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## Convincing and persuading : the rhetoric of maternity on social networks

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## Rhetoric in Italy

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#### Abstract

This essay analyzes the argumentative basis of the maternity debate on the main social network sites, in relation to the debate on the draft of Cirinnà bill on gay and lesbian civil partnerships in the Italian Parliament, to evaluate its congruence. The study of suasion (Eco, 1986), defined as a technique of covert persuasion, i.e., concealed and hidden (Mortara Garavelli, 2001), in relation to new media, represents “a new area of rhetoric, which deals almost exclusively with words and the act of writing in largely predetermined contexts” (Marazzini, 2001).

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#### Key words

argumentation, debate, persuasion, social network, maternity

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## Convincing and persuading: The rhetoric of maternity on social networks

### 1. The social networks and the hidden rhetoric

This article was inspired by a piece of research aimed at analyzing the ways in which social networks provide a platform for debating current issues. In the work of Aristotle (*Rhetoric* 1355b) rhetoric is defined as the capacity “to observe in any given case the available means of persuasion.” Online communication has removed the traditional barriers of time and location, that once limited real-time interaction. If a debate was returned to the public and only moved in a diachrony in the past, “today we are all in the debate, a circumstance that one could call a panopticon, through which we can observe things from all points of view with all the points of view and the public itself becoming another point of view” (Raimondi 1987, 93).

With the *urbi et orbi* revolution, Facebook and Twitter have amplified as never before what Perelman ([1958] 2013, 147) in *The New Rhetoric. A Treatise on Argumentation* calls “the impression of actuality,” necessary to create emotion. After World War II the Belgian philosopher and jurist, assisted by Olbrechts-Tyteca, turned to the methods of rhetorical argument as the most appropriate way to determine the conditions of persuasion for temporary audiences influenced by prejudices and passions. These methods are also appropriate for confronting themes which are not suitable for argumentation without reply (Pernot [2000] 2006, 204). This is a fundamental turning point. Nobody better than Ezio Raimondi (2002, 82) in *La retorica d’oggi* explains the process of re-evaluating rhetoric during the twentieth century:

After science and logic of the XVII century condemned rhetoric as a place of irrationality and folly, it avoided this radicalisation until the twentieth century recognised the failure of former logic in dealing with man’s real problems in describing the anomalies of reality.<sup>1</sup>

Now to develop his *Treatise on Argumentation*, Perelman did not find a better guide than Aristotle. His *The New Rhetoric* was a return to the source and he

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1. If not stated otherwise, the translations into English are mine.

placed its ancient heritage “in a position of honour”, as Pernot explains ([2000] 2006, 204) when examining how Rhetoric of the ancient Greeks and Romans reached us. He stresses exactly how Aristotle in the *Rhetoric*, a relatively little-read work in ancient times, seized a fundamental idea obscured for centuries by medieval rhetoric. The idea is that “in order to persuade, the springs already present in the audience have to be triggered” (Pernot [2000] 2006, 54). A good speaker has to appeal to pre-existing ideas and known values in order to accomplish the enigma of persuasion.

At this point, what makes the subject interesting is that social networks give rhetoric a new field of research and application. Indeed, on virtual platforms one debates without being visible and earns consensus without the user being conscious of being persuaded. That is, the techniques used are those Umberto Eco (1987, 200) defined “techniques of persuasion that do not show as such” and they are categorized under the name of *suasion*. The issue becomes all the more urgent because persuasion can be clumsy yet honest, whereas *suasion* can be elevated yet malicious (Eco 1987, 27). Therefore, it is indispensable “to practise skepticism and teach how to practise it: to report the *suasion* wherever it is dressed up as persuasion” (Eco 1987, 27). As Marazzini (2001, 238) specifies,

in certain cases, the ancient rhetoric also came to the point of discussing figurative objects, emblems, signs and endeavours but their purpose was to construct and produce these products, not to unmask their underhand messages. Thus, ‘unmasking’ seems to be a modern invention.

However, once we realize that “global nature is good, but local nature is more reasonable” (Eco 1987, 15) we get to the heart of this analysis.

From spring 2013, the government chaired by Matteo Renzi opened the debate on the draft bill to regularise civil partnerships, known as *DDL Cirinnà*, named after the bill’s author. Stepchild adoption soon became the bone of contention, occurring when two adults form a family and one or both of them already have a child from a previous relationship or when the child is born through surrogacy. The debate soon stands out as eristic, associated with the war metaphor of Cattani’s (2001, 73) work. The discussion rapidly moved from parliament to virtual platforms of social networking.

As early as 2001, Marazzini revealed that new media and particularly the World Wide Web strongly entered into the mechanism of communication and into the formation of consensus so much so that they become a reference point not only for those working in advertising, but also in media and public administration reform. So it is of interest to define the type of discourse within which the virtual debate takes part.

There are two main types of players: on one side, there are the parliamentarians who actively participate in the revision and adoption of the law; on the other side,

there are famous people who belong to show-business and to the world of culture and journalism. We are, nonetheless, immersed in the panopticon that Raimondi already had been writing about since 1987. Even the public, consisting of common Facebook and Twitter users, often shifts from a merely passive role to a more active one within the debate. Moreover, the audience's role was absolutely primary in the classification of orators as defined by ancient theorists of rhetoric. They distinguished three types of genre: the deliberative, the forensic and the epideictic; according to how they each responded to the audience engaged in deliberating, judging and enjoying the unfolding of the orator's argument (Perelman [1958] 2013, 21). Aristotle (*Rhetoric* 1359a) underlines how it is not possible to advise everyone on things that are possible because some of them are natural or accidental, but advice

is possible when it is limited to those subjects about which we take counsel; and such are all those which can naturally be referred to ourselves and the first cause of whose origination is in our own power; for our examination is limited to finding out whether such things are possible or impossible for us to perform.

Thus, the debate here fits in the deliberative genre. Nonetheless, this perspective is partially overcome in the work of Perelman ([1958] 2013, 47) on the basis of this subtle intuition: "argumentation alone (of which deliberation constitutes a special case) allows us to understand our decision". The keystone is not anymore in the audience but in the effects of the argumentation. A lively debate which takes place on social networks does not tend to lead to action as the public do not have a legal decision-making power, i.e., they are not being called to vote in a referendum. Rather, they are being called to be ready for action. In this regard, the discourse swings from the deliberative genre to the epideictic genre, re-interpreted on the basis of the *Treatise on Argumentation*. The epideictic genre is no longer a disquisition nobody opposes and from which no consequences come, but actually its argumentation

sets out to increase the intensity of adherence to certain values, which might not be contested when considered on their own but may never nevertheless not prevail against other values that might come into conflict with them. (Perelman [1958] 2013, 51)

## 2. The *normal* and the *monstrous*: maternal values

The dispute has its own prerequisites in its choice of values.

When a speaker wants to establish values or hierarchies or to intensify the adherence they gain, he may consolidate them by connecting them with other values or hierarchies, but he may also resort to premises of a very general nature which we shall term *loci*. (Perelman [1958] 2013, 83)

Aristotle (*Rhetoric* 1358a) explains that clichés “will not make people expert in no discipline”. As Francesca Piazza (2000, 169) clarifies, they can be used in different areas; “they are not concerned with a specific topic, but refer to the structure of the argument and how it is related to presuppositions”.

Pernot ([2000] 2006, 54) affirms that “The Rhetoric, in all its parts, basically consists of the huge inventory of these presuppositions and means of persuasion, and relies on them”. Therefore, the locus of quantity justifies one of the values at the basis of the argumentation of those who perceive parenthood as depending on sexual causality: the norm.

Only the locus of quantity justifies this assimilation, this passage, from the normal, which expresses a frequency, a quantitative aspect of things, to the norm, which states that this frequency is favourable and should be conformed to. (Perelman [1958] 2013, 88)

Like those who base their ethics on experience, this reasoning builds its own ideological cathedral starting from values like Tradition, Christianity, State, Family and in particular, Nature. Next, this reasoning develops through a series of words “redirected towards different situations compared to the usual and literal ones so it no longer means the same thing” (Capaci and Licheri 2014, 170), namely metaphors. The use of metaphors is indispensable for troublemakers, because as Klaus ([1971] 1974, 313) explains in its *Language of politics*, metaphors are not enunciations in the logical sense of the term – that is linguistic constructions upon which truth or falsity can be conferred – but rather “they can neither verify truth nor falsity”.

The constructs of *normal* and *monstrous* occur through these rhetorical devices. The supreme figure of speech in the universe of *normal* are the litotes, which, within the family of euphemism, “reject the term taken into account in order to go in the opposite direction” (Capaci and Licheri 2014, 117). The litotes is usually accompanied by a contrast, or rather a hyperbole, defined as “an extreme form of expression” (Perelman [1958] 2013, 290).

On May 4, 2016, the Democratic Party Member of Parliament, Eleonora Cimbri, published on her Facebook profile a picture of herself breastfeeding her son. Totally wrapped in black clothes, her figure emerges on a white couch, with a partial glimpse on her breast, uncovered to feed her baby. Here it becomes clearly evident what Giovanna Coseza (2012, 21) points out in *Spotpolitik*, “putting yourself into play as a sign of political authenticity and prestige”. Far from presenting herself as image of maternal serenity, Eleonora Cimbri declared rather an ostentatious hostility while looking straight to the lens of camera.

The comment, favoured by the hashtag (#), a thematic aggregator, “#surrogacy”, is constructed through the use of euphemism and hyperbole. At the opening of the comment, there is a euphemistic enthymeme “No mother gives her own baby

willingly to others out of altruism”. This implies that whoever does so, is because she has been constricted by social or economic conditions or, worse, a violent imposition.

Then followed a hyperbolic slogan: “And this is a #lifetime bond”. Reboul ([1975] 1977, 91) explains that a hyperbole is typical of spoken language, “hence slogan is often hyperbolic because it has inherited the patterns of oral propaganda and public notices; the hyperbole aims more at readiness than demonstration”. In terms of discourse genre and by considering the debate as swinging from the deliberative and epideictic one, we can define the universe of *normal* as *pars construens* of the the council which opposes the universe of *monstrous* that creates the *pars destruens*.

*Monstrous* is precisely everything that does not conform to what is usual: “any exceptional situation is deemed precarious... the abnormal character of situation, though it may even be favorable, can become an argument against this situation” (Perelman [1958] 2013, 89). In order to construct the *monstrous*, synecdoche and metaphor are essential. The following image is the monster created by Vittorio Sgarbi<sup>2</sup> on the occasion of the birth of the son of Nichi Vendola<sup>3</sup> and his partner Eddy Testa in February 2016, thanks to the surrogate maternity:



Fig.1 Detail of Jusepe de Ribera's peinture, La mujer barbuda Magdalena Ventura con su marido, 1631, Fundación Casa Ducal de Medinaceli, Toledo  
<https://www.facebook.com/SgarbiVittorio/?fref=ts>

Through the relation of a minor space, which indicates the part for the whole, the sexual synecdoche creates the prodigious, the horrid, the freak show, precisely the *monstrum*, as evident in the etymon itself. The image is accompanied by the

2. Italian art critic, art historian, politician and television personality.

3. National President of the Italian party Sinistra Ecologia Libertà.

vituperation: “Nothing goes out from the ass,” which implies the male gender as lacking in the female reproductive apparatus, the uterus, and it shows the undeniable male sexual identity with which the gender identity is matched. The argumentation swings between the concepts of *abuse* and *lack*. Since it is considered the *essence*, only biological maternity will be *normal*. “On the knowledge level, the notion of ‘distortion’ corresponds to that of ‘abuse’” (Perelman [1958] 2013, 329).

Nevertheless, in the same debate there is a rhetorical-argumentative construction of the *normal* lays its strength precisely on the aspects on which the *monstrous* is based. The advertising campaign launched by the e-commerce giant Amazon Prime is an example.

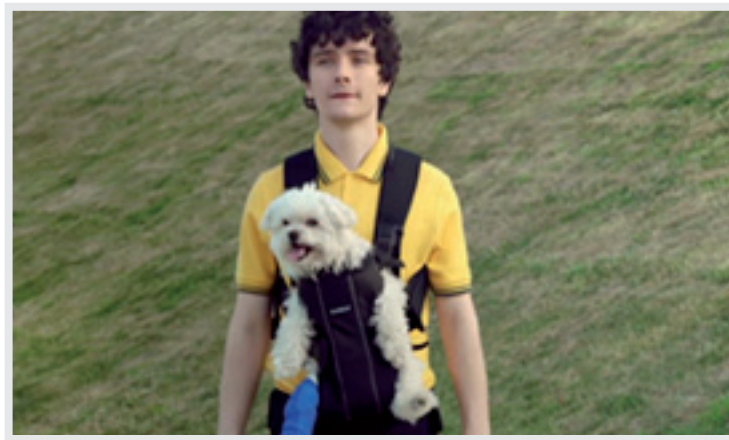


Fig. 2 Frame of the advertisement launched by Amazon for Amazon Prime  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-YvO\\_k03-s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-YvO_k03-s)

The relationship between owner and dog is metaphorically modelled on the one between mother and child. Using this logic, we find what we call a dummy argument: “this expression presents opposition to an invented or deformed topic in order to easily demolish it” (Cattani 2001, 189), which in this case is used to lighten. The advertisement is also able to not create needs in society, but rather use them in order to serve them, as Reboul ([1975] 1977, 63) confirms when he writes: “can we state that advertising creates needs? The expression is improper, nothing is created *ex nihilo*, not even in the psychological field”. Just as the snake cannot make Eve desire the apple, but rather offers her a means to satisfy the desire to be equal to the divine, in the same way this advertisement cannot create the desire for a society which guarantees equal rights for everyone but it seems offering the proof that gender (equality) and sexual orientation equality is already been accepted.

### 3. In the Web of brevity: paralogsms and fallacies

In his book *The Perfect Way of Speaking. The Italian Rhetoric from Dante to Internet*, Marazzini (2001, 261) wrote: “A new rhetoric of *brevitas* is born, with



precise rules”. The professor of the Crusca Academy highlighted exactly how most occasions where public opinion is determined are governed by the law of conciseness and brevity (Marazzini 2001, 260). It is interesting to point out the rigor with which this tendency has evolved, until establishing itself as dominant in the world of social networking, particularly in Twitter. Paola Desideri (2016, 67) explains that tweeting has become a means of direct communication between politicians and their followers. It successfully uses the linguistic advantages of *brevitas*: incisiveness, nominalization, buzzwords, “hence the whole repertoire of short forms which are essentially lacking in argumentation, which should instead be fertile ground of political debate since it is epistemic and expositive speech par excellence” (Desideri 2016, 67).

In order to follow a discussion, it is indispensable to mention brachylogy, “one of the essential devices of stylistic *brevitas*, [...] which consists of using concise expressions with brief syntactic constructions or ellipsis” (Capaci and Licheri 2014, 70). A fundamental means to dominate the virtual debate is: “a brief formula, easy to remember for its conciseness and capable of capturing the imagination.” (Reboul [1975] 1977, 45) hence the use of slogans. “Its reality does not belong to syntactic order but to style... it has to ‘capture your attention’ both in content and its ever changing form” (Reboul [1975] 1977, 30).

A tool to increase “intensity of adherence” (Perelman [1958] 2013, 48) in the condensed language of tweets becomes the “mimesis of spoken speech” (Benzoni 2016, 352). “An approach which responds to avoiding pretentious and affected tones typical of certain political oratories”, as first promoted by the Italian politician, Bettino Craxi<sup>4</sup>, in his use of language which intended to avoid political jargon.

However, in the virtual platform where everybody has a voice, where people judge, condemn and excuse themselves comfortably sat behind their computers, “the attention paid to the substance of the glossary and to the spontaneous interpretation of meaning” (Desideri 1987, 127) is conducted in a more involuntary rather than “virtuosic and radical” way to become a “crumbled and accumulative discursivity”, and at the same time, “void of omissions, implications and brachylogy” (Benzoni 2016, 352).

As Roberto Formigoni<sup>5</sup> speech on February 6, 2016, illustrates after the freedom of conscience declaration on stepchild adoption and the draft Cirinnà bill appeared Beppe Grillo’s<sup>6</sup> blog to the Movimento 5 Stelle MPs. Formigoni comments on his Twitter profile: “The sensation of defeat on #Cirinnà is causing serious hysteria for gays, lesbians, transsexuals and various fags”.

4. Italian politician, leader of the Italian Socialist Party from 1976 to 1993 and Prime Minister of Italy from 1983 to 1987.

5. President of the administrative Italian region Lombardia from 1995 to 2013.

6. Giuseppe Piero “Beppe” Grillo is an Italian comedian, actor, blogger, and political activist. Co-founder (together with Gianroberto Casaleggio) of the Italian Five Star Movement political party.

As explained by Klaus ([1971] 1974, 49) the troublemaker's calling "is not to produce literary monuments, but rather to profoundly influence conscience and behaviour". On the other hand, Cattani (2001, 86) in *Botta e risposta* – a milestone for the unmasking and the decoding of fallacious speech – emphasizes how "in order to reach their aims, good polemicists must not be stopped by ridiculous hesitations of logic."

As Marazzini (2001, 261) observes, "[...] unfortunately only those working in the industry are fully aware of how the rhetorical machine operates through the media. Others are ingenuously subjected to it". So, this paragraph's purpose is to unveil the erroneous reasoning within which the social user risks to be stuck in.

"You have a fallacy when you place unconventional reasoning before conventional logic in a discourse; an unacceptable argument which appears to be acceptable" (Mortara Garavelli 2001, 203). In the defense of traditional family, there are three elements which play a key role. First, the slippery slope argument, typical of "those who want to nip an invention in the bud... as long as they are able to connect it to an unpleasant final outcome". Second, the *argumentum ad populum* "negatively affected by ignoring the basic rule of which one thing is the diffusion of an idea and another thing is its merit" (Cattani 2001, 80) and third, circular reasoning.

Giorgia Meloni<sup>7</sup> exposes herself on the social network stage to the cry of "#defendfamily", showing her allegiance to Family Day on January 30, 2016. On her Facebook profile, she intervenes on behalf of "those children who can't defend themselves alone and, for this reason – she adds – that the State should defend them before others". The pediatrician Giovanni Corsello follows the same way of thinking, publishing his opinion on the official Facebook page of the Italian society of paediatrics, of which he is president. His reasoning is based not only on a petition of principle, that is to say an error of logic, but soon falls into an argument of contradiction: "Indeed, on the basis of scientific fact and clinical reasoning, we cannot deny that a family made up of same-sex parents can be a risk factor and a disadvantage". In addition, he states: "It is not the question of whether two homosexual subjects can guarantee a baby affection and educational standards in line with normal development."

Furthermore, the epideictic speech, placed between one of education and propaganda, "results in it being practised by those who, in a society defend the traditional and accepted values, those which are object of education, not the new and revolutionary values which stir up controversy and polemics." (Perelman [1958] 2013, 51) In any case, the speech degenerates in an unscrupulous propaganda speech and completely prejudiced aimed only at reproach.

7. Giorgia Meloni is an Italian politician, co-founder and president of the party Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d'Italia).

This is the case of the Twitter and Facebook comments belonging to Maurizio Gasparri and Gianluca Pini respectively. The former, the vice-president of Italian Senate, wrote the following answer to the campaign launched by the multinational Ikea on equal rights for homosexual couples: “@IKEAITALIA we won’t go there again, it insults customers and it sells poor quality stuff”.

Equally violent was the attack by the North League politician Gianluca Pini on the new father Nichi Vendola. His intervention on the legitimacy of the draft Cirinnà bill only concerns, in short, a reproach made by the use of “comparison by opposition” (Perelman [1958] 2013, 242) between the beautiful life the baby could have had in California if only he had been raised by his expectant mother to his actual life in Apulia where he is going to be adopted by the head of the political party Sinistra Ecologia Libertà. The attack concludes with: “But instead the child’s destiny is to have an Italian passport and grow up on pasta and turnip tops<sup>8</sup> living with two old faggots in Molfetta”. What is astonishing is not the fallacy of poisoning the source, typical of defamatory discourse, but rather the complete *ignoratio*, “that is not understanding or pretending not to understand which is the issue” (Cattani 2001, 99), that shows the absolute lack of relevance to the debate.

#### 4. When humor becomes a weapon

If words are weapons – as Cattani (2001, 189) writes in his *Botta e Risposta* – humor and irony are lethal weapons, if used well. Paraphrasing Freud, Olivier Reboul ([1975] 1977, 67) says that “jokes give pleasure; a pleasure which is difficult to explain since it has a double origin: on one side the structure gives humor to the sentence, on the other side the contents, namely the satisfaction of a given psychic tendency”.

Since, as Cattani (2001, 191) writes, “The persuasion obtained from humor is rapid”, it is successful within the world of social networks. In a deliberative context aimed at gaining consensus, jokes have several functions. They soften the tone and calm down the mood, at the same time they renew attention and create a congenial and complicit relationship with the audience, simultaneously undermining the opposition. In fact, “ridicule is a powerful weapon at the disposal of the speaker against those who might undermine his argument...” (Perelman [1958] 2013, 206) “...the ridiculous plays, in arguments, a role analogous to that of the absurd in demonstration” (209).

A prime example of the confrontation we have analyzed is presented by the famous Danish beer brand Ceres. On their official Twitter page, they do not miss the opportunity of Family day on January 30, 2016, by responding to the words

8. A poor and simple recipe typical of Apulia, to emphasize the difference with the American lifestyle.

“Family Day” illuminated on the wall of Palazzo Pirelli<sup>9</sup> in Milan, with a photo-montage changing the original words to “Switch off and come down to the bar”. Ceres introduces an argumentation using an anti-model, and “because the anti-model turns from his course of action, adoption by him of a particular behaviour turns that behaviour, whether he intends it or not, into a parody and, sometimes, a provocation” (Perelman [1958] 2013, 367). In this sense, Ceres’ reply on Twitter to Mario Adinolfi’s comment on May 11, 2016, on the adoption of the bill on civil unions, where the journalist of Radio Maria prophesied an apocalyptic scenario: “They already ask for euthanasia, legalisation of drugs and surrogacy”, is even more effective. Ceres’ responding tweet has the same biting and sacrilegious tone: “Do you happen to know if they asked for sex and rock’n’roll too? We’re ready with beers #civilunions”. In this case, “Irony consists in upsetting the interpretation of a statement” (Perelman [1958] 2013, 294) by the substitution of a fact-consequence interpretation with a means-ends interpretation. Adinolfi’s argumentation, which attributes the approval of civil unions as a consequence of the approval of euthanasia, legalization of drugs and the regulation of surrogacy, is redirected by Ceres’ interpretation which considers the liberalization of these practices a means to reach the iconic expression “sex and rock’n’roll” in a parodistic way, to indicate an exuberant and delightful situation where beer dominates.

In both cases, what made Ceres’ humor a witty argument is that it was pertinent and explicative, preventing any trace of untimeliness and unnecessary comments? (Cattani 2001, 191). In other words, “the process that causes one to laugh is the same that makes slogans effective” (Reboul [1975], 1977 68).

## 5. Maternity: when silence is sociable

Hence, there exists “a link between conciseness and power” (Reboul [1975] 1977, 53) and a link between slogans and communication in the world of social networks. To determine the persuasive power of a tweet or of a post means realizing the process which occurs between the statement and its impact. Short, compact, effective and focused sentences are more likely to move and persuade the user. Applied to *suasion* in the social networks, the domain of *brevitas* not only includes a dense web of erroneous reasoning hidden behind its simple and incisive form, but it also the kind of communication which operates through silence, reticence and omission. In fact, the lack of words does not detract from the effectiveness of the communication, but on the contrary, it exalts it. Silence is understood as a way of communicating without talking; the other side of rhetoric.

9. Pirelli Tower (also called “Pirellone”, literally “Big Pirelli”). It is the seat of the assembly of the region Lombardia.

An apparent paradox, because knowing how to speak includes knowing when not to speak (Cattani 2001, 183).

The Italian linguist Bice Mortara Garavelli (2015, VI) says: “In certain circumstances, we can say more, more effectively by keeping silent rather than speaking”. Her works such as *Manuale di retorica*, *Le parole e la giustizia*, *Prima lezione di retorica*, represent a treasure chest of theory and practice of rhetoric. Her latest work focuses right on the extraordinary communicative strategy offered by silence. In *Silenzi d'autore* Mortara Garavelli centers on literary silence, sounding out its depth of communication. In the volume edited by Alvaro Barbieri and Elisa Gregori Latenza, *preterizioni, reticenze e silenzi del testo*, where Mortara Garavelli is one of the authors, she builds a coherent itinerary presented as a preparatory study of omissions, reticence and preteritions in the most varied circles through explanatory examples from literature.

All that “does not emerge at the level of the statement remains hidden and implicit” (Barbieri and Gregori 2016, X) and constitutes an underworld of reticence and the unsaid. The enthymeme is an indispensable tool in implicit communication and brachylogy. Aristotle (*Rhetoric* 1356b) said the enthymeme occurs “when, certain things being posited, something different results by reason of them, alongside of them, from their being true, either universally or in most cases”. As Piazza (2000, 145) comments, “Considering enthymemes from their intrinsically persuasive nature allows us to see, from a different point of view, the possibility to articulate in few words, typical of rhetoric syllogism”. For a long time, the interpretation of enthymemes as imperfect or shortened syllogisms, as pointed out by Piazza (2000, 146), has denigrated them to an inferior position compared to other types of reasoning. Therefore, in *Il corpo della persuasione*, Piazza (2000, 146) does her best to prove that “the characteristic concision of enthymemes, far from being a defect, represents one of the reasons of its efficacy and is [...] a direct consequence of persuasive purpose.”

The aforementioned post published by Eleonora Cimbri on May 5, 2016, on her Facebook profile uses this efficient strategy. The accusation of plagiarism of will is hence hidden in the silence of enthymeme.

Essential for this analysis we turn to the chapter entitled “I silenzi dell’entimema” in Latenza, *preterizioni, reticenze e silenzi del testo*, where Bruno Capaci highlights the development of enthymemes, from Cavalcanti to Manzoni. These techniques flourish in the virtual platforms of Twitter and Facebook. Enthymemes “thicken particularly in the short form of political speech. In tweets and other cool forms of communication, enthymemes remind us of statements which would have not survived in political debate in rigorous journalism” (Capaci 2016, 124).

The message of parliamentarian Cimbro is furthermore emphasised by the reticence concluded in the expression “for altruism...”. This “occurs when a speech is suddenly cut off, leaving one in mid-thought, yet with enough information to understand its implicit progression and predictable consequences” (Mortara Garavelli 2011, 93). The effectiveness of the enthymeme is not in the simple omission of one of the premises, but rather in its capacity “to use the unsaid in order to share the responsibility of reasoning with the interlocutor” (Piazza 2000, 146).

Since ancient times Christian rhetoric has been expert in the persuasive effectiveness of silence, by practicing it in the form of *obscuritas*. “The same idea of *obscuritas* takes over the idea of silence and the unsaid in a synesthetic sense, because what is not expressed leads to a lack of semantic focus” (Capaci 2016, 119). From one side, Pope Francis, the second pontifex who uses a social network as mean of communication, on April 9, 2016 declares on his Twitter profile the strength of family “in its capacity of loving and teaching to love” deconstructing the ideological positions through the language of the Company of Jesus. As Battistini and Raimondi have always highlighted, the Company “organised as a militia within the religious conflict, it gives rhetoric an important key-role”.

Among those who have used this tool is Don Fanzaga, priest and director of Radio Maria. In a post published on the official Facebook page of the Vatican radio in February 2016, he inveighs the promoter of the draft bill on civil unions, Monica Cirinnà, by pointing at her through a biblical and the Petrarchan metaphor as “the woman of the Apocalypse, Babylon”. “Metaphors or other figures of speech can be sources of *obscuritas*... specifically *obscuritas* that are aimed at creating more than a form of estrangement” (Capaci 2016, 119). The attack then develops into a reticent and metaphorical reference to the Last Judgment day when, according to the Catholic doctrine, everyone will be judged according to their actions. In this case too, choosing reticence “is not the result of a rejection of communication, but it is an allusive gesture, asking the reader to cooperate up to the point they participate in the creation of the text” (Donatella Siviero 2016, 220) alluding to the understanding that on the Judgment day of God, the deputy Cirinnà will be judged as *meretrix magna*, hence condemned to eternal damnation.

Therefore, if the unsaid is “a primary system of communication” (Sini 2016, 221) we could not better close this short review of the most eloquent silences in the virtual debate on maternity if not with the most evident example of this rhetorical capacity. On February 25, 2016, the draft Cirinnà bill is approved, after the removal of stepchild adoption and bond of loyalty. The Party of European Socialists (PES) makes a stern comment on its official Twitter page showing all the indignation for what they interpret as true discrimination. However, after few minutes, the comment is removed and substituted with a softer comment:



Fig. 3 Screenshot of the comment by the Party of European Socialists from the official Twitter page, then rewritten with a softer tone.

As is evident from confronting the tweets, the hidden parts in this case become “real areas of repression” (Tonani 2016, 32). Here the silence is “the erasing of what is (or seems to be), worse than the absence of words” (Mortara Garavelli 2015, 41). This is a clear example of euphemistic rhetoric, which underlines how it is possible to say the same thing without creating conflict, presenting itself as that which Perelman ([1958] 2013, 198) defines as “diplomatic”. Typical of those who do not want “to come into conflict with a principle, or to resolve in any way, a conflict between two incompatible principles” silence is used as “a technique to avoid drawing attention to the incompatibility” (Perelman ([1958] 2013, 199). In this case, the euphemism which is in the corrected comment becomes a diplomatic choice whose aim is not to show the irreducible distance in political line generally taken in Europe and that in Italy on the legalization and regulation of civil union for same-sex couples, within the wider field of human rights. In this sense, the words of Bruno Capaci (2016, 118) can be seen as symbolic, because they contextualize the euphemistic function of silence in the area of political correctness:

Silence is a politically correct strategy through the use of euphemism which covers what could hurt by recalling the pain, embarrassment or offence of particular sensitivities. In this case we proceed by starting with voluntary omission, the parts of the speech that are omitted in order to give room to periphrasis and litotes, meant as figure of speech which substitute “a painful idea” with one more acceptable by common sensitivity.

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