

BEYOND MARSILIO FICINO? JUDAH ABARBANEL, FRANCESCO CATTANI DA DIACCETO,
AND THE RENAISSANCE *CONVIVIUM*¹

*Introduction*²

In a seminal article on the Arabic and Jewish sources that Judah Abarbanel (Leone Ebreo, c. 1470-1534) used to develop his renowned *Dialoghi d'amore* (*Dialogues of Love*, 1535), Shlomo Pines also addresses, though in a marginal section, the similarities between Judah's treatise and Marsilio Ficino's (1433-1499) *Commentarium in Convivium Platonis de amore* (*Commentary on Plato's Convivium on Love*, 1469/1484). Regarding Ficino, Pines concludes that the «*Commentarium* may be regarded as Leone's main Christian source as far as the metaphysical theory of love is concerned». ³ Although Pines places the *Dialoghi* in the medieval Judeo-Islamic philo-

sophical tradition rather than in the Italian Renaissance philosophical milieu, his statement on Ficino might be relevant to understand Judah's relationship with fifteenth- and sixteenth-century intellectuals. Among most scholars, the influence of Italian Neoplatonism on the *Dialoghi* continues to be largely understood according to the terms Pines suggested, mainly concentrating on Ficino's *Commentarium* and general resemblances between the texts – with a few studies as the exception. ⁴ Undoubtedly, the author of the *Dialoghi* owes a great deal to Ficino's commentary on Plato's *Convivium*, which was first published in 1484 in the first Latin integral edition of Plato's dialogues, the *Opera Platonis* (*Plato's Oeuvre*) edited by Ficino.

¹ This article is a revised version of the paper I presented at the AISG conference held in Ravenna in September 2021. I revised my paper when I was a Max Weber Visiting Fellow at the Department of History and Civilisation at the European University Institute between September 2021 and January 2022. I wish to thank Mauro Perani for organizing the conference, Guido Bartolucci, and Fabrizio Lelli for the precious suggestions they gave me during the conference, and the anonymous reviewers for their constructive criticism. Also, I would like to thank Enrica Sagradini for her help and support during the review and publication process. Last but not least, my warmest thanks go to Stéphane Toussaint, who encouraged me to further investigate the connection between Judah Abarbanel, Marsilio Ficino, and Francesco Cattani da Diacceto during my PhD, on which this article partially relies.

² All English translations from Latin, vernacular, and modern Italian are my own, except the English translations of Marsilio Ficino's *Commentarium in Convivium Platonis de amore* (see n. 10). In the transcriptions of Latin and vernacular texts, I

have silently expanded all contractions, with punctuation and capitalization normalized according to modern standards. For the sake of consistency with the Latin critical editions quoted in the footnotes, I have followed the sixteenth-century Latin orthography by using *u* for lowercase *u/v*. Unless otherwise specified, words or brief phrases enclosed in square brackets in my English translations have been added to clarify the English text.

³ S. PINES, *Medieval Doctrines in Renaissance Garb? Some Jewish and Arabic Sources of Leone Ebreo's Doctrines*, in B.D. COOPERMAN (ed.), *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) 1983, p. 388.

⁴ A detailed comparison of some passages from Judah's *Dialoghi* and Ficino's *Commentarium* is only available in S. GERSHENZON, *The Circle Metaphor in Leone Ebreo's Dialoghi d'amore*, «Daat» 29 (1992), pp. v-xvii and A. GUIDI, «Di poi si rinnovò quel poco che ci è al presente»: Leone Ebreo e la cultura umanistica, «Lettere italiane» 67,1 (2015), pp. 26-56.

Nevertheless, the *Dialoghi* include a remarkable number of arguments and statements that might be regarded as proof of Judah's familiarity not only with Ficino's commentary on Plato's *Convivium* but also with other contemporary philosophical treatises widely debated in Italy at the time. The aim of this article is to turn the attention to Judah's connections with the philosophical milieu of his own time and the manners through which he adapted contemporary Christian sources in favor of his argument, presenting an analysis of the only tangible evidence of these interactions: the *Dialoghi d'amore*. Although Judah was a member of an illustrious and wealthy family (the Abravanel, connected to the Aragonese Crown in Naples), as a Jew and Sephardic exile in Italy he was subject to numerous social and political restrictions, leading to a lack of public acknowledgment from the intellectual circles and Christian society of the time.⁵ For instance, no evidence can be found of Judah's name among the literati who were statutory members of the Accademia Pontaniana in Naples, nor any specific proof he gave lectures at the university in the city – despite a debate on both these issues that continues today.⁶

This brief contribution will analyze a very specific and short passage of the *Dialoghi d'amore* regarding Plato's *Convivium* and challenge the opinion that the only and main source Judah used to interpret the Platonic text was Ficino's *Commentarium in Convivium Platonis de amore*. While acknowledging the validity of

Pines's thesis about Ficino's *Commentarium*, I will suggest that Judah shows no hesitation in juxtaposing Ficino's interpretation of Plato's *Convivium* with other contemporary explanations of the Platonic dialogue. The starting point for this analysis will be the polemical allusions Judah makes to a number of interpretations of Plato's *Convivium*, in particular to those pertaining to the myth of the birth of Eros at the feast for the nativity of Venus. The second section of the article will discuss whether Judah implicitly refers here to Marsilio Ficino's *Commentarium* and his inaccurate, according to Judah, interpretation of Plato's *Convivium* in an attempt to distance himself from Ficino's exegesis to restore the, according to the author of the *Dialoghi*, more faithful meaning of the Platonic myth. By doing so, the article will demonstrate Judah's extensive knowledge of Ficino's Latin translation of Plato's *Symposium*. In the third section, I will then analyze Judah's exegesis of the myth of Eros's birth at the feast for Venus, suggesting a fascinating parallel in the lesser known writing of «one of Ficino's favorite and most promising pupils»,⁷ Francesco Cattani da Diacceto's (1466-1522) *De pulchro* (*On Beauty* 1499/1563). I will thus explore how Judah either re-elaborates or argues against the allegorical elucidations of Marsilio Ficino's *Commentarium* and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's (1463-1494) *Commento sopra una canzone d'amore di Girolamo Benivieni* (*Commentary on Girolamo Benivieni's Canzone d'Amore*, 1486/1519) in light of his reading of Cattani's *De pulchro*.

⁵ It is beyond the purpose of this article to discuss the vast literature on the political and social conditions of the Jews in sixteenth-century Italy. For an overview, see M. CAFFIERO, *Storia degli ebrei nell'Italia moderna. Dal Rinascimento alla Restaurazione*, Carrocci, Rome 2014. For the problematic issue of universities and intellectual academies, see, for example, S. CAMPANINI, *Jews on the Fringes. Universities and the Jews in a Time of Upheaval (15th-16th Centuries)*, «Annali di storia delle università italiane» 24,1 (2020), pp. 21-33 and G. VELTRI - E CHAYES, *Oltre le mura del ghetto. Accademie, scetticismo e tolleranza nella Venezia barocca. Studi e documenti d'archivio*, New Digital Press, Palermo 2016.

⁶ For the lists of *sodales* of the Accademia Pon-

taniana, see S. FURSTENBERG-LEVI, *The Accademia Pontaniana: A Model of a Humanist Network*, Brill, Leiden 2016. For Judah's participation in the intellectual life of Naples, see F. LELLI, *Intellettuali ebrei e Accademia Pontaniana: alcune considerazioni alla luce di due recenti pubblicazioni*, «Sefer yuhasin» 5 (2017), pp. 159-169. Questions concerning Judah's lessons at the university of Naples have been fueled by the article of F. NICOLINI, *Per la biografia di Leone Ebreo*, «La Critica. Rivista di letteratura, storia e filosofia» 28 (1930), pp. 312-314.

⁷ P.O. KRISTELLER, *Francesco da Diacceto and Florentine Platonism in the Sixteenth Century*, in IDEM, *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, vol. 1, *Problems and Aspects of the Renaissance*, Storia e letteratura, Rome 1956, p. 297.

Although the article concentrates on a particular and very short example of mythological interpretation in the *Dialoghi d'amore*, it should be read as part of broader research on the humanistic and Christian sources Judah studied and dialogued with in his work. In the conclusion, I argue that the way Judah advances his argumentations and engages with contemporary Christian sources might have echoed in the cultured and scholarly audience for whom Judah intended his work: his Christian peers. The question of the *Dialoghi d'amore*'s and their author's place within the contemporary intellectual landscape is controversial and has been debated since the earliest studies on the subject. I believe that a rigorous comparison between texts and the detailed reconstruction of Judah's Christian sources might help solve the issue.

Reading Plato's Convivium: Reassessing the Influence of Marsilio Ficino

The main striking similarity that has been observed between the *Dialoghi d'amore* and Marsilio Ficino's *Commentarium in Convivium Platonis de amore* is the image of the universal circle of love. Although the purpose of this paper is not to analyze Ficino's *Commentarium*, we can better understand the correspondences between Ficino's and Judah's work by briefly outlining the structure of the *Commentarium*. Written before July 1469, Ficino's commentary on Plato's *Convivium* is divided into seven parts, each for a character and his speech in Plato's *Symposium*: Phaedrus, Pausanias, Eryximachus, Aristophanes, Agathon, Socrates (whose

knowledge on love, he confesses, derives from a foreign priestess, Diotima), and Alcibiades. In the *Commentarium*, each of these speeches are commented and interpreted by seven Platonists of the nine who were invited to celebrate the anniversary of Plato's birthday and death, apparently established on November 7. It would be foolish to deny the originality of the text, which cannot be read as a blow-by-blow explanation of Plato's dialogue, and the partially fictional framework that Ficino uses to explain his philosophy of love.⁸ As is well known, the *Dialoghi d'amore*, written between 1501 and 1512,⁹ are organized into three dialogues, each developing a specific theme regarding love: love and desire, the cosmological dimension of love, and love's origins. The dialogue takes place between two characters: Filone, the male master, and Sofia, the female disciple.

Scholars have acknowledged Judah's certain familiarity with the second and third part of Ficino's commentary, namely the *oratio secunda* on Pausania's speech and the *oratio tertia* on Eryximachus's discourse. In chapter 2 of the *oratio secunda*, *Quo pacto divina pulchritudo amorem parit* (*How Divine Beauty Generates Love*), Ficino describes the way God loves his creation and was loved back by his creatures as a circular movement, making God the first lover and the last and supreme object of love: «there is one continuous attraction, beginning with God, going to the world and ending at last in God, an attraction which returns to the same place whence it began as though in a kind of circle»¹⁰ and «“Love is a circle of good, revolving from good to good perpetually”».¹¹ This cosmological and metaphysical image becomes a *circulo amo-*

⁸ For the authenticity of the meeting and the genesis of the commentary, see S. GENTILE, *Per la storia del testo del Commentarium in Convivium di Marsilio Ficino*, «Rinascimento» 21,2 (1981), pp. 3-27.

⁹ For the issue concerning the date that occurs in the *editio princeps* and the manuscripts of the third dialogue, see J. NELSON NOVOA, *Appunti sulla genesi redazionale dei Dialoghi d'amore di Leone Ebreo alla luce della critica testuale attuale e la tradizione manoscritta del suo terzo dialogo*, «Quaderni d'italianistica» 30,1 (2009), pp. 45-66.

¹⁰ M. FICINO, *Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, ed. and trans. by S.R. JAYNE,

University of Missouri, Columbia (MO) 1944, pp. 133-134. The original text reads as follows: «unus quidam continuus astractus est a deo incipiens, transiens in mundum, in deum denique desinens, qui quasi circulo quodam in idem unde manavit iterum remeat» (M. FICIN, *Commentaire sur le Banquet de Platon, de l'amour. Commentarium in Convivium Platonis, de amore*, ed. and trans. by P. LAURENS, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 2002, p. 25).

¹¹ FICINO, *Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, cit., p. 134. The original text reads as follows: «Amor circulus est bonus a bono in bonum perpetuo reuolutus» (FICIN, *Commen-*

roso (love circle) in Judah's *Dialoghi*, in the concluding pages of the third and last dialogue. It is divided into a descending and an ascending semicircle, which «returns again to the Greatest Good, which is the last and highest object of love, as well as the first lover, the Father creator».¹² Although the expression *circulo amoroso* formally recurs only once in the *Dialoghi*,¹³ the idea of an eternal circularity of love as the skeleton of the entire universe bubbles back up throughout the treatise.

Notwithstanding the centrality of the love circularity in the *Dialoghi d'amore*, if we consider the text of Judah's treatise more carefully, numerous references in it may serve as a lens for investigating a deeper and more sophisticated engagement of Judah with Italy's humanistic production of the time. The elucidation of a short passage pertaining to the myth of the birth of Eros at the feast for Venus's day of birth in the *Dialoghi d'amore* offers a new perspective from which we can easily reconstruct Judah's interactions with his Christian colleagues. It also enables us to reassess the influence of Ficino's *Commentarium in Convivium Platonis de amore*, since the myth in question is a central allegory in both Plato's *Symposium* (in Socrates's account of Diotima's speech) and Ficino's commentary (in the *oratio sexta*, where Socrates's speech is commented). Judah places his exegesis of the myth of Eros's birth at the banquet for Venus in the third dialogue on *De l'origine d'amore* (*Origins of Love*), in order to explain the genesis of the love that permeates all the cosmos. The exegesis follows the elucidation of another Platonic myth from the *Convivium* – the myth of

the androgyne, as recounted in Aristophanes's speech – and the creation of Adam in Genesis 1:27. Through the lenses of selected myths and speeches from Plato's *Convivium*, Judah introduces the readers to his idea of love, as did Ficino in his *Commentarium* before him.

Upon closer inspection, Judah's first step is to introduce his interpretation of the birth of Eros at the feast for Venus, presenting several instances in which previous authors who read Plato's dialogue misunderstood the true sense of the myth in question and thus had their authority disproven:

Some have understood by the birth of Venus the flowing down of intelligence first into the Angel and then into the World Soul, since the former, which is the heavenly Venus, and the latter, which is the earthly Venus, already participated in the life of Jupiter, the essence of Saturn, and the first being of Caelus, who were the three gods at the banquet before the birth of the heavenly Venus. However, we will not care about these allegories, which are so abstract, inconclusive, and excessive when compared to the literal meaning of the [Platonic] fable.¹⁴

This passage includes a specific reference to the *oratio sexta*, chapter 7 (*De amoris ortu; The Birth of Eros*) of Ficino's *Commentarium in Convivium Platonis de amore*, where Ficino distinguishes between two different Venuses, namely the heavenly Venus – or the intelligence of the Angelic Mind – and the earthly Venus, or the generative power of the *anima mundi* (World Soul):

“On the birthday of Venus”, that is, when the Angelic Mind, and the World-Soul, which, for the

taire sur le Banquet de Platon, de l'amour, cit., p. 25). Ficino states that the sentence here is a hymn of Hierotheos the Thesmothete and Dionysius the Areopagite.

¹² LEONE EBREO, *Dialoghi d'amore*, ed. D. GIOVANNINOZZI, Laterza, Bari-Roma 2008, p. 355. The original text reads as follows: «si reintegra nel sommo buono, ultimo amato, qual fu il primo amante, padre creatore». For a different English translation, see LEONE EBREO, *Dialogues of Love*, ed. and trans. by R. PESCATORI - D. BACICH, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 2009, p. 348.

¹³ See LEONE EBREO, *Dialoghi d'amore*, cit., p. 355. A similar expression, *circulo degli amori* (circle

of loves), recurs once in the *Dialoghi*: see *ivi*, p. 356.

¹⁴ LEONE EBREO, *Dialoghi d'amore*, cit., p. 292. The original text reads as follows: «Sono alcuni che dicono intendersi per la natività di Venere l'influenza de l'intelligenza de l'angelo prima, e poi dell'anima del mondo, avendo già partecipato la vita di Giove, l'essenzia di Saturno e il primo essere di Cielo, che erano li tre dèi del convito precedente a la natività di Venere magna, ne l'angelo e nella mondana e nell'anima del mondo; ma noi non curaremo d'allegorie sì astratte e interminate e improporzionate al litterale fabuloso». For a different English translation, see LEONE EBREO, *Dialogues of Love*, cit., p. 290.

reason we have mentioned elsewhere, we have called Venuses, were born from the supreme majesty of God. [...] For when the Intelligence in the Angelic Mind, and the power of generation in the World-Soul which we have properly called twin Venuses were coming into the light, that supreme God [...] was already existent.¹⁵

It would be difficult to doubt that Judah refers to Ficino's *Commentarium* here, since the critical description of Jupiter, Saturn, and Caelus has its parallel in the explanation of the same divine triad that Ficino advances in speech 6, chapter 7 of his commentary. As we have read in the passage of the *Dialoghi* above, Judah seems to be at least superficially familiar with, although critical of, Ficino's allegorical association of Jupiter with the property of life, Saturn with the property of essence, and Uranus, or Caelus, with God, who infused life and essence – basic ontological categories – into the Angel. However, for some reason Judah ignores the different meaning Ficino attributes to the same gods in respect to the *anima mundi*, somewhat simplifying the latter's metaphysical and cosmological theory. Indeed, as we can read in the *Commentarium*:

For when the Intelligence in the Angelic Mind, and the power of generation in the World-Soul [...] were coming into the light, that supreme God whom we call Uranus was already existent. Moreover, essence and life, which we call Saturn and Jupiter, were in the Angelic Mind; and also in the World-Soul was the cognition of the divine, and the moving of

the heavenly bodies, which we again call Saturn and Jupiter.¹⁶

The issue here is of course not whether Judah knows Ficino's *Commentarium in Convivium Platonis de amore*, but rather whether it was his main and only source. The exegesis of the myth of Eros's birth suggests a polemical overtone, showing no deference for Ficino's work. On the contrary, Judah explains that he provides his own elucidation of the myth in question, being faithful – according to him – to Plato and the original meaning of Diotima's speech, despite drawing from Ficino's philosophical vocabulary. In contrast to Ficino, Judah identifies the birth of Eros at the banquet for the birthday of Venus as the explicit connection between love and beauty and their necessary coexistence: «The same Diotima, as you have heard [before], understood Venus as the Beauty. Indeed, she says that Love always loves what is beautiful [...]. It thus means that Love was born when Beauty was born [...]».¹⁷ The impulse to refute Ficino's exegesis is on clear display in the allegorical meaning Judah attributes to Jupiter, Saturn, and Uranus. These gods, alongside other divine characters featuring in the Platonic myth as shall we see, become one of the allegories standing for the Prime Intellect. The latter, with God, infused beauty and love into the corporeal realm, «since the gods (i.e., God with the Angelic World) produced in the created corporeal world a beauty similar to their own beauty [...]».¹⁸

¹⁵ FICINO, *Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, cit., p. 190. The original text reads as follows: «In Veneris natalibus, id est, quando mens angeli et mundi anima, quas Veneres ea ratione quam alias diximus nominamus, ex summa dei maiestate oriebantur. [...] Nam cum in angelo intelligentia et in mundi anima uis generandi, quas proprie Veneres geminas apellamus, prodibant in lucem, iam erat summus ille deus [...]» (FICINO, *Commentaire sur le Banquet de Platon*, de l'amour, cit., p. 143).

¹⁶ FICINO, *Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, cit., p. 190. The original text reads as follows: «Nam cum in angelo intelligentia et in mundi anima uis generandi [...] prodibant in lucem, iam erat summus ille deus quem uocat Celum; es-

sentia preterea et uita in angelo, quos Saturnum uocamus et Iouem, atque etiam in mundi anima inerat supernorum cognitio et celestium corporum agitatio, quos iterum Saturnum Iouemque uocamus» (FICINO, *Commentaire sur le Banquet de Platon*, de l'amour, cit., p. 143).

¹⁷ LEONE EBREO, *Dialoghi d'amore*, cit., p. 292. The original text reads as follows: «Essa medesima Diotima (come hai inteso) dichiarò che intendeva per Venere la bellezza: onde dice che l'Amore sempre ama il bello [...]. Significa adunque che Amore nacque quando nacque la bellezza [...]». For a different English translation, see LEONE EBREO, *Dialogues of Love*, cit., p. 290.

¹⁸ LEONE EBREO, *Dialoghi d'amore*, cit., p. 292. The original text reads as follows: «producendo gli

Judah's philosophical critique of Ficino and his own interpretation of the Platonic myth of Eros's birth at the feast for Venus's nativity require further decoding to fully understand Judah's interactions with the significant spread of love themes in the philosophical literature in Italy between the fifteenth and sixteenth century. In fact, Judah's exegetic explanation ultimately relies on Ficino's Latin translation of Plato's *Convivium*. Before introducing his exegesis, Judah recounts the myth of the banquet for the nativity of Venus and the birth of Eros. Unlike the exegesis, the myth as narrated in the *Dialoghi* is a word-for-word translation into Italian vernacular of Ficino's Latin version of Plato's account. What follows here is a textual comparison between the two versions – recall that italics have been used to emphasize differences, though minor and unimportant, between texts:

Dialoghi d'amore. . [...] quando nacque Venere tutti li dèi furono in convito, et con loro Metides, cioè Poro, figliuolo del Consiglio, *che vuol dire* Dio de l'affluentia; alli quali, avendo cenato, venne Penia (cioè la povertà) come una poveretta per aver qualche cosa per mangiare de l'abundanzia de le vivande del convito de li dèi. *Stava come li poveretti mendicanti, domandando* fuor de le porte: Poro inebriato del nettare (che allora ancor *non si trovava* vino) andò a dormire nel giardin di Giove; la detta Penia, constretta da la necessità, pensò a che modo si potrebbe ingravidare con qualche astuzia d'un figlio di Poro; onde andò a colcarsi appresso di lui e concepé d'esso l'Amore. *Da li quali parenti* nacque l'Amore, settatore e osservatore di Venere perché *nacque* ne li suoi natali, il quale sempre ha desio di cosa bella, perché essa Venere è bella; e per essere figlio del *dio* Poro e de la *poveretta* Penia, partecipò la natura di tutt'e due, però che al principio è arido e squallido, con li piedi scalzi, sempre volando per terra, senza casa né ridotto, *senza letto* né coperta alcuna; dorme per le strade al scoperto, servante la natura de la madre sempre bisognante; secondo la stirpe del padre *procura* le cose belle e buone, animoso e audace, veemente et sagace cacciatore, va sempre macchinando nuove trame, studioso di prudenzia, facundo e in tutta la vita filosofante, *man-*

catore, fascinatore, venefico e sofista; e secondo sua mista natura non è del tutto immortale né mortale, *ma in breve in un medesimo giorno muore e vive*, e si resuscita una volta, *manca un'altra, et così fa molte volte per la mescolanza de la natura del padre e de la madre*: ciò che acquista perde e *quel che perde ricovera*, per la qual cosa mai non è mendico né mai è ricco. Il quale ancora fra sapienzia e ignoranza è costituito, però che nissuno degli dèi filosofo né desia farsi sapiente, perché gli è, né in effetto alcun sapiente filosofo, né ancora quelli che son del tutto ignoranti, ché questi non desiano mai d'esser sapienti: ché veramente questo è il peggio de l'ignorante, *che non è, né desia essere savio, perché* non desia mai le cose che non conosce che li mancano.¹⁹

Convivium. Quando nata est Venus, parato conuiuio discubuerunt dii ceteri et Metidis. Id est Consilii filius Porus. Id est affluentiae deus. Cum cenati essent, Penia, id est paupertas, mendicatura cibum utpote epulis illic abundantibus venit, et circa fores obuersabatur. Porus, quidem nectare ebrius, uinum namque *nondum erat*, Iouis ortum *ingressus est et somno grauatus dormiebat*. Penia uero inopia compulsa quo pacto filium quasi quibusdam insidiis ex Poro concipet, excogitauit. Quare iuxta illum accubuit. Amoremque concepit. *Vnde* natus est amor, sectator cultorque Veneris, propterea quod in Veneris natalibus *est progenitus*. *Quin etiam natura*, pulchri desiderio capitur, cum Venus ipsa sit pulchra. Quoniam uero Pori ac Peniae amor est filius, sortem huiusmodi, nactus est. Principio aridus est et squalidus, nudis pedibus, semper humi uolans, sine domicilio, sine stramentis et tegmine ullo, ad fores in uia sub diuo dormiens, naturamque matris seruans, semper egenus. Secundum uero patris stirpem, pulchris ac bonis *insidiatur*, uirilil, audax, et uehemens sagaxque uenator, noua semper machinamenta contexens, prudentiae studiosus, facundus, per omnem uitam philosophans. *Incantator*, fascinatorque *potens*, ueneficus, atque sophista. Neque immortalis omnino secundum naturam, neque mortalis. *Sed interdum eodem die pullulat atque uiuit, quotiens exuberat. Interdum deficit*. Atque iterum reuiuiscit *ob patris naturam*. Quod uero acquiritur *continue* subterfluit. Quo circa neque mendicus est amor unque neque etiam opulentus. *Quin etiam inter sapientiam et inscitiam constituitur. Sic enim se res habet*. Nullus deorum philosophatur, aut sa-

dèi (cioè Dio col mondo angelico) bellezza a loro simile nel mondo corporeo creato [...]. For a different English translation, see LEONE EBREO, *Dia-*

logues of Love, cit., p. 290.

¹⁹ LEONE EBREO, *Dialoghi d'amore*, cit., pp. 290-291.

piens fieri cupit. Est enim. Nec alius quis sapiens philosophatur. Neque omnino ignorantes *philosophantur*, neque sapientes fieri copiant. Hoc enim habet ignorantia pessimum, quando *qui nec pulcher bonus est neque sapiens sufficienter haec habere se censet*. Nunquam igitur expetit illa quorum se indigum non aduertit.²⁰

The textual comparison might seem redundant. Nevertheless, it confirms that Judah was well acquainted with the 1484 or 1491 edition of Marsilio Ficino's *Opera Platonis*, rather than merely with his *Commentarium in Convivium Platonis de amore*.²¹ As has been hinted at, the *Opera Platonis* contains the first full Latin translation of all Plato's dialogues, and includes Ficino's commentary on Plato's *Convivium*, as well as shorter explanations for the other dialogues in the form of *compendia*, *argumenta*, and *epitomae*. For instance, Judah read, quoted, and adapted Ficino's *Compendium in Timaeum* to explain the origin of the world in the second dialogue of his *Dialoghi*, confirming that the former was well cognizant of Ficino's *Opera Platonis*.²² Equally significantly, the theological validity Judah attributes to the pagan pantheon in his *Dialoghi* finds its parallel in Ficino's *In Phaedrum commentaria*, which was published only in Ficino's *Commentaria in Platonem* (*Commentaries on Plato*, 1496).²³ What interests me here is that the myth discussed in this article confirms that Judah definitely had a greater familiarity with Ficino's philosophical production, one that cannot however be reduced to the *Commentarium*. Also, the way Judah confronted Ficino's commentary on Plato's *Convivium* is erudite and assumes critical

connotations depending on the passage of the *Dialoghi*. With this information, we can explore another issue. Through the lens of the myth of Eros's birth at the banquet for Venus, the next section will investigate the possible connection between the *Dialoghi* and Francesco Cattani da Diacceto's *De pulchro*, which could only be read as an unpublished manuscript at the time of the composition of the *Dialoghi*.

Interpreting Poros: Charting the Influence of Francesco Cattani da Diacceto

It would be difficult to assess any possible relationship between Judah's *Dialoghi* and Cattani's *De pulchro* without knowing the latter. In 1499, Francesco Cattani da Diacceto finished the first version of his *De pulchro*, which he had been working on since around 1496. Although there were no substantial changes between the first and the final version of this work, we know that Cattani continued working on it until 1514.²⁴ It was finally published in 1563, in the *Opera omnia Francisci Catanei Diacetii* (*Francesco Cattani da Diacceto's Full Works*). Actually, none of Cattani's works were published during his life, the main exception to this being his *Panegirico all'amore*, printed by Ludovico degli Arrighi in Rome in 1526. Until recently, scholarship generally ignored Cattani's production, describing the language he used as obscure and his philosophical impact as somewhat marginal for being «part of the recondite world of Florentine learning».²⁵ However, the epistolary exchanges Cattani had during his life show that his works,

²⁰ *Platonis Convivium de Amore a Marsilio Ficino translatus*, in *Opera Platonis*, per Laurentium Venetum, Impressum Florentie [1484], f. 248v.

²¹ The 1484 and 1491 editions are almost identical.

²² See M.V. COMACCHI, «Basta credere fermamente quel che la ragione non reprova»: la renovatio ficiniana in un passo sulla creazione dei Dialoghi d'amore di Yehudah Abarbanel, in M.V. COMACCHI - L.E. PISCHEDDA (eds.), *Dissenso ed eterodossia nel pensiero ebraico*, «Rivista di Storia della Filosofia» 75,3 (2020), pp. 381-407.

²³ See M.V. COMACCHI, *Yehudah Abarbanel's As-*

tromythology: in the Footsteps of Marsilio Ficino's prisca theologia, in H.D. RUTKIN and D.J.-J. ROBICHAUD (eds.), *Marsilio Ficino's Cosmology: Sources and Reception*, «Bruniana & Campanelliana» 26,2 (2020), pp. 437-452.

²⁴ For the genesis of Cattani's *De pulchro*, see KRISTELLER, *Francesco da Diacceto and Florentine Platonism in the Sixteenth Century*, cit., pp. 287-336.

²⁵ C.S. CELENZA, *Francesco Cattani da Diacceto's De pulchro, II.4, and the Practice of Renaissance Platonism*, «Accademia» 9 (2007), p. 89. See also E. GARIN, *Francesco Cattani da Diacceto e l'or-*

in manuscript form, circulated widely in the sixteenth century and were deeply appreciated by numerous scholars at the time, even after his death.²⁶ For example, «important intellectuals asked him to clarify and explain difficult doctrines»,²⁷ suggesting that Diacceto aimed at elucidating, summarizing, and also promoting Ficino's legacy and his Neoplatonism. However, in many respects, Cattani moved away from Ficino, attempting, for instance, an original synthesis of the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. Notably, we can detect both the novelty of Cattani's thought and his loyalty to Ficino through the use he made of vernacular language. Enhancing the popularization program established by Ficino, Cattani's translation into the Italian vernacular of a selected number of works he first wrote in Latin served not only a larger civic purpose but also linguistic ideals. It demonstrated his familiarity with Ficino's profound reasons for legitimizing the vernacular and with the linguistic debates on the Italian and Tuscan languages of the time.²⁸

To date, only a handful of scholars have suggested that Judah and Cattani might have had something in common, although the issue has not yet been explored in detail.²⁹ Given Judah's long stay in Naples, the interactions between members of the Accademia Pontaniana in Naples and those who joined the Orti Oricellari in Florence – an open and somewhat informal circle founded by Bernardo Rucellai after his second stay in

Naples in 1495 of which Cattani was an eminent member – would offer the perfect historical and intellectual material to establish a connection between Judah and Cattani.³⁰ However, we know virtually nothing about Judah's participation in the activities of the Accademia Pontaniana after he arrived in the city in 1492.³¹ Let us thus return to the texts that, in the absence of further historical evidence, offer the safest path to explore any possible acquaintance of Judah with Cattani's *De pulchro*. One important reason I discuss Cattani's treatise here is the manuscript copy of the third dialogue of the *Dialoghi* at the British Library in London, MS Harley 5423. As Carlo Dionisotti has already pointed out, the exemplar shows significant linguistic communalities with *De pulchro*, mostly missing in the 1535 *editio princeps* of the *Dialoghi*.³² Admittedly, «the repeated and extensive use of [...] “pulcro” and “pulcritudine” instead of “bello” and “bellezza”, or “turpe” instead of “brutto”, and “malo” instead of “cattivo”»³³ might be easily explained assuming that the «author [...] was familiar with the philosophical tradition that saw the production of Diacceto's *De pulcro* [sic] at the time [...]».³⁴ I would like to move beyond MS Harley 5423 to further interrogate the validity of Dionisotti's thesis. Notably, one of the oldest exemplars of the third dialogue, MS Patetta 373 at the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, presents a display of words like *pulcro* and *pulcritudine* in a substantially similar way as MS Harley 5423,

todossia ficiniana, in IDEM, *L'umanesimo italiano. Filosofia e vita civile nel Rinascimento*, Laterza, Bari 1964, pp. 133-146.

²⁶ See F. CATANEI DIACETH, *Epistolae*, in IDEM, *De pulchro libri III. Accedunt opuscula inedita et dispersa necnon testimonia quaedam ad eundem pertinentia*, ed. S. MATTON, Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Pisa 1986, pp. 257-355.

²⁷ D. BRANCATO - M. VANHAELLEN, *Francesco Cattani da Diacceto and Boethius: a Neoplatonic Reading of the Consolatio in 16th-century Florence*, «Accademia» 17 (2015), p. 55.

²⁸ For Cattani, see E. DEL SOLDATO, *The Elitist Vernacular of Francesco Cattani da Diacceto and Its Afterlife*, «I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance» 16,1-2 (2013), pp. 343-362. For Ficino, see S. TOUSSAINT, *Volgarizzare l'ermetismo e divulgare l'esoterismo. Il Ficino e il Benci*, in H. SENG (ed.),

Platonismus und Esoterik in byzantinischem Mittelalter und italienischer Renaissance, Universitätsverlag Winter, Heidelberg 2013, pp. 263-280.

²⁹ See LEONE EBREO, *Dialoghi d'amore*, ed. and trans. by G. MANUPPELLA, vol. I, *Testo italiano, note, documenti*, Instituto Nacional de Investigação Científica, Lisboa 1983, p. 433 and LELLI, *Intellettuali ebrei e Accademia Pontaniana*, cit., pp. 159-169.

³⁰ For the vertical networks between academies in Naples and Florence, see FURSTENBERG-LEVI, *The Accademia Pontaniana*, cit., pp. 87-126.

³¹ For this issue, see n. 6.

³² See C. DIONISOTTI, *Appunti su Leone Ebreo*, «Italia medioevale e umanistica» 2 (1959), pp. 410-428, especially pp. 416-417.

³³ See *ivi*, p. 411 for Dionisotti's original text.

³⁴ See *ivi*, p. 417 for the original text.

although the manuscripts generally present different readings in various passages. Likewise, words such as *pulchritudine* and *pulcro*, mostly replaced by *bellezza* and *bello* in the printed edition, reoccur in many corresponding passages of MS Barberiniano Latino 3743, now preserved at the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.

One is naturally left to doubt that Judah might have been influenced by the general love literature stemming from Florence rather than specifically by Cattani's *De pulchro*. Let us thus step back from the linguistic aspects of the *Dialoghi d'amore* and look at their content. Once again, in the following pages, I will focus on the myth of Eros's birth at the feast for Venus's birth. As has been hinted at, the passage, though very brief, offers a general but explicit reference to former interpretations of the myth. Such direct reference to contemporary works is rare, if not unique, in the *Dialoghi d'amore*. As we have seen, Judah openly criticizes the exegesis of Plato, distancing himself from the allegorical sense of the myth: «we will not care about these allegories, which are so abstract, inconclusive, and excessive when compared to the literal meaning of the [Platonic] fable». ³⁵ Against this background, Judah seems to refer to more than one interpretation of the Platonic myth. Does he attack other scholars besides Ficino here? Does his vivid criticism include a specific reference to Cattani's *De pulchro*, since the treatise offers an interpretation of the same myth?

Actually, Cattani's general explanation of the myth of Eros's birth at the banquet for Venus has no parallels in either Ficino's *Commentarium* or Pico's *Commento sopra una canzona d'amore di Girolamo Benivieni*. Interestingly, Cattani places the allegorical interpretation,

which ultimately relies on his theory of the Angel's self-causation, almost at the beginning of his treatise, in the second chapter of the first volume. ³⁶ In this volume, Cattani discusses the principle of the multitude of reality, i.e., the One, the Good, the Intellect, or the Mind. Moving away from Ficino and drawing more from Giovanni Pico's *Commento*, Cattani identifies Venus as the first beauty (*prima pulchritudo*), originating from the self-causation of the Mind, rather than as any power of the Intellect or the World Soul. In other words, the first beauty, or Venus in the myth, is nothing but the Angel, Mind, or Intellect when it moves from a preexisting condition and becomes actualized, coming to life and being by its very nature, on its own, without external determination (*animal per se*). ³⁷ For Cattani, beauty is thus the exterior offspring of the Mind's self-causation. By rising to life, the Mind understands itself through the Ideas or intelligible realities that are its inner parts. Within this context, Cattani interprets the gods at the banquet in the myth – Uranus, Jupiter, and Saturn – as separate entities: the Ideas in the Mind. Jupiter's gardens, where Poros goes to sleep, incorporate the original meaning attributed to them by Ficino in the *Commentarium in Convivium Platonis de amore*, that is to say, life: «Whereby we properly call Jupiter's gardens the *animal per se*, because Jupiter means life». ³⁸ Penia, who reaches Poros in the gardens to conceive a son with him, is allegorically described as the preexistent condition of the Mind lacking beauty, since Penia appears poor and needy in the myth. Poros, on the other hand, is described as a drunken god and has been interpreted as the intellectual faculty or intelligence (*facultas intellectualis*) of the Mind, abounding, drunk-

³⁵ LEONE EBREO, *Dialoghi d'amore*, p. 292. The original text reads as follows: «noi non curaremo d'allegorie sì astratte e interminate e improporzionate al litterale fabuloso». For a different English translation, see LEONE EBREO, *Dialogues of Love*, cit., p. 290.

³⁶ For a detailed analysis of the Angel's self-causation, see S. FELLINA, *Francesco Cattani da Diacceto: la filosofia dell'amore e le critiche a Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola*, «Noctua» 1,1 (2014), pp. 28-65, in particular pp. 52-54. For a comprehensive study of Cattani's metaphysics and epistemology,

see S. FELLINA, *Alla scuola di Marsilio Ficino. Il pensiero filosofico di Francesco Cattani da Diacceto*, Edizioni della Normale - Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, Pisa 2017.

³⁷ For an thorough analysis of the *animal per se*, see FELLINA, *Francesco Cattani da Diacceto*, cit., pp. 28-65.

³⁸ CATANEI DIACETHI, *De pulchro libri III*, cit., p. 17. The original text reads as follows: «Quo fit ut merito Iouis horti per se animal appelletur; Iupiter enim uitam significat».

en and divine as he is, in Ideas. Cattani is keen to make clear that Poros's drunkenness and the nectar, so to speak, should be read specifically as an allegory for the knowledge the Mind has of its own beauty and the ultimate cause of love. Once "come to life", the knowledge the Mind has of itself, through its intellectual faculty, moves it to love its own beauty back in a circular procession of return to its own unity. This is the highest love of reality. Of course, this love movement is contrary and complementary to the one downward that incites the Mind to disseminate its beauty outside itself:

Thus, [Poros's] drunkenness is not only the knowledge but also the proof [the Mind has] of its own beauty. For this reason it is correctly called nectar because it is the cause of pleasure, like divine nectar. [...] As soon as the Mind understands its own goodness through its Ideas and beauty, a desire for beauty for what is not yet beautiful ensues. Given that, love is undoubtedly a devotee and worshipper of Venus, because it desires not only to enjoy beauty but also to imitate it.³⁹

Given the interpretation of the myth of Eros's birth in *De pulchro*, Judah's criticism does not point to Cattani's treatise at all. As stated before, the author of the *Dialoghi* explicitly states that the target of his critique is Ficino's distinction between the two Venuses, understood as the intelligence of the First Angel and the generative power of the World Soul. These notions cannot be traced in Cattani's *De pulchro*. However, a close look at Judah's explanation of the

myth recalls Cattani's metaphysical exegesis of Plato's mythological account. Notably, both Cattani and Judah attribute the same allegorical sense to Poros. In *De pulchro*, Cattani interprets Poros as the *facultas intellectualis* (intellectual faculty) or *intelligere* (intelligence) of the Mind: «Poros is the intellectual faculty through which the One [i.e., the Mind] understands its own nature intellectually. Indeed, it is [also defined as a] way and a passage [*meatus*]».⁴⁰ Cattani's allegorical interpretation of Poros is rather original and very different from the one Marsilio Ficino suggests in his *Commentarium*. In fact, for Ficino, Poros represents the range of forms originating from God and flowing into the Intellect: «"Poros is the son of Thought", that is, the spark of the supreme God. [...] when Poros, that is the light of God, of course, descends, and mixes with Penia, that is the former lack of the light, he creates love».⁴¹ In obvious ways, Cattani engages – at least linguistically – with Giovanni Pico here who, in his *Commento sopra una canzone d'amore di Girolamo Benivieni*, argues that Poros conveys the *affluenzia* (abundance) of Ideas. That said, Pico's interpretation keeps, to a certain extent, the same allegorical imaginary adopted by Ficino: «Thus, when Poros, whose name means copiousness, that is to say the abundance [*affluenzia*] of Ideas, mixes with Penia, who is the formless nature [of the Mind] [...], Love was born».⁴²

Linguistically, in the corresponding passage of the *Dialoghi d'amore*, Judah adopts a set of terms to describe Poros that are almost

³⁹ *Ibid.* The original text reads as follows: «Ebrietas uero de nectare non solum cognitio, uerum etiam approbatio ipsius per se pulchri, quae propterea nectar iure dicitur quoniam principium est uoluptatis, quod deorum nectar est. [...] In plenum statim quam mens apprehensis ideis et pulchro illa eadem declarauit, natum est pulchri desiderium eo quod nondum pulchrum possidebatur. Qui amor est, secutor nimirum et cultor Veneris, quoniam pulchro non solum perfrui studet, uerum etiam effingere».

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* The original text reads as follows: «Poros autem facultas est intellectualis, qua ipsum intelligibile percipitur, nam uia meatusque est».

⁴¹ FICINO, *Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, cit., p. 190. The original text reads

as follows: «Poros, *Consilii filius*, id est, summi dei scintilla. [...] cum descendit *Poros ille*, dei scilicet radius, *Penie*, id est priori huius indigentie, mixtus creat amorem» (FICINO, *Commentaire sur le Banquet de Platon*, de l'amour, cit., pp. 143-145).

⁴² G. PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, *Commento [...] sopra una canzone de amore composta da Girolamo Benivieni [...]*, in IDEM, *De hominis dignitate. Heptaplus. De ente et uno*, ed. E. GARIN, Vallecchi, Firenze 1942, p. 502. The original text reads as follows: «Nasce adunque questo amore quando Poro, che significa copia, cioè l'affluenzia di esse Idee, si mischia con quella natura informe chiamata Penia [...]».

identical to those in Pico's *Commento*. As I said elsewhere, Judah was acquainted with Pico's *Commento*, which, although published only in 1519, had circulated in manuscript form since 1486. In fact, the author of the *Dialoghi* employs the same metaphors that Pico used – and drew from Thomas Aquinas – to describe the love among both non-rational and non-sensitive beings.⁴³ However, in Poros, Judah sees the intellectual faculty or the intelligence of the Intellect, rich in Ideas, rather than the profusion of intelligible forms descending from God, bridging differences between his sources: «Son of Thought, Poros, who is the abundant intellect [*affluente intelletto*], drunken from nectar – that means [the intellect was] copious with divine Ideas and Forms – desired to make the inferior world participate [in the Ideas] in order to improve it [...]».⁴⁴ Judah might have turned to Cattani's *De pulchro* to expand Ficino's and Pico's elucidations of the myth of the birth of Eros. Nevertheless, the explanation of Poros's allegorical sense might appear marginal when compared to the myth's length and thus not significant enough to effectively prove Judah's acquaintance with Cattani's *De pulchro*.

Judah goes on to explain the proper interpretation – according to him – of Poros's drunkenness, clearly displaying the influence from *De*

pulchro, in which Cattani clarifies the sense of Poros's intoxication and nectar as follows: «[Poros's] drunkenness is not only the knowledge but also the proof [the Mind has] of its own beauty. For this reason it is correctly called nectar because it is the cause of pleasure, like divine nectar».⁴⁵ Accordingly, Judah argues that the nectar allegorically mimics the knowledge of as well as desire for divine beauty the Intellect had, resulting in the abundance, or drunkenness, of Ideas, as we have seen. Indeed, the concept of nectar differs from both Ficino's and Pico's notion, who understand it, respectively, as the fact that the Mind «was overflowing with the liquor of divine vivacity»⁴⁶ and the divine Ideas because «the ancient theologians [...] say that all those things that God fed with nectar and ambrosia at his table are eternal [...]».⁴⁷ On the contrary, in the *Dialoghi* we read:

And this is what means that [Poros] went to sleep in Jupiter's gardens, that is, he put to sleep his attentive intellective faculty and directed it to the corporeal world made from motion and generation, which is Jupiter's orts. The celestial Intellect is, however, Jupiter's house and palace, where [the gods] banquet and drink the divine nectar, which means the eternal contemplation of and desire for God's beautiful majesty.⁴⁸

⁴³ See M.V. COMACCHI, *Metafore d'amore tra filosofia della natura e filosofia pichiana nei Dialoghi d'amore di Yehudah Abarbanel (Leone Ebreo)*, in A. CASADEI - F. FEDI - A. NACINOVICH - A. TORRE (eds.), *Letteratura e Scienze, Atti delle sessioni parallele del XXIII Congresso dell'ADI (Associazione degli Italianisti)*, Pisa, 12-14 settembre 2019, Adi editore, Roma 2021, pp. 1-10.

⁴⁴ The quotation here is from LEONE EBREO, *Dialogi d'amore di Maestro Leone Medico Hebreo*, cit., p. 96r. The original text reads as follows: «Poro figlio del consiglio cioè l'influente intelletto, imbricato del nettare, cioè pieno de le Idee, et forme divine, desiderò partecipare al Mondo inferiore per bonificarlo [...]». I have decided to use here the *editio princeps* instead of the critical edition edited by Delfina Giovannozzi for the sake of major clarity. For a different English translation, see LEONE EBREO, *Dialogues of Love*, cit., p. 290.

⁴⁵ CATANEI DIACETI, *De pulchro libri III*, cit., p. 17. The original text reads as follows: «Ebrietas ue-

ro de nectare non solum cognitio, uerum etiam approbatio ipsius per se pulchri, quae propterea nectar iure dicitur quoniam principium est uoluptatis, quod deorum nectar est».

⁴⁶ FICINO, *Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, cit., p. 191. The original text reads as follows: «rore diuine uiuacitatis exuberat» (FICINO, *Commentaire sur le Banquet de Platon, de l'amour*, cit., p. 145).

⁴⁷ PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, *Commento [...] sopra una canzona de amore composta da Girolamo Benivieni*, cit., p. 503. The original text reads as follows: «gli antiqui teologi [...] dicono tutte quelle cose, le quali Iddio cibò di nettare e d'ambrosia alla sua mensa, essere eterne [...]».

⁴⁸ LEONE EBREO, *Dialoghi d'amore*, cit., p. 292. The original text reads as follows: «e questo è che dice che andò a dormire ne l'orto di Giove, cioè che addormentò la vigilante cognizione sua, applicandola al mondo corporeo del moto e generazione, che è l'orto di Giove, però che l'intelletto celeste è casa e

On this passage, Judah additionally remarks that Love, born from the union between Poros, the *affluente intelletto*, and Penia, who originally becomes the Prime Matter in the *Dialoghi*, is actually twofold. He distinguishes between a highest and first form of contemplative love of the Intellect, the one turning toward divine beauty, and a second type of love, leading the Intellect to generate beauty downward, into the corporeal reality. At the end of his commentary on the myth, Cattani concludes with a similar distinction between two beauties and two loves: a beauty that is the object of the Mind's contemplative love towards itself on one hand and a beauty that is the result of the Mind's generative love on the other.⁴⁹ I am inclined to think that what we have here in the *Dialoghi* is a re-elaboration, though simplified, of Cattani's allegorical imaginary and highly sophisticated ontological treatise on beauty, directly connected to the legacy of both Ficino and Pico that is central to the philosophical composition of the *Dialoghi*. In other words, we should consider the example discussed here – the myth of Eros's birth at the feast for Venus's birth – as an ingenious dialogue with contemporary sources and the Neoplatonic Florentine tradition that Judah establishes, however different his interpretation of Plato might be. The example of exegesis I have reconstructed, though brief, should thus be considered as part of an enormously complex system of implicit references to contemporary sources that Judah used in his work, by bringing them into alignment with his philosophical perspective on love. Of course, the *Dialoghi* include further references to Cattani's *De pulchro*, such as the distinction between three kinds of objects of desire, the long-discussed is-

sue of beauty in God, and the allegorical image of twin Venuses and Loves slightly debated here. Most importantly, the fact that Judah commented Ficino's *Commentarium* while engaging with Pico's *Commento* and, above all, Cattani's *De pulchro* shows that he accessed the manuscripts of those works, since both Pico's *Commento* and Cattani's *De pulchro* were published after the composition of the *Dialoghi* – Cattani's treatise even after the publication of Judah's work.

Conclusions

Through the lens of the small example studied in this article, I would like to conclude by arguing that Judah's *Dialoghi d'amore* are a remarkably compelling example of, first, Judah's interactions with the philosophical and intellectual life of contemporary Italy, indicated by the numerous references throughout the text to sources that became popular and circulated widely, in manuscript form, among Christian scholars and their cultural milieux. Second, they are a remarkable example of Judah's struggle for official intellectual acknowledgment. In his *Dialoghi d'amore*, as well as in the elegy, the *Telunah 'al-ha-zeman* (*Complaint about Time*, c. 1503-1504), Judah maintains an emphasis on his scholarly and philosophical superiority, with rhetorical flourish but without adopting a position in defense of Judaism *per se*. Judah was eager to be acknowledged as a great philosopher of his time, as was every humanist before him, and he made the *Dialoghi* into a claim about his own philosophical superiority.⁵⁰ In conclusion, the *Dialoghi d'amore* should clearly be understood as intended for a Christian audience, for

palazzo di Giove, ove si fa il convito e si beve il nettare divino, che è l'eterna contemplazione e desio della divina e bellissima maestà». For a different English translation, see LEONE EBREO, *Dialogues of Love*, cit., pp. 290-291.

⁴⁹ For a detailed analysis of these two forms of love, see FELLINA, *Francesco Cattani da Diacceto*, cit., pp. 28-65.

⁵⁰ For an overview on the controversies between humanists, see, for instance, M.J.B. ALLEN, *The Second Ficino-Pico Controversy: Parmenidean Po-*

etry, Eristic and the One, in G.C. GARFAGNINI (ed.), *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone: Studi e documenti*, vol. 2, Olschki, Firenze 1986, pp. 417-55; F. BACCHELLI, *Giovanni Pico e Pierleone da Spoleto. Tra filosofia dell'amore e tradizione cabalistica*, Olschki, Firenze 2001; U.I. AASDLEN, *The First Pico-Ficino Controversy*, in S. CLUCAS - P.J. FORSHAW - V. REES (eds.), *Laus Platonici Philosophy. Marsilio Ficino and His Influence*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2011, pp. 67-88; and FELLINA, *Alla scuola di Marsilio Ficino*, cit., pp. 307-335.

their author used the same philosophical language as his Christian contemporaries and constituted his intellectual personality in dialogue with them. His readers were the same as those of Ficino, Pico, and Cattani. Understanding whether Judah was debating philosophical issues with contemporary scholars in his *Dialoghi*, with whom, and in which way does not question his Jewish identity and knowledge, on which he relies in his *Dialoghi*. On the contrary, placing

Judah within a broader narrative framework contributes to reading the *Dialoghi d'amore* as a work of Renaissance philosophy because of the author's ability to engage, reproduce, and re-elaborate a set of images mutually established between Jewish and Christian scholars. Doing so restores the integrity of the intellectual landscape of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy that reverberated in Judah's work.

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SUMMARY

This article explores Judah Abarbanel's interpretation of the Platonic myth of Eros's birth at the feast for Venus's nativity in his *Dialoghi d'amore*, suggesting that Judah presents his exegesis as a critique of the one given by Marsilio Ficino in his *Commentarium in Convivium Platonis de amore*. I will show that Judah reads Ficino's interpretation of the myth, as well as the allegorical images in Giovanni Pico's *Commento sopra una canzone di Girolamo Benivieni*, in light of Francesco Cattani da Diacceto's *De pulchro*.

KEYWORDS: Judah Abarbanel (Leone Ebreo); Francesco Cattani da Diacceto; *Symposium*.

