Reconstructing Cicero's *Hortensius*. A Note on Fragment 43 Grilli[1]

Constantin-Ionuț MIHAI[*]

Key-words: *Cicero's Hortensius, reconstruction of Hortensius, otium, contentio animi, Latin literature*

Despite its widespread use during Antiquity, Cicero's *Hortensius* has survived only in fragmentary form, as quotations or paraphrases in the works of writers such as Seneca, Tacitus, Nonius Marcellus, Lactantius and Augustine. Owing to the numerous attempts at reconstruction made by various scholars starting with the second half of the 19th century, we now have a sufficiently clear picture of the aim and the plan of this dialogue in its entirety. The efforts of scholars such as Otto Plasberg (1892), Michel Ruch (1958), Laila Straume-Zimmermann (1976, 1990) and, above all, Alberto Grilli (1962, 2010), have decisively contributed to the reconstruction of this dialogue, written by Cicero as an exhortation to philosophy. Of these endeavours, Grilli's reconstruction of the dialogue tends to be considered the "standard edition" for citing and discussing the surviving fragments of this dialogue. Indeed, in his arrangement of the fragments and his commentary on them, Grilli has made some noteworthy contributions, which are now accepted by the great majority of scholars.

Nonetheless, as it is always the case with lost works, transmitted only through indirect tradition, the reconstruction of this dialogue led to divergent views regarding the selection, arrangement, and interpretation of the surviving fragments, so that it is difficult to establish a definitive edition of the *Hortensius*. One of the controversial aspects of the reconstruction concerns the order in which the fragments should be arranged, since only a small number of them can definitely be assigned to a certain particular place.

In this paper I readdress the issue of the arrangement of the fragment preserved in Nonius Marcellus' *De compendiosa doctrina*, 258, 26-27 (Müller's edition): *magna etiam animi contentio adhibenda est in explicando Aristotele, si legas* (Müller 1888: 402). I will argue against the arrangement proposed by Alberto Grilli, and I will attempt to provide a different solution for establishing the place of this fragment within the dialogue as a whole.

[1] This article has been elaborated in the framework of research plan of the "Traditio" Centre from the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași, with the financial support of this institution.

[*] "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași, Romania.

„Philologica Jassyensia", An X, Nr. 1 (19), 2014, Supliment, p. 451–456.

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The above quoted passage from Nonius was included by Grilli into his first edition of the *Hortensius* as fragment 43, and it was presented as a sequence from the speech given by Hortensius the Orator against philosophy. It is probable that Nonius' lines were corrupted; accordingly, Grilli eliminated the sequence *in explicando*, considering it a gloss inserted into the text of *Hortensius* before Nonius made these *excerpta*. According to Grilli, the gloss was intended to explain what the *contentio* mentioned by Hortensius the Orator consisted of. At the same time, the Italian philologist corrected the form *Aristotele* to *Aristotelem*, and gave more credit to those manuscripts that contain the future *leges* instead of the conjunctive *legas*[2]. The text thus obtained is read in Grilli's edition as *magna etiam animi contentio adhibenda est [in explicando], Aristotele<m> si leges*[3].

It seems that Cicero structured his dialogue into two relatively distinct parts: one dedicated to the critiques that Hortensius the Orator levied against philosophy and philosophers, and another one in which Cicero answered his opponent, underlying the importance and the advantages of studying and practicing philosophy. In its turn, Hortensius' discourse is divided into two part: it is, foremost, a critique against dialectic, on the grounds of its abstruseness and difficulty, followed by a critique of philosophy in general, meant to reveal the reasons for which *philosophandum non est*.

Before delving into the discussion of the frag. 43 I will summarize the content of the previous fragments from Grilli's edition of the *Hortensius*, in order to draw the general frame in which the conversation between the four characters of the dialogue takes place. The dialogue is envisioned as taking place in a period of *feriae*, in one of Lucullus' houses (*villae*), sometime between 65 and 60 BCE. The works of art that decorate Lucullus' abode – most probably sculptures and pictures of famous artists – delight Catulus (frag. 4: *delectatus*), and Hortensius admires the skill (*sollertia*) by which lifeless objects acquire an air of vividness and life (frag. 5). Hortensius cherishes these works of art for the enchantment and the unbending of the mind they produce, because, during a period of *otium*, he wishes to direct his attention not towards those matters that demand a great intellectual effort (*quibus intedam rebus animum*), but to those through which the mind can ease and rest (*sed quibus relaxem ac remittam* – frag. 6). At this point of the conversation, Catalus intervenes to stress his preference for reading literary works (frags. 8-10), particularly tragedies and comedies. He suggests that a true *relaxatio animi* can be obtained by reading such works. This would constitute, according to him, an activity suitable for periods of *otium*. Catulus' opinion was probably criticised by Lucullus, who expresses his preference for the lecture and study of historical works, full of *exempla* from which a true *disciplina rei publicae* can be extracted (frags. 13-14). Later on, Hortensius will deliver a speech in which he will emphasize the merits of oratory, considering it

[2] Grilli (1962: 91): "...*leges* sta bene, in quanto è in evidente corrispondenza con l'implicita idea di futuro contenuta nella perifrastica dell'apodosi".

[3] *Cf.* Plasberg (1982: 36): *magna etiam animi contentio adhibenda est <in> explicando Aristotele si leges*; Ruch (1958: 93): *magna etiam contentio adhibenda est explicando Aristotele, si leges* (= frag. 29); Straume-Zimmermann (1990: 52): *magna etiam animi contentio adhibenda est in explicando Aristotele, si leges* (= frag. 56); Rocca (1985: 244): *magna etiam contentio adhibenda est in explicando Aristotele, si legas <commentarios>*.

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superior to the rest of the *artes* (frags. 17-19). Catulus will intervene once again in order to counter Hortensius, stating that, ultimately, oratory cannot ensure a true uplifting of the soul (frag. 20); furthermore, there is also a nefarious use of oratory, such as when somebody comes to the defence of another who committed an injustice (frag. 21). At the same time, Catulus will draw attention to the great benefit one can obtain from philosophy in everything and everywhere: it succours us in the greatest matters, at the same time delving to the smallest (frag. 22).

Catulus' eulogy for philosophy will be answered by Hortensius as a first attack against dialectic, viewed as a part of philosophy (frags. 24-25). At this point, Cicero intervenes in order to remind Hortensius that in his oratorical practices he himself resorts frequently to the dialectic, particularly for dividing, defining and expounding the subject at hand (frag. 27). In this way, Cicero prompts his adversary to reconsider the arguments against philosophy, to give them more consistency (frag. 32).

In frag. 35, a very elliptic one, Hortensius resumes his critique of philosophy and philosophers. The fragments 36 to 41 speak particularly about the incoherence of the philosophers, whose discourses are seductive, while their lives are fundamentally at odds with the precepts they exhort. In frag. 42, philosophy is once again attacked on the grounds that it requires a too austere way of life, that was first espoused by Socrates and then exacerbated by the cynics. Finally, it is in this context that Grilli inserts the passage from Nonius, 258, 26-27, as frag. 43, witch is the main topic of this paper.

Let us begin with Grilli's motivation for placing the passage from Nonius into this context. A thorough analysis reveals that it has little consistency: without providing grounding for his option, Grilli limits himself to stating only that, in this second part of his critique, Hortensius the Orator reviews and criticizes several Ancient Greek philosophers, including Aristotle. Indeed, the mentioning of Aristotle in frag. 43 is followed by references to Democritus of Abdera (frag. 44) and to the stoic Ariston of Chios (frag. 45). The references to these philosophers provided Grilli with the grounds for placing the three aforementioned fragments in this context[4]. However, we cannot be certain that frags. 44 and 45 contain a part of Hortensius' discourse against philosophy. Fragment 44, for instance, could be as plausibly interpreted as belonging to Cicero's own discourse delivered in defence of philosophy, in the second part of the dialogue, in which he probably invoked the names of some philosophers worthy of consideration, who came to prominence through their righteous conducts[5].

Returning to frag. 43, I highlight, from the beginning, two aspects: it contains references to *contentio animi* ("mind straining" or "intellectual effort") and to the activity of reading (*si leges*). A survey of the fragments from the first part of the dialogue reveals that the discussion revolved around these two aspects, because the characters were debating about how exactly a state of *relaxatio animi* during a

[4] Grilli (1962: 92): „il frammento non sarà da porre nella prima polemica di Ortensio: la sua migliore collocazione è più oltre, nella seconda fase, quando Ortensio critica alcuni tra gli antichi filosofi".

[5] See *Hortensius*, frag. 56 Grilli: *itaque nec in philosophia cuiquam cessit et vitae gravitate praestitit.*

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period of leisure (*otium*) can be obtained. Hortensius himself claimed that during such periods he doesn't seek things that demand a great intellectual effort (*quibus intendam animum*), but things through which the mind can ease and rest (*quibus relaxem ac remittam* – frag. 6).

A tight correspondence can be established between the ideas expressed in frag. 43 and those from the beginning of the dialogue (*vide* frags. 6-22): as it can be readily seen, in both cases the discussion orbits around reading, *contentio* and *relaxatio animi*. We should recall that the character Catalus had already suggested that, during a period of *otium*, the reading of literary works can offer *relaxatio* and *remisio animi*[6]. This raises the question, if the sequence which figures in Grilli's edition as frag. 43 is not, in fact, a reply of Hortensius the Orator in the first part of the dialogue, in which the characters discuss about a suitable activity during a period of *otium*, about readings, about *contentio*, *remisio* and *relaxatio animi*. But where exactly, within the context of the first part of the dialogue, should the passage from Nonius be best inserted?

Shortly after Grilli published his first edition of the *Hortensius*, in 1962, Paolo Frassinetti advanced the hypothesis according to which the frag. 43 should be rather placed in the context of the discussion on the liberal arts from the first part of the dialogue, though without arguing in favour of this hypothesis (Frassinetti 1963). It seems that the suggestion did not receive much credit from other researchers, not to mention Grilli who, in his new edition of the *Hortensius*, published posthumously in 2010, placed the passage from Nonius Marcellus again as frag. 43, just as in the previous edition. Frassinetti considered that the quote from *Hortensius* supplied by Nonius should rather be placed immediately after the discussion from frags. 8-10, in which Catulus extolled the reading of literary works, in order to emphasize the pleasure and unbending of the mind (*relaxatio*) resulting from it (*Ibidem*: 150, 154 n. 13). Frassinetti was thus suggesting that the fragment preserved in Nonius would constitute a response from Hortensius the Orator to Catalus' contention: while for Catulus reading was a suitable activity for a period of *otium*, Hortensius argues that reading philosophical works cannot offer a *relaxatio animi*, but necessitates (*adhibenda est*), on the contrary, a *magna contentio animi*, Aristotle's case being relevant in this respect.

Frassinetti had justly observed that the idea expressed in frag. 43 tallied to a large extent with the topic of the first part of the dialogue, in which the discussion revolves around *otium* and the best way to obtain a *relaxatio animi* in a brief period of *feriae*. Indeed, there are no conclusive arguments for placing this fragment in the second part of Hortensius' diatribe against philosophy. The discussion about *otium*, about reading, about *contentio* and *relaxatio animi* argues for placing this fragment in the context described in the beginning of the dialogue.

Nonetheless, I cannot fully agree with Paolo Frassinetti's suggestion that frag. 43 should be placed immediately after the discussion from frags. 8-10. I see Hortensius' words from frag. 43 rather as a reply to Catulus' argumentation from

[6] A parallel passage is found in Cicero's *De oratore* II, 5, 22, in which it is asserted that the enjoyment of an *otium litteratum* shouldn't be a mental effort, but a relaxation: *verum otii fructus est, non contentio animi, sed relaxatio*.

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frags. 21-22, which contain a first eulogy of philosophy, considered superior to oratory. In frags. 8-10, Catulus only eulogises reading in general (mentioning the works of the tragedians and comediographs), with no allusion to philosophical readings, which, quite indeed, could produce a *contentio animi*. The first hint to philosophy is not found until frag. 21, whereafter an eulogy for it is delivered in frag. 22. Furthermore, a closer analysis reveals that in the first part of the dialogue the discussion advances gradually, from the assessment of the various liberal disciplines, to the discussion on the importance and merits of philosophy. Accordingly, it is unlikely that the dialogue of the four characters had already contained a reference to philosophy in the stage described by frags. 8-10.

Instead, frag. 43 could be put into connection with the eulogy from frag. 22. Catulus' defensive and encomiastic stance on philosophy may have been criticised by Hortensius precisely by readdressing the central theme of the previously-held discussion, namely that concerning *otium* and the manner in which *relaxatio animi* can be obtained. Hortensius may have replied that during a period of *otium litteratum*, philosophical reading or discussions would be inappropriate, particularly if an author such as Aristotle were to be brought into discussion, since a great mental effort must be exerted by whoever reads or discusses his works.

To conclude, the occurrence of motifs similar to those from the fragments constituting the first part of the dialogue – such as *contentio* and *relaxatio animi* and the motif of readings suitable for periods of *otium* – compels us to place the passage from Nonius Marcellus, 258, 26-27 Müller (= *Hort*., frag. 43 Grilli) at the beginning of the first speech against philosophy delivered by Hortensius, as a reply to Catalus' ideas expressed in frags. 21-22.

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Cicero's *Hortensius*, undoubtedly the most famous exhortation to philosophy from the whole of Latin literature, has survived only in fragmentary form, as quotations or paraphrases in the works of different writers of Antiquity, including Seneca, Tacitus, Nonius Marcellus, Lactantius and Augustine. Despite the cautious attempts of different scholars to reconstruct this dialogue, we still do not have a definitive edition of it. Since only a small number of the known fragments can be certainly assigned to one particular place, the attempts to reestablish the plan of the dialogue and the proper order in which the fragments should be arranged still remain a source of quarrel between scholars. In this paper I propose a new arrangement of the frag. 43 from Grilli's edition of the *Hortensius*, in an attempt to establish more adequately its place and meaning in the structure of the dialogue.

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