

TWO LAUDATIONES

THE LITERARY SCHOLAR AS INTELLECTUAL HISTORIAN:

MICHAEL J. B. ALLEN AND WESTERN THOUGHT

&

BRIAN COPENHAVER: OR ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATOR AS SHAPE-SHIFTER

JOHN MONFASANI

UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY – SUNY



Ephemera are meant for particular moments. But some moments are worth preserving in special ways, and in the case of Professors Allen and Copenhaver, a moment that allows a retrospective look at their impactful scholarly careers not only pays tribute to them, but also gives us particular insight into the course of Renaissance scholarship for much of the last half century.¹ The talks deliberately contain a good deal of whimsy,² but also, I hope, indications of the achievements of these two great scholars.

¹ The first of these talks was delivered on 16 November 2012 at the University of California, Los Angeles, at the symposium ‘The Poetic Theology of Michael J. B. Allen’, organized to honor upon his retirement the greatest living student of the Renaissance philosopher Marsilio Ficino. The second talk was also delivered at UCLA, this time on 24 January 2015, as one of several appreciations by various scholars that constituted the ‘Brian Fest’ organized to honor upon his retirement one of the most distinguished scholars today of Renaissance philosophy, intellectual history, magic, and occultism. Since then Professors Allen and Copenhaver have continued to publish at an enviable rate and have in the press or in the process of completion still more works of scholarship. But to attempt to update the talks would be Sisyphean, given the continued productivity of Professors Allen and Copenhaver, and would in the end also distort the talks as they were given at the time. So the texts are reproduced here as they were delivered.

² Two references in the talk on Michael Allen might need elucidation for anyone not familiar with American sports. The first is to the NCAA’s Final Four in college

I

The Literary Scholar as Intellectual Historian: Michael J. B. Allen and Western Thought

Michael J. B. Allen is a man of many parts. *Inter alia*, he has a way with titles, from strangled chickens and nuptial numbers to Plato's third eye and the six academies of the moon. But what I would like to focus here on is something that never appears in his titles, namely, the way he has conducted a conversation with certain intellectuals. Obviously, both in the titles of his works on Marsilio Ficino and in their substance Michael has carried on a conversation with the ancients. Plato, Plotinus, Proclus, Syrianus, Hermias, Plutarch, Dionysius the Areopagite, Apuleius, Boethius, and many other classical worthies appear in his pages. But what interests me in this paper is the conversation he has carried on with the moderns, and more specifically, with three moderns: Paul Oskar Kristeller, Edgar Wind, and D. P. Walker. Let me start with Kristeller.

Like Michael, Kristeller was a learned immigrant to our shores from across the Atlantic who trained in classics. But after that the similarities begin to break down. For one thing, as he aged, Kristeller listed severely to port as he walked and had this terrible habit of stopping in the middle of heavy traffic while crossing Amsterdam Avenue next to Columbia to expound upon an arcane point to his helpless and utterly terrified companion. Thus far, Michael hasn't shown any sign of these tendencies, even if he sometimes seems to lack situational awareness, such as at the time when the Renaissance Society of America was holding its annual meeting at Duke University and Duke was in the NCAA's Final Four, a student passed by saying he was hurrying to see the game and Michael asked, 'What game?'

Michael has always been deeply conscious of the great debt he and all other Ficinian scholars owe Kristeller. With his very first words in his very first book on Ficino, *Marsilio Ficino: The Philebus Commentary* in 1975, Michael began: 'Pre-eminently it is a joy to thank Professor Paul O. Kristeller who sat down out of the goodness of his heart two years ago and read through my typescript, correcting errors, providing me with invaluable suggestions and directing my attention to the Pesaro fragments. He is legendary for his kindness, but such spontaneous generosity of time and great learning is surely of the golden age'.³ One can find similar sentiments in Michael's books and articles since 1975. I wish to record

basketball, which mesmerizes the American sport scene for a weekend the way the World Cup in soccer does the rest of the world. The second is to the baseball player Lawrence 'Yogi' Berra (1925–2015), one of the most beloved figures in American sports history, famous for the many (very often apocryphal) sayings, characterized by amusing malapropisms, attributed to him.

³ Michael J. B. Allen, *Marsilio Ficino: The Philebus Commentary*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975, p. 5.

here, however, an oral testimony. Some years ago at a conference, after a younger scholar had magisterially declared that Kristeller's monograph on the philosophy of Marsilio Ficino has now been superseded, I witnessed Michael rising up from the audience to give a spirited and lengthy defense of Kristeller's seminal book as still centrally important for our understanding of Ficino. But to paraphrase Aristotle, Michael was Kristeller's friend, but truth's first.

So the *discipulus* did not draw back from correcting the *magister*. One of Michael's most important articles is 'Ficino's theory of the five substances and the Neoplatonists' *Parmenides*', which first appeared in *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* in 1982.⁴ Here Michael challenged one of the fundamental arguments of Kristeller's *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, namely, Ficino's originality in positing a hierarchy of five substances (God, Angel, Soul, Quality, and Matter) instead of the Plotinian six (the One, Mind, Soul, Sense, Nature, and Body). Michael's article itself has a prehistory. In a no less innovative article, corrective of Kristeller, Michael two years earlier had published in the *Journal of the History of Ideas* the article 'The absent angel in Ficino's philosophy'.⁵ In this earlier article, Michael argued that despite its second place in Ficino's hierarchy, the angel had lost its ontological function for Ficino. Michael's concluding paragraph is worth quoting in full not just because it summarizes his view, but also because it captures Michael's extraordinary ability to combine philosophical analysis, literary allusion, religious consciousness, and poetic imagination, so characteristic of Ficino, but absent from almost all his commentators save Michael:

'The overall conclusion seems inescapable. Despite the vestigial presence of the Dionysian angel and the scholastic elaboration of various arguments affecting it and involving it, and despite Ficino's own incidental employment of these arguments in his theological proofs, the concept of the angel is diminishing in significance on every important philosophical level. On the crucial ontological level it is being undermined by his dynamic theory of the soul as an entity that has ceased to be a fixed member of the universal hierarchy and has acquired copulative and also transcendent powers beyond those of the angel. On the epistemological, and so on the related ethical levels also, the angel has had its powers either abrogated or preempted by the soul. From Ficino's imaginative, mystagogical, and religious points of view, of course, the angel is still ubiquitously vital. The six-winged holy ones, crying the one to the other, 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord

⁴ Michael J. B. Allen, 'Ficino's theory of the five substances and the Neoplatonists' *Parmenides*', *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 12 (1982), pp. 19-44; reprinted as 'Essay VIII' in Michael J. B. Allen, *Plato's Third Eye: Studies in Marsilio Ficino's Metaphysics and its Source*, Aldershot, Hampshire: Variorum, 1995.

⁵ Michael J. B. Allen, 'The absent angel in Ficino's philosophy', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 36:2 (1975), pp. 219-240; reprinted as Essay I in Allen, *Plato's Third Eye*.

God of Hosts', in the year that King Uzziah died, are both the mightiest ornaments of the cosmos and the awful presences to be felt and prayed to: Ficino must have celebrated them at the sound of every sanctus bell. Nevertheless, from Ficino's strictly philosophical viewpoint the angel has lost its necessary functions and powers. It is a fossil bearing the imprint of traditional theological and quasi-philosophical ascriptions; it is no longer the instrument for truly profound or creative thinking'.⁶

Having thus demolished the Ficinian angel as an empty category, Michael proceeded in his article two years later to show that Neoplatonists after Plotinus, specifically Proclus, Plutarch, and the mysterious 'philosopher of Rhodes' had developed a hierarchy of five substances and that Ficino had read all of this in Proclus' commentary on Plato's *Parmenides* in the context of the three Plotinian hypostases and the nine hypotheses identified by the Neoplatonists in the *Parmenides*. What is striking and, indeed, characteristic of Michael's discussion in this article is how much of his analysis revolved about Ficino's commentary on a Platonic dialogue and on a Neoplatonic commentary on a Platonic dialogue. Kristeller especially focused on Ficino's *Platonic Theology*, implicitly and explicitly playing it off of Plotinus' *Enneads*, which Kristeller knew so well from his doctoral dissertation. It certainly would be patently false to say that Michael and Kristeller were looking at two different Ficinios, least of all when Michael has translated all of Ficino's *Platonic Theology* into English. Nonetheless, the fact remains that Michael has very much made his career by attending to Ficino's commentaries and introductions to Platonic dialogues, starting with the *Philebus*, and continuing on to the *Phaedrus*, the *Sophist*, the *Republic*, the *Timaeus*, the *Laws*, and, of course, the *Parmenides*. Nor has Michael ignored Neoplatonist commentaries, as these two articles on the *Phaedrus* commentaries of the minor Neoplatonist Hermias attest. In any case, it is worth quoting Michael's conclusion in his 1982 article 'Ficino's Theory of the Five Substances and the Neoplatonists' *Parmenides*':

'It was only logical and perhaps inevitable, once Ficino had become acquainted with the orthodox Neoplatonic interpretation of the *Parmenides*, and particularly, with the history of the breakthroughs leading to its establishment, that he should then accept it himself, at least in its broad outlines. While Kristeller is right, therefore, to underscore the significance of the theory of the five hypostases for Ficino and to argue that it focuses our attention on the cardinal position of Soul [*upper case*] and of the soul [*lower case*], he is wrong to suppose that the theory was the outcome of an individual and original attempt to modify the Plotinian schemes. For only one basic ontological scheme existed for the Neoplatonists, the pentadic scheme found in the *Parmenides*'.⁷

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

⁷ Allen, 'Ficino's Theory of the five substances', pp. 42-43.

The Allen-Kristeller debate has an epilogue. In 1987 Kristeller published the last fresh statement of his views on Ficino, namely, *Marsilio Ficino and His Work after Five Hundred Years*. In a footnote (where else would one expect to find it?), he chided Michael:

‘Allen is right in asserting that the central position of the soul in the hierarchy is asserted by Proclus (and even by Plotinus). Yet the place assigned in the hierarchy to Quality is an innovation of Ficino and has no precedents in Proclus or other Neoplatonists (as I was reassured by Werner Beierwaltes), and it is this innovation which made Ficino’s scheme more symmetrical than that of his predecessors. The role of Quality was repeated after Ficino by Francesco Patrizi’.⁸

Hence, while acknowledging Michael’s *scoperta*, Kristeller reasserted his basic contention on the originality of Ficino’s scheme of five natures. But all’s well that ends well. The next year, 1988, saw a reissue of Kristeller’s 1952 *Il pensiero filosofico di Marsilio Ficino*, with only one substantive change, namely, an updated bibliography. I am happy to report that the 1988 bibliography contains not only every work Michael had published on Ficino to date, but also one book of Michael’s that had not yet even come out.⁹ Indeed, except for Kristeller himself and Eugenio Garin, Michael is the most cited author by far in the 1988 bibliography. Kristeller remained to the end solicitous of his most illustrious successor in Ficinian studies.

Michael’s conversations with Edgar Wind and D. P. Walker are of a different order than that with Kristeller. Neither stood as the fountainhead of modern Ficinian studies, but both were and remain inescapable to anyone committed to these studies. In his writings, Michael has frequently and consistently expressed his debt to both. Yet neither has escaped Michael’s critical eye. As regards D. P. Walker, the work to consult is Michael’s *Synoptic Art: Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation* of 1998,¹⁰ a work whose greatness has not been adequately appreciated, perhaps because, despite adequate circulation,¹¹ it lacks indices to open up its amazing richness of sources and citations. If one work is needed to prove what a brilliant intellectual historian Michael is, *Synoptic Art* would easily

⁸ Paul O. Kristeller, *Marsilio Ficino and His Work after Five Hundred Years*, Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1987, p. 13 n. 29.

⁹ Paul O. Kristeller, *Il pensiero filosofico di Marsilio Ficino. Edizione riveduta con bibliografia aggiornata*, Firenze: Casa Editrice le Lettere, 1988, p. 442: ‘M. J. B. Allen, *Icastes: Marsilio Ficino’s Interpretation of Plato’s Sophist*, in corso di stampa’. *Icastes* was published in 1989, Los Angeles: University of California Press.

¹⁰ Michael J. B. Allen, *Synoptic Art: Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation*, (Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, Studi e Testi, 40), Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1998.

¹¹ The database *WorldCat* reports 210 libraries with copies.

fit the bill. Perhaps one concrete result of this symposium could be to provide the impetus for creating online indices to this work. In any case, in *Synoptic Art*, Michael refutes one of the fundamental aspects of D. P. Walker's celebrated study of the *prisca theologia*, namely, on the position of Egypt as the birthplace of the ancient theology; Michael corrects Walker on the source for Ficino's interpretation of a prophesy of Plato,¹² and he explains what Walker failed to explain, namely, the absence of Socrates in the sequence of the *prisca theologi*.¹³ In his 1984 book, *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino: A Study of His Phaedrus Commentary, Its Sources and Genesis*, Michael rejects Walker's theory of a Ficinian hierarchy of demons and insists at several points that we still do not have an adequate knowledge of the sources of Ficino's demonology because of an absence of an adequate investigation of the Byzantine texts on the topic, especially the writings of Psellus.¹⁴ Finally, in his 1989 book, *Icastes: Marsilio Ficino's Interpretation of Plato's Sophist*,¹⁵ Michael seems to have endorsed in language ever so careful Ioan Petru Culianu's denial of Walker's distinction between a spiritual and a demonic magic in Ficino.¹⁶ I have ascertained that Michael has a reader's card to the Warburg Institute in London, but whether he ever appears there without a disguise I am not so sure.¹⁷

Interestingly enough, in the first of these corrections of Walker, that on the place of Egypt in Ficino's *prisca theologia*, Michael explicitly sides with Edgar Wind against Walker. This is not surprising to anyone who attends to the text and especially to the footnotes of Michael's articles. For, as I read Michael, Edgar Wind was not merely a source for Michael; he was at times an inspiration for themes and ideas. Again, this should not be surprising. Of all of Michael's great

¹² Michael J. B. Allen, *Synoptic Art*, p. 71, n. 55.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁴ Michael J. B. Allen, *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino: A Study of His Phaedrus Commentary, Its Sources and Genesis*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984, p. 9, n. 19-20 and p. 136.

¹⁵ University of California Press: Berkeley.

¹⁶ Michael J. B. Allen, *Icastes: Marsilio Ficino's Interpretation of Plato's Sophist*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989, p. 184, n. 15.

¹⁷ At the risk of making Michael into an academic 'hit man', I note that he criticized not only Walker yet another time in *Nuptial Arithmetic: Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on the Fatal Number in Book VIII of Plato's Republic*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994, p. 107, n. 2 (on Walker's fallacious argument for an anti-astrological phase late in Ficino's career), but also Mariam Bullard in the same note (on her contention that Ficino only gradually internalized astrology) and perhaps most shockingly of all Erwin Panofsky, Fritz Saxl, and Raymond Klibansky for 'overstating the case for Ficino's melancholy by ignoring his wit, his playfulness, and the fundamental optimism of his philosophical premises' in their classic 1964 work, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of of Natural Philosophy (Nuptial Arithmetic)*, p. 84; see also p. 133).

Ficinian forebears, Wind is the one most like him. At home with the myths, the practices, and language of antique religion and philosophy, deeply versed in classical philosophy and even patristic theology, and exquisitely capable of capturing in his prose the tone and mood of his subjects, Wind showed Michael, as he has showed all of us, the kind of magic great scholarship and literary skill can achieve. I am not privy to any insider information on Michael's contacts with Edgar Wind. I shall just point out, however, that in the years Michael studied at Oxford, 1963 to 1966, Edgar Wind, based in Trinity College, taught art history there to general acclaim. Wind was a Berliner like Kristeller and a refugee from Nazi Germany, but after two stints teaching at various places in the United States, he eventually settled in England in 1955, shortly before the time that a young kindred spirit was about to embark on his own life of scholarship at Oxford.

Nevertheless, not even Edgar Wind escaped Michael's critical gaze. In his 1984 article, 'Marsilio Ficino on Plato, the Neoplatonists and the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity', which first appeared in *Renaissance Quarterly* and then was reprinted in Michael's 1995 *Variorum* volume, *Plato's Third Eye*,¹⁸ Michael launched a frontal assault on one of the most stimulating and learned appendices of Wind's *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, namely, Appendix 2, which has the title 'Pagan Vestiges of the Trinity'. Michael argued that Wind was fundamentally wrong in asserting that because of his Neoplatonism and his desire to harmonize Platonism and Christianity Ficino had bought into and had internalized an Arian, subordinationist conception of the Trinity as a dogma born out of the three Plotinian hypostases of the One, Mind, and Soul. Citing and connecting texts that Wind had ignored, including Ficino's treatment of the pseudonymous Second Letter of Plato, Michael proved three things: first, that Ficino was very sensitive to the difference between the Orthodox and Arian views of the Trinity and consistently affirmed the former; second, Ficino, with great finesse, was able to distinguish the views of Plato from those of the Neoplatonists who were the source of the Arianizing interpretation of the Trinity; and, third, that Ficino's understanding of the Platonic trinity was a long, slow process culminating in his last work, the commentary on Paul's epistles, which Wind knew, but misread, for Ficino had finally understood in his old age that he had been dealing with:

'a triad within a triad, a mystery within a mystery. But Ficino had only managed to arrive at this insight himself after a series of attempts to unravel the mysteries of the *Second Letter* [of Plato] In this regard we can see once again that it often took a

¹⁸ Michael J. B. Allen (ed.), *Plato's Third Eye: studies in Marsilio Ficino's Metaphysics and its sources*, Aldershot: Variorum, 1995.

long time, sometimes as here or in the case of the *Phaedrus*' Charioteer myth a lifetime almost, for Ficino to perfect his understanding of Plato, to initiate himself fully into the master's occulted wisdom'.¹⁹

I quoted Michael at length here because if you substitute the name Allen for Ficino and Ficino for Plato, Michael in effect has given us a description of his own career-long quest to understand Ficino, even if this meant demonstrating Ficino's basic orthodoxy on an important point against great authority and against the current fashion to find scandalous heterodoxy under every rock or text. Michael, of course, recognized – and explicitly asserted²⁰ – that a century later Giordano Bruno would be burned at the stake for ideas not dissimilar to some of those of Ficino's. In this regard, we should also take note that in his article 'Marsilio Ficino's interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus* and its myth of the Demiurge', which was Michael's contribution to the 1987 Kristeller *Festschrift*, Michael took to task the distinguished scholar E. N. Tigerstedt for attributing to Ficino a heterodox interpretation of Plato when in fact Ficino had been carefully orthodox.²¹ For Michael the point has never been to enlist Ficino in one camp or another, but to comprehend accurately the subtleties and developments of Ficino's thought.

This scholarly quest has its missionary side. Some years ago, Michael came to that dynamo of American culture, Albany, NY, to spread enlightenment about Marsilio Ficino. Ever attuned to the language of American popular culture, Michael explained to the students that they should understand Ficino's Indian gymnosophists to be yogis. Consequently, in closing, I think it would be just to quote here America's greatest living yogi: Yogi Berra, whom, I am sure, Michael greatly admires. Indeed, I for one have detected a certain resemblance between the two men, though I am well aware that Berra's friend Phil Rizzuto used to say that Berra's two sons were the luckiest boys in the world: they look like their mother. In any event, two Yogi-isms, or in Michael's terminology, two Neo-Chaldaic oracles, are appropriate here. The first is: when you come to a fork in the road, take it. The second is: it ain't over until it's over.

One of the extraordinary qualities of Michael's Ficinian scholarship is that when he started his career, he did come to a fork in the road. He could have followed after Kristeller in the tradition of grand scholarship that explained in

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 580.

²⁰ In his article 'At Variance: Marsilio Ficino, Platonism and Heresy' in D. Hedley and S. Hutton, eds., *Platonism at the Origins of Modernity: Studies on Platonism and Early Modern Philosophy*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2008, pp. 31-44, p. 43.

²¹ 'Marsilio Ficino's Interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus* and its Myth of the Demiurge', in J. Hankins, J. Monfasani, and F. Purnell, Jr., eds., *Supplementum Festivum: Studies in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1987, pp. 418-421, 429-33, 336.

detail the contours of the underlining principles of Ficino's metaphysics and mapped out the intricate relationships between Ficino's writings produced over the course of his more than forty years as a Renaissance philosopher. Alternatively, Michael could have followed the exciting new path pioneered by D. P. Walker, Eggar Wind, and others who introduced us to the unconventional Ficino dabbling in magic, demonology, theurgy and astrology. In perfect accord with the first Yogi-ism, Michael spontaneously embarked on both paths, and the world of scholarship, forty years later, has been much the better for it. In Kristellerian tradition, Michael has produced editions of Ficino's commentaries on *Philebus*, the *Sophist*, the *Phaedrus*, and part of the *Republic*. On the other hand, astrology was central in Michael's 1992 article 'Homo ad zodiacum: Marsilio Ficino and the Boethian Hercules';²² as was magic in his 2009 article 'To Gaze Upon the Face of God Again: Philosophic Statuary, Pygmalion and Marsilio Ficino',²³ just as was demonology in two of his articles: first, in his 1994 article 'Marsilio Ficino, Socrates and the Daimonic Voice of Conscience',²⁴ which was chapter 4 of his *Synoptic Art: Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation*;²⁵ and again in his 2006 article 'At Variance: Marsilio Ficino, Platonism and Heresy'.²⁶ One can fairly argue that in taking both paths at the fork in the road, Michael has explored Ficino more in the round than have all other scholars who have taken one or the other of the paths at the fork in the road. Perhaps the vintage example of Michael's ability to take both forks in the road is his 1994 book, *Nuptial Arithmetic: Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on the Fatal Number in Book VIII of Plato's Republic*, where in a dazzling dissection of Ficino's interpretation of Plato's famously cryptic fatal number, Michael not only produced a critical edition and translation of Ficino's *De Numero Fatali*, but also explained Ficino's 'mathematical magic' and exposed the therapeutic potential of Ficino's 'geometer-magus'.²⁷

As for the Yogi-ism that it's not over until it's over, I would like to call attention to three extraordinary recent articles. In his article 'Marsilio Ficino,

²² Published in *Forma e parola: studi i memoria di Fredi Chiappelli*, ed. D. J. Dutschke, et al., Rome: Bulzoni, 1992, pp. 205-221, and reprinted as Essay XIII in Allen's *Plato's Third Eye*.

²³ In *Rinascimento*, ser. 2:48 (2008), pp. 123-136.

²⁴ In G. Aranci, P. De Marco, and T. Verdon, eds., *Teologie a Firenze nell'età di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: V Centenario della morte di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (Firenze 1494-1994)*, Bologna: Edizione Dehoniane, 1994, pp. 301-324.

²⁵ *Synoptic Art*, pp. 125-147.

²⁶ See n. 20 above.

²⁷ *Nuptial Arithmetic*, pp. 96-100. See pp. 140-142, for the suggestion that in Ficino's mind that Gabriel, the angel of the Annunciation, had taken on 'some of the attributes of a Platonic geometer-magus.'

Levitation, and the ascent to Capricorn' of 2006,²⁸ Michael makes a connection that not even the most daring of previous scholars ever made, namely, between Ficino's understanding of astrology and Platonic death on the one hand and Christ's Transfiguration on the other, with the conclusion that 'the very centre of Ficino's mystical Christianized Neoplatonism' was not the Nativity in Bethlehem or the Crucifixion on Golgotha, but the Transfiguration on Mt. Tabor.²⁹ In other words, light metaphysics has given way to light mysticism. I know for a fact that Michael is now investigating possible links between Ficino and late Byzantine hesychasm, a theology and a set of religious practices which revolved about the uncreated light of Christ on Mt. Tabor. In this connection, one will note that in his article 'At Variance: Marsilio Ficino, Platonism and Heresy', Michael points out that 'Ficino actually calls light 'visible soul' and soul 'invisible light'.³⁰ Michael then proceeded to discuss Zoroastrian and Hermetic light worship, at which point he, called attention to 'the haunting significances too ['haunting', I interject here, as anyone who has read much Michael Allen can tell you, is one of Michael's most favorite adjectival participles, matched only by his preference for the adjectival participle 'arresting'] of the reference to God in St. James' Epistle 1:17 as 'the father of lights' and of the noonday setting with the stridulating cicadas of Plato's *Phaedrus*. These harmonising insects Ficino identified with demons in the particular sense now of men who had entered, after philosophising for the requisite three millennia, a quasi-immaterial, light-filled demonic condition'.³¹ This conclusion leads in turn to another, namely, that 'the demons and, by implications, our own ascending philosophical, Apollonian selves, [are] beings who can pass like Alice through the terpsichorean illusions of the mirror plane into the world of intellectual, of uranian light'.³² This is why, Michael explains, '[f]or Ficino, predictably, one of its most important consequences [i. e., the consequence of 'the ascent into the mystical 'glory' of light'] was to draw our attention to Christ's Transfiguration on Mt. Tabor as recounted by Matthew 17.1-9 and Mark 9.2-9, as the supreme Platonic moment in the New Testament'.³³ In other words, in his latter years Ficino was working towards a light mysticism that combined demonology, Christianity, Platonism, and an experience similar to that of the Byzantine hesychasts' contemplating the light of Mt. Tabor.

²⁸ In B. Pinchard and P. Servet, eds., *Éducation, transmission, rénovation à la Renaissance*, Geneva: Droz, 2006, pp. 223-240.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

³⁰ 'At Variance', p. 41.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, p. 42.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

The third recent article I wish to call attention to is the previously mentioned ‘To Gaze upon the Face of God: Philosophic Statuary, Pygmalion and Marsilio Ficino’, which treats Ficino’s engagement with statuary magic and where Michael concludes that ‘the permutations on the Pygmalion theme suggest a number of intricate and arresting [that word again] possibilities’³⁴ and that ‘[t]he statue for Ficino, at least in certain mystical or poetic contexts, is therefore the symbolic nexus between man and God, ironically so given its traditional associations with idolatry’.³⁵ Michael then concludes by tying Ficinian statuary magic in a totally unexpected way with the conventional precepts of Ficinian Platonic love, to wit:

‘The religious injunction that we must be born again means in effect that we must first fabricate, and then animate, the statue not only of ourselves ... but also of what we must successively pursue as the supreme object of our desire: first a beautiful beloved, then Beauty as an Idea, and at last the one God of our idolatry and of our image-making and our image-breaking powers alike’.³⁶

Where these new investigations will go, I have no idea. But they do suggest that retirement for Michael will lead to new forks in the road at which points he will gaily proceed down all the new paths. I myself can easily foresee another *Variorum* volume some years hence on Ficino, the Transfiguration, and Pygmalion. I am sure that when Michael puts that volume together it will have an all together much more arresting title than I could ever have conjured up that will haunt our collective scholarly memory. But more importantly this purported volume and the other work he will produce will continue Michael’s career as an historian of philosophy, of religion, of the occult, and of magic. In short, Michael will continue to be an extraordinary example of the literary scholar as intellectual historian.

II

Brian Copenhaver: Or Academic Administrator as Shape-Shifter

Brian has spent most of his long academic career as an administrator in one guise or another. This prompts the happy thought that we are all gather here to bury Caesar. Brian will remain a scholar to his last dying breath, but his days as an autocrat are now over. Not that he didn’t excel within the jungles of academic administration; but we are here to speak of the *good* Brian, not administrator Brian. Indeed, what is perhaps the most extraordinary aspect of Brian’s career is how he proved to be an amazingly productive scholar not before he became an

³⁴ ‘At Variance’, p. 135.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

administrator, but during all the time that he was an administrator. In academia, he exemplified what it means to lead from the front. Hence, the title of my talk. An administrator is not supposed to be so productive. He would almost have to be a different person: in one form a paper-pushing official fighting bureaucratic battles and contending with budget crises, and in another a totally different animal, a creative researcher discovering, recovering, and explaining facts and ideas of epochs long past. Brian has had to remake himself almost on a daily basis to maintain the dual tracks of his career. And what is even more wondrous, as a publishing scholar Brian has almost constantly reappeared in a new shape, starting as a student of Renaissance occultism and magic and now, more lately, as an expert in medieval and Renaissance logic and modern Italian philosophy, with stops along the way to explore the Cabala, Renaissance humanism, and the history of science.

Brian's first major publication was *Symphorien Champier and the Reception of the Occultist Tradition* in 1978,³⁷ which has remained to this day the unquestioned standard work on this sixteenth-century doctor, humanist, and combative intellectual. Champier was an outspoken opponent of occultism, of demonic magic, and of most of astrology. Given Brian's brilliant success as a dean and provost, one might not unreasonably suspect that at the very start of his career Brian learned much more about the dark arts that Champier opposed than Champier ever intended to teach. But as I have said, I only want to speak here of the good Brian and not delve into the ways and means of an academic administrator.

The book on Champier demanded an exceptional command of Latin in addition to the forbidding arcana of the occult tradition, medieval medicine, and the intricacies of premodern astronomy and astrology. The acquisition of this rare erudition would suffice as the basis of any ordinary scholarly career. But Brian's has not been an ordinary scholarly career. Yes, early on he did cooperate in the editing of William Mewe's Neolatin drama *Pseudomagia*, which fits very nicely with his study of Champier's anti-magical campaign.³⁸ And yes, very recently he has published a 700 page volume consisting of an edition, translation, and dense commentary on Polydore Vergil's *De Inventoribus Rerum*, a major

³⁷ Brian Copenhaver, *Symphorien Champier and the Reception of the Occultist Tradition*, The Hague: Mouton, 1978.

³⁸ Brian actually cooperated with John Coldewey on three editions: (1) William Mewe, *Pseudomagia: A Neo-Latin Drama*, Neuwkoop: De Graff, 1979; (2) Thomas Watson, *Antigone*. William Alabaster, *Roxana*. Peter Mease, *Adrastus Parentans sive Vindicta*, Hildesheim: Olms, 1987; and (3) William Mewe, *Pseudomagia*. Aquila Cruso, *Euribates Pseudomagus*. John Chappell, *Susenbrotus or Fortunia, Zelotypus*, Hildesheim, 1991.

contribution to Neolatin studies of which any scholar would be proud.³⁹ But Brian's next book after that on Champier revealed a very different kind of scholar. In 1991 he published *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in English Translation, with Notes and Introduction*.⁴⁰ In this new epiphany Brian manifested quite a different set of expertise knowledge. He had now become a classical scholar, a Hellenist to be precise, translating a large corpus of Greek texts and expounding late antique religion and theosophy. Brian had produced the first translation into English based on a reliable text of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Again, his work has no rival. It remains the standard text in English and a worthy companion on the shelf next to the great scholarly volumes of Fowden, Festugière, Mahé, and Nock.

But already within a year of *Corpus Hermeticum* Brian had already completely changed his scholarly profile. In 1992 appeared his *Renaissance Philosophy*, as volume 3 of the Oxford University series, *A History of Western Philosophy*.⁴¹ He had now become an historian of philosophy. He, of course, would eventually migrate from the History Department to the Philosophy Department. Far be it for those of us who have remained in History to suggest treasonous activity on the part of one of our own, least of all for anyone who is an admirer of Paul Oskar Kristeller, a hero to Brian as to most students of the Renaissance. But it worth pausing for a moment to consider Brian in relation to Kristeller. As Kristeller migrated to history, with most of his doctoral students being in the History Department in his later years, Brian has migrated to Philosophy. But in larger sense, neither migrated at all. From the start Kristeller had a profound historical orientation and Brian's philosophical interests are apparent from his earliest writings. All the humanistic disciplines have an historical base ('Geschichte über alles', as surely some nineteenth-century German said), and more often than not the vicissitudes of fortune and institutional structures determine in what compartment of human history one begins. So what is done in a history department can be done just as legitimately in a philosophy department or vice-versa. Why even an English professor can do Renaissance philosophy since as Aristotle teaches, though nature does nothing in vain, it does allow for the occasional monstrous aberration. So it was only just that Brian dedicated his history of Renaissance philosophy to Kristeller.

³⁹ Polydore Vergil, *On Discovery*, ed. and trans. Brian P. Copenhaver, (The I Tatti Renaissance Library, 6), Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002.

⁴⁰ Brian Copenhaver (ed.), *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in English Translation, with Notes and Introduction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

⁴¹ Brian Copenhaver, *Renaissance Philosophy, A History of Western Philosophy* vol. 3, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

This history also reveals another quality of Brian's: his sense of honor. A great scholar, Charles B. Schmitt, initially committed to writing the book, but he died very unexpectedly before he had begun in earnest. The task was turned over to Brian, and though Brian is in fact responsible for 99% of what one reads in the volume, he kept Charles B. Schmitt's name on the titlepage as co-author. Oddly enough, the Oxford volume is a competitor of a book Schmitt edited not long before, the *Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*. Perhaps because Schmitt realized the difficulties of the Cambridge volume, he agreed to write the Oxford *History*. In any case, Brian's Oxford *History* remains the best overall history we have in any language of Renaissance philosophy, ending with a chapter on 'Renaissance Philosophy and Modern Memory' that is memorable as much for its eloquence as for its erudition.

Amid all this book writing, Brian was also hard at work, producing articles on various topics. Some of these articles one could almost predict, as he wrote on Renaissance Hermeticism and magic, proving for instance that Francis Yates was quite wrong in believing that Ficino's magical teaching came out of the *Corpus Hermeticum* since in fact the Hermetic do not contain the gobs of magical lore she assumed.⁴² But the articles he began producing also revealed still yet another Brian, one that could not have been predicted from his first publications: Brian the Hebrew scholar and student of Renaissance Cabala. The first indication of this new field of interest was his 1980 article 'Jewish Theologies of Space in the Scientific Revolution: Henry More, Joseph Raphson, Isaac Newton and their Predecessors' in the *Annals of Science*.⁴³ The work of Brian the Hebraist has blossomed into ground-breaking scholarship on Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. What Brian has shown is that the conventional interpretation of Pico's famous Oration, to which later editors added the description 'on the Dignity of Man', is a modern fabrication created whole cloth out of a Kantian reading of Pico as a Kantian *ante litteram* primarily concerned with preserving human dignity through the freedom of moral choice. Rather, Pico was in fact a Cabalist and the key to understanding the oration was his proposal to bring about the elevation of man to the angelic level of the Cherubim through a Cabalistic scheme of theosophy and Neoplatonic mysticism.⁴⁴ By absorbing the interpretation of the

⁴² See his 'Hermes Trismegistus, Proclus and the Question of a Philosophy of Magic in the Renaissance', in I. Merkel and A. Debus (eds.), *Hermeticism and the Renaissance: Intellectual History and the Occult in Early Modern Europe*, Washington, D.C.: Folger Books, 1988, pp. 79-111.

⁴³ Vol. 37, pp. 489-548.

⁴⁴ See his 'The Secret of Pico's Oration: Cabala and Renaissance Philosophy', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 26 (2002), pp. 56-81; and 'Giovanni Pico della Mirandola' in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pico-della-mirandola>.

Cabalist Abraham Abulafia of Maimonides' teaching concerning esoteric doctrine, Pico even discovered a secret Aristotle, as Brian instructs us in one of his articles, not known in the Middle Ages, but intuited by a later reader of Pico, the German Cabalist Johann Reuchlin.

More recently, Brian has expanded his Hebrew scholarship to take into account the other great Italian Hebraist and Cabalist of the age, Giles of Viterbo. I am here to tell you that the article he recently published with Daniel Stein Kokin, 'Egidio da Viterbo's *Book on Hebrew Letters: Christian Kabbalah in Papal Rome*',⁴⁵ is not exactly the paper he delivered in Rome in the Biblioteca Angelica last year. In that elegant setting, Brian exposed yet another side of himself, namely, Brian the pornographer. He not only promised pornography in the title of his talk in the Biblioteca Angelica, but he delivered on his promise with score upon score of illustrations, some in vivid color. Fortunately for him and all the clerics in the audience – and, I confess, to the disappointment of the rest of us there – nothing can cure you more quickly of a taste for pornography than illustrations of Cabalistic sexual symbolism. No wonder the Cabalists wished to leave the body behind in their ascent to the divine. Repenting of his momentary impetuosity (as the saying goes, 'what happens in Rome, stays in Rome'), Brian cleaned up his act when he published the paper in *Renaissance Quarterly*.

Ever the Protean shape-shifter, Brian has continued to remake himself even as his formal position as a UCLA professor winds down. For one thing, he has now become an expert on the history of logic. This new expertise is clearly on display in his translation, in cooperation with Lodi Nauta, of the *Dialectical Disputations* of the brilliant Renaissance humanist Lorenzo Valla.⁴⁶ The edition is notable not only for making Valla's work available in English for the first time, but also for its substantial introduction, which is in itself a mini-history of medieval and Renaissance logic. And now, in cooperation with Calvin Normore and Terry Parsons, he has just come out with a translation of and commentary on the prime medieval textbook of logic, Peter of Spain's *Summulae logicae*.⁴⁷

But wait! There's more! In his latest incarnation, Brian has now also established himself as an expert on modern Italian philosophy. His massive 2012 book, *From Kant to Croce: Modern Philosophy in Italy, 1800-1950*, written with daughter Rebecca, promises to be not the culmination, but rather the dramatic kick-off of

⁴⁵ Brian Copenhaver and Daniel Stein Kokin, 'Egidio da Viterbo's *Book on Hebrew Letters: Christian Kabbalah in Papal Rome*', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 67 (2014), pp. 1-42.

⁴⁶ As vols. 49-50 in 'The I Tatti Renaissance Library', Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012.

⁴⁷ Brian Copenhaver, Calvin G. Normore & Terence Parsons (eds.), *Peter of Spain: Summaries of Logic: Text, Translation, Introduction, and Notes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

yet another Copenhaverian line of research.⁴⁸ Already he's published an article with daughter Rebecca on the most famous modern Italian philosopher, Benedetto Croce,⁴⁹ and has written, again with daughter Rebecca again, an article on the impact in Italy of the Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid.⁵⁰ Far be it for me to suggest that all this is a clever ploy by Brian to continue to get invitations to opulent Italian conferences, but covering the Italian philosophical waterfront from Pico to Gramsci surely makes Brian one of the leading North American experts in the field, just as he is in multiple other fields.⁵¹

Since Brian has on tap forthcoming editions and translations of Pico and various Cabala texts, as well as books on magic, philosophy, and intellectual history, not only will he further solidify his preeminent position in his chosen specialities, but we ourselves are far from seeing his last transformation as a scholar. I would not be surprised if a decade or two from now, those of us who are left gather to hold a deeply serious conference on the early, middle, and late Copenhaver only to discover shortly after that with his latest publication once again a new Copenhaver has emerged. But until then I am grateful to have had the opportunity here to pay tribute to one of the great American scholars of our time.

⁴⁸ Brian Copanhaver and Rebecca Copenhaver, *From Kant to Croce: Modern Philosophy in Italy, 1800-1950*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2012.

⁴⁹ Brian Copanhaver, 'How Croce Became a Philosopher,' *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 25 (2008), pp. 75-94.

⁵⁰ Brian Copanhaver, 'The Strange Italian Voyage of Thomas Reid,' *British Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 14 (2006), pp. 601-626.

⁵¹ For Gramsci, see B. Copenhaver and R. Copenhaver, *From Kant to Croce*, pp. 147-152, 159-162, 717-752, 762-778, and *ad indicem*.