

Unity and Parody,
or how to read a Menippean Satire:
on Martianus' *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*¹

JULIETA CARDIGNI
Universidad de Buenos Aires-CONICET

*1. Preliminary Thoughts on De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii
as a Menippean Satire*

Since its arrival in the universe of Literature (circa 470 CE) Martianus Capella's work has brought about extreme reactions from its readers with regards to its interpretation and valuing.² Disconcerted by its heterogeneous and chaotic appearance, the confusing nature of its presumably didactic message, and its mixture of tones, registers and styles, most critics consider *De nuptiis* to be an unclassifiable work.³

Although there are not many references on which we can rely that might give us an idea of how contemporaries received *De nuptiis* or the use that they might have made of it,⁴ there is no doubt that Martianus' literary posterity read, copied

¹ My most sincere gratitude to Prof. Robert Kaster, who generously read and commented a draft of this article as my advisor, during my research stay at Princeton University. I am also very grateful to Professor Joel Relihan for his insightful comments on the subject.

² According to the Martianus' scholarship, it is often admitted that *De nuptiis* is a menippean satire, and in this sense, my statement does not pretend to be new (see, for example, Shanzer 1986, Dronke 1994, Relihan 1993). What I am interested in pointing out here is the fact that sometimes this generic acceptance is not fully accepted when constructing an interpretation of the work. As we will see soon, some scholars insist in considering menippean just a mere mold, with no further consequence than an entertaining resource. It is against these perspectives that I insist in *De nuptiis* as a menippean satire.

³ As it will soon be pointed out, LeMoine's work (1972a, 1972b) was the first attempt to treat *De nuptiis* as a literary work, and I consider it as an antecedent of my own proposal. Since then, though, this literary point of view has not been deepened as one would expect.

⁴ There are certainly some references, such as the mention made by Fulgentius (6th century) in *Sermones Antiqui* 123.4-6: 'Unde Felix Capella in libro de nuptiis Mercurii et

and used it assiduously, as can be seen from the number of manuscripts of it produced between the 9th and the 10th centuries and the profusion of commentaries and glosses from the same period.⁵ Since by the Middle Ages many of the sources that Martianus used to compose his work had already been lost, it is logical to assume that scholars from the era would try to hang on to whatever knowledge the Liberal Arts presented in *De nuptiis*. Thus, from the Middle Ages onward, Martianus' work has been considered instructional, and its interpretation, to the present day, seems to be forced to make it fit this presumably didactic mold. This mold has prevailed despite the acceptance of the matrix of Menippean Satire in *De nuptiis*, and critics have attempted to relegate Menippean features such as fiction and parody to the first two books and other isolated episodes, refusing to acknowledge the powerful influence these features have on the overall interpretation of the work.⁶ In an effort to make both matrices—didactic and Menippean—coexist, *De nuptiis* has been categorized as a sort of monster: a 'menippean encyclopedia.' This is a very problematical tag when we consider that it brings two

Philologiae ait, "placuitque Minervae pellere celibatum." As Shanzer (1986: 12-13) and also Baldwin (1988: 43) point out, Fulgentius is misquoting, since Martianus Capella actually wrote (1,5) "*constitua (sc. Mercurius) pellere caelibatum*". However, the source is perfectly recognizable. Likewise, also Gregory of Tours mentions Martianus in the 6th century. According to McCluskey (1990) though Gregory's astronomy is not part of the mainstream of Greco-Roman mathematical astronomy, similarities to many astronomical traditions suggest direct or indirect influences. An analogue to Gregory's location of constellations in relation to the path of the sun appears in Martianus' *De nuptiis*. Here we find a description of 183 parallel daily circles that the sun travels twice each year. Gregory had read this standard text in the liberal arts and noted that "*Martianus noster septem disciplinis (...) in astrologiis cursus siderum contemplare.*" (*De nuptiis*, 7,872; *Historia Francorum* 10,31). These two references, however, do not give us much information about the reception of *De nuptiis*; Gregory seems to consider his work as a compendium, but I think the reference is not rich enough to jump into more conclusions. On the other hand, the bizarre nature of *De nuptiis* is not a modern, or even postmodern perception. Since the Middle Ages we can find opinions showing that the work is perceived in a controversial or amusing way (about this point in particular, cf. LeMoine (1972b).

⁵ On Martianus' manuscripts, cf. Leonardi (1959).

⁶ In favor of didactic/ encyclopedic theory (with variations): Petrovicova (2010), Stahl (1977), Westra (1981, 1988), Shanzer (1986), Bakhouché (2015), (2011). LeMoine (1972a, 1972b) does not dismiss a didactic purpose, but she approaches to the work as a whole, and we consider it a precedent for our own literary perspective. Schievenin (1986) and Cristante (1978) also analyze the parodic elements throughout the work, though they insist in its encyclopedic nature. Relihan (1993) places *De nuptiis* in the generic tradition of Menippean satire and more readily accepts the consequences. Although he does not abandon the idea that *De nuptiis* is somehow didactic (in this case, the work would function as a counter-example), parody is the main axis of his interpretation, and our point of departure in the present paper.

nearly contradictory terms face to face, and that it was created *ad hoc* to refer to this single and unique work from among all works in the history of Literature.⁷

Two problems therefore arise from reading *De nuptiis* as a didactic work. The first is the attribute of a generally serious tone, one that has caused the discourses of the Liberal Arts to be interpreted as objective scientific knowledge, and from which comes the notion of *De nuptiis* as an encyclopedic text. The second is a conception of the text as fragmented, in which even comic and parodic episodes (such as dialogues between Martianus and Saturia) are considered mere rhetorical devices having no major influence on the consideration of the serious discourses of the Liberal Arts.⁸ As a result, the connection between both sections of the work—the allegorical and the scientific—has been seen as extremely weak, the first two books being considered a mere conceit for introducing the disciplinary content in a nice way. So in this conception, the matrix of menippean satire becomes a simple contrivance used to favor the overall didactic purpose.

By contrast, the aim of this paper is to state that *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* is a Menippean satire that exhibits strong unity in structure and meaning, and that the unifying feature is parody.⁹ We intend to show that parody is not simply a rhetorical device occasionally applied for comic relief or critical effect, but rather a register that characterizes the very nature of the work. In addition, the main result of the use of parody is the creation of a general climate of inadequacy that comes from the dissolutive spirit of Menippean satire. Thus, *De nuptiis* does not *use* parody, but rather *is* itself a parody. This leads to the disintegration of the idea of the serious character, which is broken down by parody's destabilizing

⁷ The defender of this particular idea is Westra (1988), who appears to be strongly against possible 'post-modern' readings of Martianus' work, such as the one proposed here. In his opinion, the presence of parodic features does not cancel the serious *propositum* of the work, which is a didactic one.

⁸ To a certain extent, this is Bakhouche's (2011) opinion. She analyzes the irony that the narrator applies to himself and acknowledges its presence beyond the first two books. But she either resists projecting these results out to an interpretation of the work as a whole or relegates them to being mere strategies, the result being that she joins those who consider *De nuptiis* to be a didactic work.

⁹ I would like to point out that I am not considering menippean satire and *prosimetrum* as synonyms. From my perspective, a functional one, the alternance of prose and verse is a formal feature of Menippean Satire, but this pattern is insufficient to ascribe a text to a specific genre. Thus, all Menippean satires are *prosimetra*, but not all *prosimetra* are Menippean satire (noticed by many, for example, Dronke 1994: 1). The genre ascription depends on many other elements, and particularly on the work's 'social purpose', a functional concept we will take up in the following pages of this article. About Menippean Satire and a discussion on the genre, cf. Relihan (2018, 1993), Bakhtin (2012, 2003, 1984); Frye (2000); and Herren (2018); McLuhan (2015). On *prosimetrum* and its history and variants, cf. Pabst (1994); Dronke (1994); Harris-Reichl (1997).

effects. From this perspective, *De nuptiis* is a work that slips perfectly into the discursive genre to which it belongs, and one whose deepest meaning is effectively brought out by taking the interpretive capabilities of this genre to the extreme. When considered in this way, the problems that have arisen from trying to read *De nuptiis* as a didactic work turn into key features full of meaningful information.

2. Unity and Parody

This being said, establishing the unity of the work seems to be the first thing to do. This is contrary to opinions that see it divided into the two virtually unconnected sections of fiction versus true knowledge. The main argument of those who consider fiction restricted to the first two books of *De nuptiis* is the final passage of Book 2, in which Martianus, the narrator, says (2,220):

*nunc ergo mythos terminatur; infiunt
artes libelli qui sequentes asserent.
nam fruge vera omne fictum dimovent
et disciplinas annotabunt sobrias
pro parte multa nec vetabunt ludicra.*¹⁰

Along with the use of the word *fabella*, which he promises to his son at the beginning of the first book (1,1, “*fabellam tibi... explicabo*”),¹¹ this statement seems to close the fictional section of the work, announcing the beginning of the ‘scientific’

¹⁰ Since I wouldn’t dare attempt a translation to English, as it is not my native language, I will use Stahl’s translation for Martianus’ text (1977). However, since Willis’ edition (1983, on which most modern editions and translations are based) had not been published yet, Stahl used Dick’s edition (1925). I am following Willis’ text, which has become canonical. Therefore, I will note any resulting differences of words or phrases and provide my own translation for these only when the differences are meaningful. With this in mind, here is Stahl’s translation: “So now the mythical part is ended; the books which follow set forth the arts. With true intellectual nourishment they put aside all fable and for the most part explain serious studies, without however avoiding entertainment. Now you know what will follow, given the goodwill of the heavenly powers and the Muses and the lyre of Latona’s son [Apollo].”

¹¹ The term “*fabella*”, or even “*fabula*” is of course a very loaded one. Martianus even takes it up in the Epilogue (9,997), when Martianus-narrator says he has finished his “*anilem fabulam*”, a phrase which, of course, also remind us of Apuleius. The presence of Apuleius in Martianus has been noticed by Ramelli (2001), Relihan (2009). On “*fabella*” and “*anilis fabula*” in Apuleius, see Tilg (2014).

one. Of course, this hypothesis is based on acceptance of the notion that *mythos* and *fabula* are synonyms. I will now address this notion and attempt to show that alternating between the two is not a mere *variatio*, but a careful and meaningful choice of words.

Bovey (2003)¹² has pointed out that we can shed light on this question by referring to Macrobius' *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*.¹³ According to Macrobius, *fabulae* can be divided into two main parts, the first aiming to please the audience, and the second designed to promote moral behavior (1,2,6-9). The first part is rejected by Philosophy and philosophers, but the second is accepted and can even be divided again, according to the relationship that *fabulae* establish with truth. When *fabulae* are nothing but lies, Philosophy doesn't take them into account. However, when they arise from truth and use fiction to develop the plot, they have philosophical value, in which case Macrobius proposes calling them *narrationes fabulosae* (1,2,9-10):

*ex his autem quae ad quandam virtutum speciem intellectum legentis hortantur fit secunda discretio. in quibusdam enim et argumentum ex ficto locatur et per mendacia ipse relationis ordo contextitur ut sunt illae Aesopi fabulae elegantia fictionis illustres, at in aliis argumentum quidem fundatur veri soliditate sed haec ipsa veritas per quaedam composita et ficta profertur, et hoc iam vocatur narratio fabulosa, non fabula, ut sunt caerimoniarum sacra, ut Hesiodi et Orphei quae de deorum progenie active narrantur, ut mystica Pythagoreorum sensa referuntur.*¹⁴

¹² Also Cullhed (2015) agrees with this proposal.

¹³ The *communis opinio* on Macrobius is that he lived and wrote in the first half of the fifth century (cf. Kaster 2011; Cameron 2011), so even if Martianus wrote a bit later, they are still contemporaries. I am not suggesting that Martianus had read Macrobius' *Commentarii*; there is no certain textual evidence of that, but they certainly belonged to a common milieu, and this can be appreciated in their works.

¹⁴ I am following Willis' text for Macrobius (1970), and since Stahl also translated the *Commentary* (1952), I am using his text as well. As Stahl himself warns us, he is using Jan's edition (1848) in comparison with the Eyssenhardt edition (1893), but the few textual differences in these passages are not meaningful nor do they pose textual problems which affect my analysis. This is Stahl's translation: "The other group, those that draw the reader's attention to certain kinds of virtue, are divided into two types. In the first both the setting and the plot are fictitious, as in the fables of Aesop, famous for his exquisite imagination. The second rest on a solid foundation of truth, which is treated in a fictitious style. This is called the fabulous narrative (*narratio fabulosa*) to distinguish it from the ordinary fable; examples of it are the performances of sacred rites, the stories of Hesiod and Orpheus that treat of the ancestry and deeds of the gods, and the mystic conceptions of the Pythagoreans."

Echoing an idea present in the Platonic tradition, Macrobius concludes this section by stating that this *narratio fabulosa*, based on decorous subject matter, is not appropriate in every philosophical discourse. God, for example, cannot be comprehended by human discursive language, and therefore we can only recur to images and analogies (1,2,13-14). But as long as we remain at our earthly, human level, *narratio fabulosa* is not only acceptable, but also efficient.

Now, Martianus does not explicitly reflect on the subject; he simply writes a *fabula*. As we have seen, he uses the term “*mythos*” at the end of Book 2, which calls to mind his use of “*fabella*” at the beginning of Book 1. A superficial interpretation of this might lead us to think that fiction has ended and that the part on scientific knowledge is now to begin. We offer two objections to this opinion. First, the use of the term “*mythos*” instead of the repetition of ‘*fabula*’, seems to us odd as a choice of words; and second, there is the subsequent dialogue between Saturator and Martianus at the beginning of Book 3, in which Saturator insists on using fiction to decorate and ‘dress’ Liberal Arts in order to present them to the heavenly Assembly. Martianus finally accepts the advice (3,222):

*“atquin prioris ille
titulus monet libelli
mythos ab ore pulsos
Artesque vera fantes
voluminum sequentum
praecepta comparare.”*
*at haec iocante rictu:
“nil mentiamur” inquit
“et vestiantur Artes.
an tu gregem sororum
nudum dabis iugandis,
et sic petent Tonantis
et caelitum senatum?
aut si tacere cultum
placet, ordo quis probatur?”*
*“certe loquentur illae
quicquid fuat docendum,
habitusque consequentur
asomato in profatu.”*
*“haec nempe ficta vox est,
et devius promissi es;
cur ergo non fateris*

*nil figminis figura
 nil posse comparari?"
 His me Camena vicit.
 'fugis?' 'Iugabo ludum.'*¹⁵

Martianus seems to be operating in a binary system (truth vs. falseness), while Satura is trying to convince him of the benefit of incorporating fiction and verisimilitude in his story. So, *mythos* has ended, but not fiction; therefore, *mythos* and *fabula* are not synonyms.

But if we accept this, to what then does the term "*mythos*" refer? It appears to be a more specific term than '*fabula*,' the latter being the general term for 'fiction.' Now, following Bovey, let's apply the Macrobian classification to Martianus' use of "*mythos*" in both passages previously quoted. We can identify the plot of the first two books as Macrobian "*narratio fabulosa*." its content is religious and noble, it is a fiction, but based on a true principle, and it differs from straight '*fabula*,' the general term with which Martianus denominates his whole work when introducing it to his son (1,1 "*fabella*"). So according to this and to the statement Satura makes at the beginning of Book 3 as well, the fictional atmosphere extends also to the seven schoolbooks which complete the work. Martianus reaffirms this very same idea in his *sphragis*, when he says, referring to the subjects treated in *De nuptiis* (9,998):

¹⁵ I follow Dick's punctuation on this last line because I agree with Stahl that the sentence makes more sense with this punctuation. "Once again in this little book the Muse prepares her ornaments and wants to tell fabricated stories at first, remembering that utility cannot clothe the naked truth; she regards it as a weakness of the poet to make straightforward and undisguised statements, and she brings a light touch to literary style and adds beauty to a page that is already heavily colored. 'But' I cried, 'in the previous book notice is given that the myths have been put away and that the precepts in the volumes which follow are a work of those Arts which tell that which is truth.' But with a laugh she joked at this and said: 'Let us tell no lies, and yet let the Arts be clothed. Surely you will not give that band of sisters naked to the bridal couple? Surely they will not go like that before the Senate of the Thunderer and the heavenly gods? To say no more about embellishment, what is to be the program?' 'Surely let them speak on their own teachings and let them be clothed in incorporeal utterance.' 'Now you are deceiving me and are not consistent with your promise; why do you not admit that your work cannot be composed except by the use of imagery?' With these words the Muse got the better of me: 'Are you running away?' 'I am joining in the game.' "

(...) *docta indoctis aggerans*¹⁶
fandis tacenda farcinat, immiscuit
Musas deosque, disciplinas cyclicas
*Garrire agresti cruda finxit plasmate.*¹⁷

In addition, both Macrobius' *narratio fabulosa* and Martianus' *mythos* find a place in Augustine's classification of the three ways to approach theology (*Civ. dei* 6,5): mythical, physic and civil, according to a previous systematization attributed to Varro: "*Latine si usus admitteret, genus quod primum posuit fabulare appellaremus; sed fabulosum dicamus; a fabulis enim mythicon dictum est, quoniam μῦθος Graece fabula dicitur.*"¹⁸

As Augustine's quote shows, '*mythos*' and '*fabulosum*,' the latter being the adjective used by Macrobius to describe his '*narratio fabulosa*,' are synonyms in Greek and Latin. So Macrobius chooses the Latin form, while Martianus prefers the Greek. In conclusion, by integrating *mythos* and scientific knowledge within his *fabula*, Martianus is telling us that the whole of his work, the 'scientific' section included, is an allegorical fiction, since his initial denomination of *fabella* is a statement of literary genre. At the same time, by calling the first two books *mythos*, he is legitimizing the allegorical narrative by giving it value as a truth-based fiction. Given this, both sections of *De nuptiis* would only differ in the *balance* between the fictional and the non-fictional, a subject discussed many times by Martianus and Satura. This implies that the speeches of the Liberal Arts do not belong to the realm of any 'objective Truth,' and that they are inseparable from the fictional (and parodic) atmosphere stated in the first section.

The second fundamental element to be clarified is the possibility of reading *De nuptiis* as a parody at the level of the narrative plot. This is something legitimized by Martianus himself, who seems to hint in this direction, if we are willing

¹⁶ Dick's text says "(...) *docta indoctis aggerans*", which I accept in Stahl's translation. This passage has been discussed extensively by Cristante (1987, 1978). According to him, Wilis *doctis* is a misprint, and it seems better to read *docta indoctis*, which parallels the same contrast *fandis* vs. *tacenda* in the next line. Thus, I have accepted this suggestion and changed the text in that verse, in accordance to more recent editions which also print "*docta indoctis*" (such as Guillaumin, 2011).

¹⁷ "[Satire] has heaped learned doctrines upon unlearned, and crammed sacred matters into secular; she has comingled gods and Muses, and has had uncouth figures prating in a rustic fiction about the encyclopedic arts."

¹⁸ I am using Loeb's edition (1957) for the Latin text and the English translation: "Of these one is called mythical, another physical, and the third, civil. If Latin usage allowed, we should call the kind that he placed first 'fabular'. But let us call it 'fabulous', for the term 'mythical' is derived from fables, since in Greek a fable is called 'mythos'."

to read a passage from Book 1 on a metaliterary level. This seems plausible in the context of *De nuptiis*, in which many other metaliterary passages appear.

As we know, Philology is not Mercury's first choice as a bride, and one of his primary candidates is Psyche. He has discarded Sophia and Mantia as candidates, the former because she is consecrated to Pallas and the latter because she has just been promised to Apollo.¹⁹ But Psyche receives more attention than these two. The presents given by the gods and goddesses when she was born are described at length, as is her beauty. This idyllic description ends in a rather tragic way, when a crying Virtus notifies Mercury that his wedding Psyche will not be possible (1,7):

His igitur Ψυχὴν opimam superis ditemque muneribus atque multa caelestium collatione decoratam in conubium Arcas superiorum cassus optabat. Sed eam Virtus, ut adhaerebat forte Cyllenio, paene lacrimans nuntiavit in potentiam²⁰ pharetrati volitantisque superi de sua societate correptam captivamque adamantinis nexibus a Cupidine detineri.²¹

At this point, we should remember that the main source for the narrative section of *De nuptiis* is the episode of Psyche and Cupid in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*.²² Thus, a metaliterary exegesis of this passage could be stating that, in the search for a literary plot, Martianus must give up the idea of narrating us the story of Psyche and Cupid because that has already been done by a previous narrator. However, since Martianus does indeed want to tell this particular story, the story of a marriage, he will have to make some changes, and the result, then, will be a *translatio*. With this in mind, then, the whole story can be considered a parody of Apuleius.

¹⁹ On allegorical interpretations of Mercury's possible candidates, see Lenaz (1975), Shanzer (1986), and Gersh (1986).

²⁰ I prefer to follow Dick's "*in potentiam*" here, against Willis' "*impotentia*".

²¹ "So the Arcadian [Mercury], his earlier hopes frustrated, thought of marrying Psyche, wealthy as she was in the gifts of heaven and richly adorned by the gods. But Virtue, almost in tears and clinging fast to the Cyllenian, confessed that Psyche had been snatched from her company into the hand of Cupid the flying archer, and was being held captive by him in shackles of adamant."

²² For Relihan (2009), the story of Cupid and Psyche is *already* a parody of the philosophical account of the ascent of the soul in Apuleius' work. The story of Lucius and Isis is sublime because there is no *story* about Isis in *Metamorphoses*. The union that Lucius achieves in silence in Book 11 is the mystic union, while the union of Cupid and Psyche, achieved in narrative, is its comic counterpart. If this is true, it suggests that Martianus' tale of Mercury and Philology is modeled on Apuleius in many ways, and this establishes a very interesting, nearly parallel, means of analysis for both tales.

On the other hand, according to Virtus' description, Psyche's story is a sad, violent one. Martianus, on the contrary, might wish to give his own *fabula* a different tone that is closer to comedy. The mentioned appreciation is not verified when we read Apuleius' tale.²³ Psyche is never actually taken prisoner, per se. Rather, it is Cupid who spends a terrible night locked in Psyche's mother's basement until Psyche arrives there looking for him (6,11): "*Interim Cupido solus interioris domus unici cubiculi custodia clausus coercebatur acriter, partim ne petulanti luxurie vulnus gravaret, partim ne cum sua cupita conveniret.*"²⁴ Martianus' idea seems to be that Psyche's prison has more to do with her body and the restrictions imposed by it than it does with an actual prison. And since Martianus is seeking a bride not bound in such a way, his choice of Philology seems better. Since as far back the Middle Ages, she has represented the rational part of the soul, as opposed to Psyche, who is associated with passion.²⁵

This displacement is evidence of one of the main components of Martianus' transformation: he aims to elevate Apuleius' tale to the level of the divine, to the contemplation of true knowledge, distancing it from the realm of the Milesian tale. The couples from each *fabula* have in common the fact that they are from different worlds. But due to this transformation, Mercury and Philology manage, at least to all appearances, to install themselves far from the human world, while Psyche and Cupid, though they occupy a presumably divine space, experience the passions of the body.²⁶ About this particular subject, Relihan (2009: 82) correctly states that: "*Cupid and Psyche (...) expresses a truth about sex and the mortal World, but its divine world is not held up for our admiration. The tale's real concerns are those of the World below.*"

²³ Fulgentius, in his *Mythologies*—very close in time and character to Martianus' *De nuptiis*—interprets Psyche and Cupid's tale allegorically (3,6), as many medieval commentators would do later with Martianus' tale. However, he does not allude to any sad or negative implication in the story, like we can detect in Martianus' interpretation.

²⁴ Here is Relihan's translation, whose Latin texts I also follow (2009): "Cupid was in solitary confinement, under close watch, shut in a one-room apartment in the interior of the house, partly so that he couldn't make his wound the worse through his immodest and sensuous obsessions, partly so that he couldn't arrange an assignation with his heart desire."

²⁵ From the start of its medieval reception, *De nuptiis* was obsessively read as an allegory, ascribing various meanings to the union of Mercury and Philology. For example, in the introduction to his *Annotationes*, John Scotus Eriugena proposes an allegorical identification of Philology with the study of *ratio*, while Mercurius incarnates eloquence (on medieval commentators of *De nuptiis*, cf. Ramelli 2006).

²⁶ On Martianus and the novelistic molds in *De nuptiis*, cf. Bakhouché (2011). The author presents a series of interesting observations in order to account for differences and similarities between Martianus and Apuleius. But if we think of *De nuptiis* as a Menippean satire, the differences explain themselves.

Philology herself confirms her removal from the human world when, upon receiving the news of her deification, she expresses her regrets at not being able to listen to human tales anymore (2,100): “*Nam certe mythos, poeticae etiam diversitatis delicias Milesias historiasque mortalium, postquam supera conscenderit, se penitus amissuram non cassa opinione formidat.*”²⁷ As a consequence, when Philology begins her ascension, Cupid is intentionally left out of the bridal party (2,148): “*Nam Cupido, corporeae voluptatis illex, licet eam semper antevolat, Philologiae occursibus non ausus est interesse.*”²⁸ Although an indirect allusion to the main character of the Apuleian episode, this remark seems to separate Martianus’ text from its source, situating his wedding plot in the realm of the spirit rather than the body. This might be a way to show that true union must occur at the spiritual level; but it also might be a way to discredit this very opinion once it has been established. We must not forget that in Martianus’ work the marriage never takes place.²⁹

3. Menippean Satire and Anti-didacticism

Departing from this perspective, Martianus’ work acquires a very different character, enabling a different interpretation. In this frame, the final section will lead briefly with two elements. First, I would like to establish the possibility of considering Menippean Satire as a genre in Antiquity, conformed by a group of texts shaping a literary tradition, to which Martianus’ work might be ascribed. This corpus is composed by the works of the fragmentary Menippus, Varro, Seneca and Petronius, the Greeks Julian and Lucian, the late Latin Martianus, Fulgentius and Ennodius, and finally Boethius, according to Relihan’s proposal.³⁰ This ‘Menippean tradition’ implies the presence of certain non-formal features shared by every exemplar of the corpus. The advantage of this perspective is twofold: on

²⁷ “She had a fear, not without substance, that after she had ascended to the sky, she would forgo altogether the myths and legends of mankind, those charming poetic diversities of the Milesian tales.”

²⁸ “As for Cupid, her lure of physical pleasure, although he always flew in front of Juno, yet he did not dare to be amongst those to meet Philology.”

²⁹ The closest reference we can find in the text is the allusion to the nuptial chamber and to the nuptial procession at the end of book 9, from which we can infer that Philology and Mercury will concrete their marriage. However, this is not the main point here; the interesting thing is that the text does not narrate the marriage, because it is an *ineffabile* fact, no matter if it actually occurred or not.

³⁰ Since Relihan’s work (1993) many interesting contributions have been written on the subject; to mention a few examples, Weinbrot (2008), Herren (2018), and Harris-Reichl (1997).

one hand, it states functional parameters to characterize the genre; on the other hand, it enables the drawn of a tradition, within which each text dialogues and constructs meaning. In this context, *De nuptiis* is not a bizarre literary occurrence, but one more exemplar in this discursive universe, dialoguing and playing with the conventions of the genre.

In the second place, since we accept that Martianus' work can be linked to a previous and posterior tradition, we need a theoretic framework which allows us to study *De nuptiis*' discursive features in relation to this literary tradition, establishing a dialogue between text and its context. Thus, if we approach *De nuptiis* from a functionalist point of view, it is possible to study the text both as a product and as a process, and therefore, many of the problems described above find their solution.

For this reason, I apply the theoretical framework of Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL), taken by the Sydney School from the Bakhtinian perspective. This provides concrete elements of discursive analysis for the purpose of approaching the study of parody.³¹ According to this line of thinking, for example, although *prosimetrum* is traditionally a central feature from which Menippean satire is recognized, its formal nature makes it a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition. Many works alternate prose and verse, but not all of them are Menippean satires; it is necessary to perceive what function verse serves in order to activate one or another key of generic reading. Also, in SFL, the *social purpose* of a text is what determines its literary genre. For example, although we can find a certain systematization of knowledge in *De nuptiis*, it is not a didactic work if its social purpose is not that of instruction. If it is rather to unbalance or attack common cultural spaces by means of parody, then this feature—added, in context, to others that lead in the same direction—points to the destabilizing and critical genre of Menippean satire. In this case we can then, as medieval scholars did, read the work in order to know (perhaps) what the rhetoric was about, but doing so does not mean that the social purpose of the work is necessarily that of a manual on Rhetoric.

Added to this, the SFL enlightening concept of *contextual metaphor* helps to explain the phenomenon of generic displacement that often arises in interpretations of polyphonic and heterogeneous works like *De nuptiis*. According to this idea, a genre can activate certain features that set the stage attributable to a determined genre; yet at the same time it can reverse this impression and frustrate the reader's expectations by bringing out features that re-signify the generic adscription and, consequentially, the interpretation of the work. In the case of Martianus,

³¹ On SFL, see Eggins & Martin (2003); Halliday & Hasan (1976); Halliday (1989); Halliday & Mathiesen (2004); Martin & Rose, D. (2007).

perception of the parodic register re-signifies this stage and, at the same time, the discursive genre of the work, which goes from being a didactic manual to a Menippean satire. This rapprochement not only allows for an important flexibility in the study of literary genre, but also explains the confusion and imprecision with regards to the generic adscription of the *De nuptiis*, since didactic elements are indeed present in the work, but only insofar as to function as objects of parody and subversion.

Thus *De nuptiis* is a parody, and parody is the main unifying bond of the work. But what is the object of this parody? At the level of the narrative plot and its allegorical projection, it is a parody of the perfect narrator telling the perfect tale, the wise magister able to tell a story whose subject is no less than the ultimate fulfillment of the highest of philosophical aims: the union of humanity and divinity, where humanity has been elevated to a divine status. In more general terms (not possible to address within the scope of this paper³²), *De nuptiis* is a mock on the possibility of this narration and a caveat about the arrogance of its undertaking. It is an implacable criticism of discourse and, specifically, of its inability as a vehicle for knowledge, which turns didactic instruction futile by rendering its aims unattainable.³³

In this context, the display of erudition—the pageant of the Liberal Arts and their discourses—is no more than the shaping of the object to be parodied, and this assemblage is to ‘true’ contemporary erudition what a seaborne target is to a real warship. It is of no doubt that medieval scavengers took a significant didactic profit from this literary procedure (bless them) but reading *De Nuptiis* as if its main social purpose had been ‘to instruct pleasantly’ obliges us to leave its many incongruences in the realm of the unexplained or the idiosyncratic. We would have thus just a well-intentioned encyclopedia in whose pages (no one knows why) something went slightly wrong.

The reassessment of *De nuptiis*’ social purpose dissolves those incongruences.³⁴ In keeping with the Menippean spirit (which admits no compromises with more ‘constructive’ purposes), *De nuptiis* becomes no longer an unclassifiable

³² See Cardigni (2019).

³³ On this subject, and in particular on Harmonia as a proof of this criticism to language in Martianus, cf. Chang (1998).

³⁴ SFL looks at categories of the social purpose of texts, from which genre is determined. For example, although we can find a certain systematization of knowledge in Martianus’ work, it is not a didactic text if its social purpose is not instruction. If its aim is to attack through parody certain common cultural icons, then it leans toward the genre of Menippean satire. So we can indeed read *De nuptis* as medieval scholars did, in order to find out about Rhetoric in late Roman education. But doing so does not mean that the purpose of the work is to instruct.

monstrosity, but a bittersweet caricature of everything that can be learnt, everything that can be taught, everything that can be said and everything that can be known.

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