content of what Gregory is saying? Are the literary aspects content neutral?

**Matthieu Cassin:** I think that a literary reading of *Contra Eunomium* III – and of many other Patristic writings – is necessary because of the very nature of the text: literature (to say it briefly) is part of the refutation *and* part of the theological elaboration, as M. Ludlow has also shown.<sup>2</sup> The literary aspects are not neutral and they have direct influence on the *what*, on the theological elaboration. To understand this influence, therefore, an investigation of the *how* is needed. To take two brief examples, Gregory of Nyssa's images are of vivid concern both for understanding the refutation of his adversaries and for understanding his own theological investigations. To explain his exegetical method about Pr 8, 22 (CE III.1), Gregory uses the image of the peacock's tail. At first look, this image is just an illustration of his theoretical explanation about the right way to read Scripture. But a second look should show that this image is richer than the theory: the beauty of the upper side of the tail mirrors the beauty of Scripture *when it is properly read* and the aesthetic pleasure that one experiences when looking at the upper side of the tail mirrors the spiritual pleasure of the true reader of Scripture, etc. Another example: a closer look at the literary structure of the *Contra Eunomium* will help [one] to understand how Gregory builds up his refutation of Eunomius's text. Such an investigation allows

us to see which part of Nyssen's books is directly addressed against Eunomius, which is turned against other adversaries, which is not directly concerned with refutation.

A literary investigation, therefore, allows the reader to discover some elements that are not immediately visible, but that are of real importance not only to understand a Patristic text, but also to interpret it in a modern context.

**Question:** If the context or the paratext is important, how do we know where to stop? (How much context do we need to read in order for our reading to be 'responsible'? Or to be a 'good' reading?)

**Matthieu Cassin:** This is a difficult question: I should say that we need as much context as we may be able to find and how deep our reading might go is, in fact, dependent upon this. 'No context' or 'minimal context' is not enough. Truly though, to unfold the whole context for a reasonably long text – historical, theological, literary context and so on – a whole life would not be enough. So, from a practical point of view, one should not go too deep and should proportion his investigation to his duty or goals. But a reading that just takes a Patristic work at face value and pretends to read it with fresh eyes and modern glasses would at least miss some important aspects of the text, and at worst introduce some major misinterpretations. Due to the historical, cultural and linguistic distance, a responsible reading of a Patristic text requires some investigations around the text.

**Question:** Clearly, many people think that the doctrinal aspects of the CE are translatable into the present (they read the CE as evidence for cogent arguments about the nature of God, of the limits of human language, etc.) But what about the reception of the other aspect of the CE: its invective? Can modern-day readers read this with pleasure? Two issues are raised here: (1) Has the cultural context which makes the text *pleasurable* been lost? (2) Do we now have ethical scruples about reading such invective with pleasure – especially if, for example, Gregory accuses Eunomius of being 'Jewish'?

**Matthieu Cassin:** I think that the cultural context that makes the text pleasurable has been partially lost. As a result, the standard modern reader, without any historical explanation, is not able to place the text back in its literary frame, making a more accessible process that makes it more enjoyable like we experience in the reading of a modern literary text. The intertextual frame of the ancient text – its simultaneous process of integration and distance from literary genre and conventions, and so

on – is no longer self-evident to a modern reader. But a scholarly reading can reconstruct at least part of this background, and give it back to the ‘simple’ reader. A good explanation wouldn’t place the modern reader in exactly the same reading posture as a fourth-century reader, of course, but may help him to find some pleasure in Nyssen’s text – not only pleasure caused by an understanding of the non-evident meaning, but also literary pleasure in the same way that an informed reader discovers in a medieval novel or of Rabelais that would, in large part, be missed by the uninformed reader. To expand a bit upon the example of Rabelais, if you do not know the literary conventions that preceded him and that he indirectly criticized, if you do not understand the allusions and ironical references, you will miss a great part of the pleasure a sixteenth-century reader would experience while reading Rabelais’s novels. In the same way, if a reader does not know the literary conventions and references Gregory was playing with in his refutation of Eunomius, a good part of the potential literary pleasure of reading him will be lost.

A non-contextualized reading of Nyssen’s invectives against Eunomius would produce ethical concerns, especially when Gregory accuses him of being Jewish, but I think that a contextualized reading should not, or at least should induce less scruples, because of the distance such a reading establishes. We may not ask fourth-century writers – even Christian writers – to behave in the same way or according to the same contextual standards as present writers, Christians or not. When Gregory is accusing Eunomius of being Jewish, he does not talk of any racial inferiority, but only of a religious attitude as the New Testament’s authors do when they speak collectively of ‘the Jews’ or ‘the Pharisees’ or ‘the priests’. ‘Jew, here, is not a racial indication, but a spiritual one, as Nyssen himself reminded the reader: a ‘Jew’ is not the person from Judea or even someone taking part at the cult in Nyssa’s synagogue (if there were ever to be a synagogue in Nyssa), but the man who read the Bible like the Jews in the New Testament. So, again, a non-contextualized reading of Gregory’s invectives is clearly misleading if we were to understand such invectives as we should read them in a twentieth-century anti-Semitic (Semite, not Jew . . . ) text. If we do so, we miss the purpose of Gregory. As a result, our ethical concerns will have arisen from our own preconceptions, not from the text itself. If we want to properly understand these attacks, we must take into account the meaning they had in the context in which they have been written.

**Question:** A reading which focuses on the dogma can either be historical or theological-philosophical: that is, it can ‘remain’ in the past, or seek

to carry over something from the past into the future. But to what extent can a literary reading transcend the past?

**Matthieu Cassin:** Literature, unlike dogma, is not strongly attached to an era, because concepts are not its central topic. Literature may become distant and strange, but this gap can be bridged (at least partially) with investigation. Literature does not need to be carried over from the past to the future because literature (I do not say cultural references of a particular book) isn't part of the past but rather the present. It is the very nature of Literature to be transhistorical: even if one were not to read Euripides' plays exactly in the same way in the twentieth century as when they had been written, they still do not need to be transposed to the present time. That is, you should prefer a production that makes Oedipus an apparent orphan from the Chechen war rather than a traditional production that reconstructs ancient Greece, while not changing anything to the text itself. You may need some linguistic help to understand Rabelais's French, but not any rewriting, not any conceptual translation and adaptation. So literature needs scholarship insofar as the past is distant from the present – and past culture from present culture – but needs no actualization except via reading. When dealing with dogma, on the contrary, we need a conceptual transposition and adaptation from a past intellectual context to the present one. If you just repeat ancient formulations, you should be true to your faith, but would not be able to explain it to your contemporaries, nor discuss it with anyone else. Literature is not inserted in the history of humanity in the same way: it needs contextualization, not adaptation.

*A Conversation with Johannes Zachhuber  
(Trinity College, Oxford University)*

**Question:** In your genealogical tracing of Jean Luc Marion's reading of Dionysius back to Schelling via Heidegger and Balthasar, you identify something of a fork in the reception history of Dionysius and apophaticism: the positive Schelling-Heidegger trajectory (that 'negation ultimately produces true positivity', p. 17) and the negative Kant-Nietzsche-early-Barth-Levinas-Derrida arc. This backward tracing, in theory, would eventually return to Dionysius and beyond to his antecedents, including numerous branches like the one you developed that represent key interpretive decisions that determined the canonical direction of reading Dionysius. Could you speak more broadly to the following statements/questions. To what degree does Marion's positive