FROM *SOPHISTOPOLIS* TO *EPISCOPOLIS.*

THE CASE FOR A THIRD SOPHISTIC[*]

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In 1983 D. A. Russell defined the stereotype of the Greek city in the Roman Empire as "sophistopolis",[1] due to the predominant and influential role of the literary works of rhetors and sophists in forming the social and political identity of cities. Unfortunately, this "archetype" of the "sophistopolis" and its literary pillars is all but absent from the bibliography on Greek imperial literature after the arrival of Constantine I. as emperor, as though some scholars have taken knowledge of the later literature for granted. A comprehensive study of fourth century literature as a whole is still lacking.[2] Of course, there are important papers and studies on authors such as Libanius, Themistius, Julian, Himerius, John Chrysostom, and Synesius, to name but a selection, yet the literature from

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[1] D. A. Russell, *Greek Declamation*, Cambridge, 1983, 22.

[2] A good but superficial handbook is A. Dihle, *Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire. From Augustus to Justinian*, 1994 (translation by M. Malzahn), London. In the last few decades, the following works have closed some gaps, though further work is still needed: P. L. Malosse, "Sans mentir. La dissimulation des faits genants dans la rhetorique de l´eloge, d´aprés l´exemple des discours royaux de Libanios," in : *Rhetorica* XVIII 3 (2000), 243-263; Id., *Libanios. Discours. LIX*, París, 2003 ; A. López Eire, *Semblanza de Libanio,* México, 1996; J. Ritoré Ponce, *Temistio. Discursos Políticos*, Madrid, 2000, J. Vanderspoel, *Themistius and the Imperial Court. Oratory, civic duty and paideia from Constantius to Theodosius*, Ann Arbor, 1995; J. Bouffartigue, *L´Empereur Julien et la culture de son temps*, Paris, 1992; R. R. Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus: rhetor and philosopher*, Oxford, 1969; W. Mayer, "The homily as historical document: some problems in relation to John Chrysostom," in: *Lutheran Theological Journal* 35 (2001) 17-22; Id., *The homilies of St. John Chrysostom. Provenance*, Rome, 2005.

the fourth century onwards has more than usually been studied as historical sources for the investigation of religious matters. Consequently, the literary value of these works has been substantially underestimated.

As a result, the study of later Greek rhetoric and its different branches suffers from some major omissions. Yet it is important to bear in mind that during the last centuries of the Roman Empire the development and importance of epideictic rhetoric reached its zenith.[3] In fact, it can be described, beyond any doubt, as the epitome of almost all types of imperial literature, since epideictic developed its own sub-system of genres, over twenty-five different types of orations, as well as adopting the forms of other literary genres such as poetry and religious hymns.[4]

This is why we should think of rhetoric in this period not as product but as process. In fact, this process – the Greek imperial rhetoric – was a valuable tool in establishing the limits of self-presentation and the boundaries of genre,[5] and the power of the different schools and cities:[6] it was one of the cornerstones of the relationship between the cultural elites of paganism and Christianity.[7] As Tim Whitmarsh has pointed out, "Oratory was not just a gentle pastime of the rich: it was one of the primary means that the Greek culture of the period, constrained as it was by Roman rule, had to explore issues of identity, society, family, and power."[8] Hence an in-depth study and a possible redefinition of fourth century literature should be carried out. The aim of this short paper is to elucidate whether in the light of this challenge the literature of the fourth century onwards could, as a consequence, be renamed as "Third Sophistic", considering some important religious and political changes at the period as well as new perspectives in research today opened up by literary theory, in particular reception studies[9] and the study of intertextuality.[10]

The starting point must be Philostratus, who speaks of "Second Sophistic" in opposition to "Ancient Sophistic": "We must regard the ancient sophistic art as philosophic rhetoric. For it discusses the themes that philosophers treat [...] But the sophistic that followed it, which we must not call 'new', for it is old, but rather 'second', sketched the types of the poor man and the rich, of princes and tyrants, and handled arguments that are concerned with definitive and special themes for which history shows the way."[11] This is an important

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[3] L. Pernot, *La rhétorique de l'éloge dans le monde Greco-Romain*, Paris, 1993, 605-609; T. M. Conley, "Byzantine Rhetorics," in: *Logo* 2 (2002) 27.

[4] T. C. Burgess, *Epideictic Literature*, New York-London (repr.), 1987, 110-113.

[5] M. W. Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome*, Princeton, 1995.

[6] R. Cribiore, *The School of Libanius in Late Antioch*, Princeton, 2007.

[7] D. K. Shuger, *Sacred Rhetoric. The Christian Grand Style in the English Renaissance*, Princeton, 1988, 42-53.

[8] T. Whitmarsh, *The Second Sophistic*, Oxford, 2005, 1.

[9] C. Martindale, *Redeeming the Text. Latin poetry and the hermeneutics of reception*, Cambridge, 1993; Id., "Introduction. Thinking through recepeion," in: C. Martindale and R.F. Thomas (eds.), *Classics and the Uses of Reception*, Oxford, 2006, 1-13.

[10] G. D'Ippolito, "Il concetto di intertestualità nel pensiero degli antichi," in: V. Bécares and others (eds.), *Intertextualidad en las literaturas griega y latina*, Madrid, 2000, 13-32.

[11] Philstr., *VS* 480-481. Translation by W. C. Wright.

text because it marks the division between two different literary tendencies, and it is unusual because the task of categorizing the ancient literary periods has usually been undertaken by modern scholars.

However, although the division between these two "sophistics" has the consent of an ancient author such as Philostratus, in modern times the literature of the Second Sophistic did not gain the admiration or interest of scholars as a discipline in its beginnings.[12] From the dismissive attitude of Wilamowitz, who lectured on Favorinus of Arelate and the style of the Second Sophistic writers as "an exemplar of his times [...], a soleicistic Atticizer, a rhetor-philosopher, a courtier vaunting his liberty, a eunuch itching with desire [...]; a man (pardon the expression!) of that sort suits the age, an age glowing with pleasingly variegated color, the color of a corpse on the brink of putrefaction,"[13] to B. Van Groningen's assertions about the Second Sophistic as a "museum of fossils",[14] imperial Greek literature has been reduced to a catalogue of pejorative terms: arthritic, empty, extravagant, artificial, impoverished.[15]

But in the last few decades there has been a sea change in the analysis of these Second Sophistic authors: the supposed timelessness and repetition of their texts have been studied not as a defect but as an inherent charasteristic, since most of the literary themes past and present are implicated in each other.[16] For instance, Sarah Spence has argued recently that repetition is a common characteristic residing at the core of almost all cultures and it does not have to bear a pejorative meaning.[17] As a result of that scholars no longer see the concept of "originality" as a dinstinctive sign of quality, whilst recognizing that the complex concept of "mimesis" was the one that predominated among the deuterosophists.[18] The intention of the authors from the Second Sophistic was not to create but to employ the past to build up meta-textual discourse, a literature capable of supplementing and enhancing the models which inspired it.

All these premises are useful for studying the texts of the first three centuries CE, or at least up until the advent of the age of Constantine. In fact, there is no reason why (almost all) the studies on Greek imperial literature could not conclude with the arrival of Constantine as emperor. It is clear that there were important cultural, religious and political changes from the third quarter of the

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[12] Compare Whitmarsh 2005, 6-9.

[13] I quote from Gleason 1995, 27. This idea finds support in P. A.Brunt, "The Bubble of the Second Sophistic," in: *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 39 (1994) 37.

[14] B. van Groningen, "General literary tendencies in the second century A.D.," in: *Mnemosyne* 18 (1965) 52.

[15] S. G. Maccormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity*, London, 1981, 2; J. Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*, London, 1989, 251-253; L. Pernot, "La rhétorique de l'Empire ou comment la rhétorique grecque a inventé l'Empire romain," in: *Rhetorica* XVI: 2 (1998) 131-133; B. P.Reardon, *Courants litteraires grecs des II et III siécles après J.C.*, Paris, 1971, 18-21.

[16] T. Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire. The politics of Imitation*, Oxford, 2001, 28.

[17] S. Spence, *Figuratively Speaking. Rhetoric and culture from Quintilian to the Twin Towers*, London, 2007, 19-20.

[18] Whitmarsh, 2001, 41-89.

third century,[19] but the question is whether these changes enable us to establish a new literary classification. As stated above, our knowledge is mainly based on arbitrary and artificial boundaries whose main task is (in this case) to help us to chart the different literary tendencies and movements of Late Antiquity. In fact, as Tim Whitmarsh has pointed out, "the modern use of the phrase 'The Second Sophistic' is not consonant with Philostratus' use."[20] But the artificiality of our definitions and boundaries also support the case for attempts to search for new denominations which are more accurate and capable of distinguishing clearly all the shades of the late Greek imperial literature. The "Golden" or "Silver" periods of Roman Literature, our conception of the Second Sophistic, the phrase "Late Antiquity", are periodisations established to make easier the study of the Graeco-Roman civilisation. So, why not talk of a Third Sophistic?

Some scholars have underlined the specificity of literature from the fourth century. Albin Lesky has pointed out that this literature represents the last great legacy of Antiquity.[21] Simon Swain has highlighted the impact of political and religious events of the fourth century on literature, and particularly, on rhetoric:

> "But much comes from the fourth century and later – especially Sopater, Choricius of Gaza (second quarter of the sixth century), and Libanius himself. These figures are part of the literary tradition of the Second Sophistic. But the world they live in is quite different. The consequences of the establishment of Christianity are one major change; the reorganized Roman Empire of the later third century and after is another. If in Libanius we can still recognize the combination of letters and political activity recorded by Philostratus, we can also see him trying to make sense of a changed world. In the person of Choricius, the last Greek sophist of Antiquity, Hellenic letters were firmly married to Christianity."[22]

Laurent Pernot analysed these changes and baptized them as the Third Sophistic: "Lorsque le christianisme devint religion officielle, la rhétorique chrétienne prit le pas sur la rhétorique païenne. Le tournant décisif se produisit au IVe siècle, une des époques les plus brillantes de l´histoire de la rhétorique antique, qui vit à la fois une sorte d´aboutissement de la tradition gréco-romaine et le triomphe des Pères."[23] So the possibility of talking about a "Third Sophistic" is not something that has appeared suddenly, it emerges at the end of a long development.

The purpose of this new nomenclature is to distinguish between the literature of the fourth century onwards and the works of the deuterosophists in relation

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[19] S. Swain, "Biography and Biographic in the Literature of the Roman Empire," in: M. J. Edwards and S. Swain (eds.), *Portraits. Biographical Representation in the Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire*, Oxford, 1997, 3-4.

[20] Whitmarsh 2001, 43.

[21] A. Lesky, *A History of Greek Literature*, London (translated by J. Willis and C. de Heer), 1966, 870-888

[22] S. Swain, "Sophists and Emperors: the case of Libanius," in: S. Swain and M. Edwards (eds.), *Approaching Late Antiquity. The transformation from early to Late Empire*, Oxford, 2003, 362-363.

[23] L. Pernot, *La rhétorique dans l´Antiquité*, Paris, 2000, 271.

to the influence of the rise of Christianity and the transition toward a Christian order. Several features can be singled out as idiosyncratic characteristics of the period.

The meta-linguistic function of the works of Dio Chrysostom, Lucian or Plutarch almost vanished: the obsession with linguistic accuracy, the very same accurate passion of the "deipnosophists" of Athenaeus with their answer ποῦ κεῖται – where is it attested? – has decreased. Due to these reasons, the concept of the "secondariness" has almost disappeared. That is, the constant anxiety about imitating the classical models – the anxiety of influence, as Harold Bloom describes it – diminished as the intertextuality, the mimesis, the bond between "presentisism" and "historicism" was taken for granted.

This situation contributed to making rhetoric more pragmatic and more related to its historical context. Rhetoric was no longer (except in schools) a collection of fireworks, a mere dialogue of *suasoriae/controversiae*,[24] but a useful tool of persuasion, the cornerstone where reality and literature became involved with each other.[25] Rhetoric, in fact, benefited "from the realization that its practices are not a jumble of techniques, but are, instead, a coherent theory in the cognitive class."[26]

This greater involvement with historical events led rhetoric to push aside stereotyped declamations on mythological subjects: "[l]ike the provision of food and lodging in Macdonalds, Starbucks and Holiday Inns, a sophistic declamation might be expected to be similar in form and content wherever in the Greek world its audience was gathered."[27] In the case of rhetoric of the Third Sophistic, the taste for realistic issues overshadowed the tradition, but rather than trying to persuade the audience, rhetoric aimed to analyze and explain the facts at the core of the transition towards a Christian order.

Because of its flexibility, rhetoric was becoming a hermeneutic tool the purpose of which ranged from grammatical analysis and biblical exegesis[28] to literary propaganda.[29] For instance, in 387 Antioch witnessed a riot when an extraordinary tax was demanded by the emperor Theodosius. As a result of this event, the pagan sophist Libanius of Antioch wrote five orations on the riot. The first of these orations was an ambassador's speech in which Libanius pretended to have gone to Constantinople before the emperor Theodosius I. and pleaded his forgiveness. His audience were well aware that he had stayed in Antioch during and after the riot and that he was displaying his rhetorical skills not to convince them of the content of his speech (i.e. that he was the

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[24] Brunt 1994, 24-25.

[25] P. Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity. Towards a Christian Empire*, Madison, 1992, 31.

[26] M. Dascal, A. G. Gross, "The marriage of pragmatics and rhetoric," in: *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 32:2 (1999) 129.

[27] E. Bowie, "The geography of the Second Sophistic: cultural variations," in B. E. Borg (ed.), *Paideia: the world of the Second Sophistic*, Berlin-New York, 2004, 72.

[28] F. M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*, Cambridge, 1997; G.Yamasaki, *Watching a Biblical Narrative. Point of view in Biblical Exegesis*, London, 2008 (forthcoming).

[29] T. D. Barnes, "Scholarship or Propaganda? Porphyry *Against the Christians* and its historical setting," in: *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 39 (1994) 53-65.

saviour of Antioch), but to protect and perpetuate the role of the sophist within the city. Thus rather than persuading the emperor Libanius made use of the riot to interpret the events. Rhetoric was evolving into hermeneutics.[30]

In fact, rhetoric as Libanius and the sophists understood it (as a strict set of rules and *topoi* to make and deliver *pro* or *contra* speeches) was declining because of the increasing pressure of other disciplines such as Roman law or Latin.[31] Lamentations about this state of affairs were frequent in fourth century literature: "So when the students in the schoolrooms see this, don't you think they have often said to themselves, 'What profit is there for me from these countless labours, whereby I must go through many poets, many orators and all kinds of literature, if the result of my exhausting efforts is that I hang around in dishonour, and somebody else becomes successful?'"[32]

Now rhetoric was not a matter of beliefs: "Quand l'intérêt des lettres est en jeu, les différends d'ordre religieux s'oublient vite."[33] Still, the bonds between rhetoric and paganism are obvious. Authors of the Second Sophistic ignored the rise of a certain type of Christian literature in to great extent: "Le monde de la Seconde Sophistique ignore largement le christianisme. Dans les *Vies* de Philostrate, la nouvelle religion est totalment absente."[34] Yet it is necessary to take account of the importance of rhetoric in Christian culture as a disrupting presence on the surface of fourth century literature.

First, we should consider again the concept of *paideia* as the matrix for literature of the fourth century. Christians and pagans had a similar education based on a canonical *paideia*, but this *paideia* was the root of an important duplicity: a relevant group of Christians began to think that the moral values of the classical *paideia* were inappropriate, and there is an identifiable tendency for forms of argument in Christian literature to be more strongly influenced by biblical motifs than by the classical models. In a time when Christians were trying to define themselves, their Holy Scriptures became the counterpart of classical *paideia* in its attempt to link literature and the concept of self-representation through literature.

Taking the stylistic issues for granted (i.e. Atticism and Asianism avoiding the *koine* that Christians and pagans shared), what really invigorated the praxis and relevance of rhetoric in fourth centuty literature was the conception of rhetoric within Christianity.[35] Rhetoric became an important topic in the context of the Christian adoption of classical subjects, but Christianity wanted to

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[30] Spence 2007, 94-96; C. J. Swearingen, *Rhetoric and Irony. Western Literacy and Western lies*, New York-Oxford, 1991, 178-179.

[31] Cribiore 2007, 6 and 206-212; G. Wöhrle, "Líbanios' Religion," in: *PCULGC* 7 (1995) 76.

[32] Lib., *Or.* LXII, 12. Transalation from A. F. Norman, *Antioch as a Centre of Hellenic Culture as Observed by Libanius*, Liverpool, 2000, 92.

[33] J. Schamp, "Sophistes à l´ambon. Esquisses pour la Troisième Sophistique comme paysage littéraire", in: E. Amato, A. Roduit, M. Steinbrueck (eds.), *Approches de la Troisième Sophistique. Homagges à Jaques Schamp*, Brussels, 2006, 314.

[34] Pernot 1993, 773.

[35] P. Auski, *Christian Plain Style. The evolution of a spiritual idea*, Montreal, 1995, 145; R. R. Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus. Rhetor and Philosopher*, Oxford, 1969, 174; I. Sandwell, *Religous identity in Late Antiquity. Greeks, Jews and Christians in Antioch*, Cambridge, 2007, 55-56.

stress the fact of its view and conception of rhetoric as separated from pagan values: "What clearly emerges from the patristic concern with the charms and dangers of secular, classical culture is not simply an anxiety over its appeal to Christians or a sense of tension between pagan and spiritual allegiances, but a growing realization that Christian letters and culture have a distinct and valuable nature of their own, quite separate from worldly artistry."[36]

In contrast to allegorical statements or verbal wisdom which did not require specialized skills in the first three centuries A.D.,[37] Christian rhetoricians in the fourth century tended to display the oratorical and rhetorical skills that Augustine would try to moderate in his *De Doctrina Christiana*. Augustine stated that the Christian orator "will succeed more by piety in prayer than by gifts of oratory; and so he ought to pray for himself, and for those he is about to address, before he attempts to speak. And when the hour is come that he must speak, he ought, before he opens his mouth, to lift up his thirsty soul to God, to drink in what he is about to pour forth, and to be himself filled with what he is about to distribute."[38] The point here is that there is no persuasion unless the preacher has the divine *placet*. These considerations were usually followed by Christians preachers, as John Chrysostom shows when he talks abouth the attempts of bishop Flavian to persuade emperor Theodosius I: "For whilst the Emperor is supplicated, and the priest is supplicating, He Himself will interpose, softening the heart of the Emperor, and exciting the tongue of the priest; facilitating his utterance; preparing the mind of the other to receive what is said and with much indulgence, to accede the petitions."[39] Behind these statements lies a new vision of the platonic debate between philosophy and rhetoric. This debate was now performed in a Christian key.[40]

However, Christian rhetoric suffered from a stylistic duality. The appeal for plain style had to face the need to attract audiences and keep them attentive.[41] Augustine and Chrysostom themselves approved the use of "rhetorical fireworks" as a means to preach to an audience that was used to the performances of orators and sophists. So Augustine draws the attention of the Christian orator/preacher to the fact that "when we keep monotonously to one style, we fail to retain the hearer's attention; but when we pass from one style to another, the discourse goes off more gracefully, even though it extends to a greater length."[42] This seems to have reached a stable consensus as we can find the same idea in Chrysostom's text: "We need to be well equipped to decorate the

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[36] Auski 1995, 153.

[37] G. Anderson, *Sage, Saint and Sophist. Holy men and their associates in the Early Roman Empire*, London, 1994, 73-74.

[38] Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, IV, 32. Translation by Ph. Schaff in www.ccel.org. Shuger 1988, 42-50; Swearingen 1991, 176-177.

[39] John Chrysostom, Homily on the Statues III (PG 49, 49). Translation by Ph. Schaff in www.ccel.org.

[40] J. Bregman, *Synesius of Cyrene. Philosopher-bishop*, Berkeley, 1982, 141.

[41] J. Maxwell, ,*Christianization and Communication in Late Antiquity. John Chrysostom and his congregation in Antioch*, Cambridge, 2006, 94-106.

[42] Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, IV, 19. Translation by Ph. Schaff in www.ccel.org.

discourse with comparisons and examples to choose among them the most suitable for the moment."[43]

The result of the a priori argument of refraining from excessive eloquence and the usual insertion of rhetorical figures can be summarized in the following sentence by John Chrysostom: "The church is not a theatre to come and listen for amusement."[44] In spite of Chrysostom´s attempts to make the church a holy place where only celestial and trascendental issues matter, his audience expected entertainment to the extent that bishops "hired claques to lead their audiences' applause."[45]

In my opinion, all these facts could lead us to a reinterpretation of literature and rhetoric in the fourth century: Christianity speeded up the impact of rhetoric in society, both daily life and imperial matters. The result is that pragmatism and interactivity were the main characteristics of fourth century rhetoric and literature since there were new institutions, figures and people to praise or to vituperate: "The very fact that they used a rhetorical form of public display that was popular as well as common in the ancient world helped them to spread their Christian message rather than hindered them in any way."[46]

According to Libanius (*Epp.* 226, 5; 245, 8; 1346, 3), the mission of all sophists was to put rhetoric in practice for the commonwealth of the city, but because of the new political and religious situation the position of the most prominent figure of the city was shared by bishops. Rhetoric, beyond any doubt, was one of the main factor that conducted this change: "El rétor de la Antigüedad Tardía se convierte así en el obispo de la Edad Media y la Retórica sigue siendo lo que siempre fue, la Retórica sigue siendo política, continúa enseñando a conducir a las masas por la palabra, a convertir el lenguaje en política."[47]

A good example of how this transition from "*sophistopolis* to *episcopolis*" took place is the case of Amphilochius of Iconium, who attended the school of Libanius, but then became bishop of Iconium.[48] In *Ep.* 1543 Libanius regrets that Amphilochius has become "a great loot" for the Christians, but at the same time he congratulates him because "I hear how you move the crowd, how wonderful it is, how the shouts are resounding, and I don't doubt it."[49] Thus rhetoric and literature were regarded during the fourth century as active agents whose ability to influence in society was increasing. Bernard Schouler considered this factor as a main characteristic of fourth century literature: "Or il semble que les sophistes du IVe siècle aient été plus preoccupés de morale, ne fût-ce que de morale scolaire, que leurs devanciers du IIe siècle. Au temps du principal il faut, pour faire oeuvre de moraliste, se rattacher plus ou moins à la tradition philosophique, comme ce fut le cas de Plutarque ou de Dion de

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[43] John Chrysostom, *De Prophetiarum Obscuritate I* (PG 56, 165).

[44] John Chrysostom, Homily on the Statues II (PG 49, 38).

[45] Maxwell 2006, 61.

[46] Sandwell 2007, 57.

[47] A. López Eire, J. Santiago Guervós, *Retórica y comunicación política*, Madrid, 2000, 60.

[48] A. López Eire, *Semblanza de Libanio*, México D.F., 1996, 207-221; Maxwell 2006, 35-39.

[49] Translation from J. Maxwell 2006, 37.

Pruse, et même de Lucien, alors que dans l´empire post-constantinien les so-
phistes semblent conscients de leurs responsabilités morales même si, comme
Libanios ou Himérios, ils n´ont pratiquement aucune attache avec la philoso-
phie. À la différence d´Aelius Aristide Libanios se sent investi d´une impor-
tante mission éthique, tout autant que son contemporain Thémistios, bien qu´il
n´ait pas, comme ce dernier, la moindre attirance pour la philosophie.”[50]

All these statements can make an important difference in illuminating the
relationship between Second Sophistic and Third Sophistic. Christian litera-
ture was able to create its own rhetoric and so became one of the main forces
for the dynamic of the discipline in Late Antiquity. Simon Swain summarizes
the change by singling out in the gap between biographical works: “The so-
phists of Philostratus’ *Lives* have a very public persona, and politics and cul-
ture are well integrated. Eunapius’ philosophers and sophists, who form a
majority of the pagan ‘holy men’ known to us, are far more intense, more
obsessive, and aware of the real dangers of public gesture and the hazards
political involvement now held for them. The powerlessness of these figures
can be measured by the success of the Christians, for whom earthly power –
whether it mattered or not – was easily available.”[51]

It could be said that that was a symbiotic relationship as Christianity found
a powerful tool for its purposes, enabling Christian writers to develop their own
rhetorical and ethical paradigms.[52] Hence rhetoric was invigorated as it became
part of the Christian cultural legacy. As Sarah Spence has underlined recently,
“Yet the very prospect of speaking well contains within it a notion that changes
with time. If we accept that rhetoric is connected with articulating the good, we
must also grant that the representation of that good varies as a culture changes.”[53]

The historical background is also important here. In addition to the reforms
concerning the role of important social figures (especially, the sophists and their
new status[54]) carried out by the emperor Diocletian,[55] the relevant influence of
Christianity on society marked a new need to construct identities. Throughout
the period of the Roman Empire, things “Hellenic” or “Greek” were not clearly
defined, but belonged to a complex blend, an aggregation of shades that only
gradually became a stereotyped group. Thus recent papers have demonstrated
the variations and diversity of the conception of the terms “Hellenic” or “pa-
gan” when related to the cultural movement of the Second Sophistic.[56] The
cultural elites and deuterosophists would define themselves in opposition to
the barbarians or to Roman culture, but the massive pressure of Christianity in

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[50] B. Schouler, *La tradition hellenique chez Libanios*, Lille, 1977, 941.

[51] Swain 1997, 35.

[52] C. Rapp, “Comparison, paradigm and the case of Moses in Panegyric and Hagiography,”
in: M. Whitby (ed.), *The Propaganda of Power. The role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, Lei-
den, 1998, 277-298.

[53] Spence 2007, 10.

[54] G. A. Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric under Christian Emperors*, Princeton, 1983, 134-135.

[55] S. Corcoran, *The Empire of the Tetrarchs. Imperial pronouncements and goverment AD
284-324*, Oxford, 2000 (revised edition), 234-254; S. Williams, *Diocletian and the Roman re-
covery*, London, 1985, 132-134.

[56] Bowie 2004, 65; C. P. JONES, “Multiple identities in the age of the Second Sophistic,”
in: B.E. Borg (ed.), *Paideia: the world of the Second Sophistic*, Berlin-New York, 2004, 13.

the fourth century obliged them to redefine what it meant to be pagan, Christian or Jewish: "It was only from the beginning of the fourth century that the terms *Hellênes, hellênikos* and *hellênismos* came into common usage among Greek-speaking Christian writers such as Athanasius and Eusebius. From then onwards these terms appear to have been used interchangeably with *ta ethnê* to designate those who were neither Jews nor Christians and who worshipped the Graeco-Roman gods in some form."[57]

What matters here is that these attempts to construct religious identities were made through rhetoric. The conception of rhetoric in the works of Themistius, Julian or Libanius reveals is indebted to classical models (Plato, Demosthenes, Isocrates, Aristotle), which, as a result, were reinvigorated. In fact, the moral and ethical values that can be found at the core of the pagan mentality were taken from that rhetorical learning.

On the other hand, Christianity was developing its own rhetoric: based on the classical models it was cleaned of pagan content and then reused in order to build up a Christian discourse.[58] Hermeneutics, interpretation and adoption of New Testament texts to be inserted in fourth century rhetoric as arguments were an idiosyncratic feature of it. The best example for this kind of rhetoric is John Chrysostom. His oratorical skills found their counterpart in the Pauline epistles, which Chrysostom reconfigured for the current religious and political situation. Just as pagan authors relied on their literary models, so many fourth century Christian authors were "locked" in a "symbiotic engagement"[59] with New Testament texts, which they interpreted and developed into a new kind of rhetorical literature.

Basil of Caesarea's "Address to young men on the Right Use of Greek Literature" can be interpreted as no less than a short essay on this very model. Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*, though in its influence restricted to the Latin sphere, can be considered the climax of this process of purification and refinement, because it unites rhetorical devices with Christian ethics.[60] Thus Cato's concept of the orator as *vir bonus dicendi peritus* was substitued by a new concept, that of *vir sanctus dicendi peritus*.

A catalogue of authors from the "Third Sophistic" is not yet available. In a kind of parricidal act, I would like to dare to contradict one of the "fathers" of this possible "Third Sophistic", Laurent Pernot, who restricts the list of authors from the "Third Sophistic" only to pagan writers – especially sophists –, or to authors whose activity embraced the different functions of a sophist: "Le domaine grec païen connut un tel éclat que les savants modernes parlent parfois, à ce propos, d´une «Troisième Sophistique», représentée par les orateurs et professeurs Libanios et Himerios, l'orateur-philosophe Thémistios, l'Empereur Julien, le théoricien des *progumnasmata* Aphthonios."[61] In my opinion, it might be necessary to obviate these requirements and expand this list to include

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[57] Sandwell 2007, 149.

[58] E. J. Watts, *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria*, London, 2006, 17.

[59] M. Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet. John Chrysostom and the art of pauline interpretation*, London, 2000, XVIII.

[60] Swearingen 1991, 176-177.

[61] Pernot 2000, 271.

some Christians authors; for I suggest that the rise and impact[62] of "Christian culture", though in itself a problematic concept, was an important factor in the birth of the "Third Sophistic". If we consider that, it might also be possible to speak not only of Themistius, Libanius, and Himerius, but also of John Chrysostom, Synesius, and others as appropriate candidates to be included in that movement that might be called the "Third Sophistic", although we probably must remain aware that locating and making a catalogue of this sort may lead to misunderstandings.

Political, social and especially religious changes strongly impacted on the course of fourth century literature. Even if we accept all these characteristics as defining for a "Third Sophistic", it does not follow that this new classification entails a break of every single link with the Second Sophistic, on the contrary. There are important objections to this new denomination, important obstacles to establishing this term as the magic key that could help us in our efforts to reach a more complete knowledge. As mentioned earlier, regarding style the respect for the canon remained stable. Apart from quotations from Holy Scripture there were no attempts to trangress or undermine the literary canon. Homer, Plato, Isocrates, Demosthenes, Sophocles, they all continued to stand fast as the main models to imitate, and provided inspiration for most authors, Christians and pagans alike. Mimetic style and the supremacy of epideictic still stood as the main features of literary production.

The fact of renaming the literature of the fourth century onwards as "Third Sophistic" could be thought of as the starting point to inaugurate an endless series of sophistics. The nomenclature of this movement has been the main hobbyhorse of contemporary francophone scholars: some authors consider that it would be better to denominate it "2.1" or "Second Sophistic bis" in order to emphasize the stylistic continuity with the Second Sophistic alongside some of the characteristics of the "Third Sophistic", such as the same rhetorical skills, similar "topoi" or the great influence and impact of rhetoric on political and social daily life throughout the Empire.

But first of all we must be aware that the modern use of the concept "Second Sophistic" is not consonant with its original meaning, because modern scholarship tends toward the "application of a literary-generic term to a historical period."[63] Classification based on a chronological criterion does not guarantee the accuracy and correctness of a theory. Thus Victor Vitanza has proposed a "Third Sophistic" whose main exponents are Gorgias, Nietzsche, Lacan or Foucault.[64] This achronological sophistry is founded under the same assumptions of Philostratus' statement: style and content have priority over diachronical account.

In conclusion, what I would like to achieve with the concept of the "Third Sophistic" is the development of a valuable working tool, which could be used to destroy the myth of the Late Greek imperial Literature as a motionless and static one. Rhetorical theories were fixed since the second century A.D., and

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[62] About the impact of Christianity in other literary genres, Swain 1997, 35-37.

[63] Whitmarsh 2001, 43.

[64] V.Vitanza, "Some more notes. Toward a Third Sophistic," in: *Argumentation* 5 (1991) 117-139.

the topics remained unchangeable, but the praxis of rhetoric in Late Antiquity was far from being arthritic. The influence of Christian culture on literature, the increasing impact of the rhetoric at all social levels, the relationship be-tween paganism and Christianity conducted by rhetoric and literature are themes that can lead us to redefine some stereotypes about fourth century literature and, perhaps, enable us to establish a new terminology.

I agree with Tim Whitmarsh when he states that "attempts to come up with absolutist definitions of literary genres, movements, and cultures are rarely successful, and almost without exception desperately uninteresting."[65] But as long as an attempt to define a literary genre can assist the researcher in his task, why not try it?

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[65] Whitmarsh 2005, 5. Similar convictions about scholars overrating the Second Sophistic can be found in P. A.Brunt, "The bubble of the Second Sophistic," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 39 (1994) 25-52.