

FSA/2024 Conference

A Falconieri Memoire

As Members of *Il Foro di Avanzati Gaetano Massa* - we journeyed and then journaled toward *Vivarium Novum* on an unusually cool May day. A common terrain was shared within each of us of conferences past, but a new horizon beckoned in the Frascati hills just beyond. Upon arriving at Villa Falconieri, we discovered four Ariadnean threads that would guide us through a labyrinth of shared seminars and papers: confidence, concern, community, and friendship. Confidence in a shared *humanitas et humanitatis*; common concerns focused on rigorous thinking and teaching; community which embraced an *ethos of arete*; and a *philia* embracing students, teachers, and their texts.

Arriving from Canada and Mexico; Udine, Salerno, Madrid, Cambridge, Atlanta, Charlotte; and as far away as Buenos Aires and Los Angeles old friends and new greeted each other now in Frascati. The mood was festive, indeed anticipatory. For the first time our *collegium academicum* would convene for full days hosted by *Vivarium Novum* at Villa Falconieri and Villa Tuscolana in the hills of Frascati. We had a day conference there the previous year. Villa Falconieri with its sweeping views, verdant gardens, historic sala and library awaited us again. What we experienced was a brilliant encounter with *Vivarium Novum* students, faculty and staff. Ideas were discussed and new friendships made and old remade; common meals celebrated with much talk among colleagues both old and new.

FSA is a close group. Some of us, like Kevin Corrigan, and myself go back to origins: FSA's founding in Roma in 2013; Claudia D'Amico, Claudia Marsico and Victoria Arroche joined with the Buenos Aires Declaration of 2015; and from our 2016 to 2023 meetings at Casa Santa Lucia Filippini by the Largo Argentina in Roma - Michele Olzi, Stephen Gersh, Jose-Maria Zamora, Valery Rees, Salvatore Lavecchia, Michele Abbate, Svetla Slaveva-Griffin, Luciana Gabriella Soares Santoprete, Andreea-Maria Lemnaru-Carrez, Enrico Peroli and Salvatore Zucconi to mention but a few came aboard. We are of a kindred Renaissance kind, all for several days students of Ficino, Cusanus and Eriugena; Socrates, Plato, Plotinus, and Proclus; Aristotle and Aristoxenus; and texts and contexts ranging from the *Patres*, Nag Hammadi and Greek mathematics to politics ancient and modern.

Vivarium Novum offered a unique opportunity for FSA Fellows to serve as faculty for VN students. Classes ranged from Slaveva-Griffin's weeklong reading of Marinus Capella to teaching seminars by members of our Socrates/Plato, Ficino, Cusanus, Mathematics and Music groups. Teacher-student relationships emerged that greatly enriched all of us. This was among of the very highlights of the conference. Later, individually, Francesco Zucconi and I had an impromptu session reading our texts on intentionality and number that stretched from 8pm to 1am. Students gathered as we exchanged ideas posing questions. Stephen Gersh and Mark Nyvlt talked about music and composition with students while Luciana Gabriela Soares Santoprete followed up with student sessions on Coptic and Greek sources ranging from Nag Hammadi to Plotinus. Alvaro Bo held impromptu talks on Proclus and his Greek and Latin legacy and Kevin Corrigan was interviewed on his *Less Familiar Plato*.

When FSA colleagues and friends meet, we attempt to think together, and our themes are wide-ranging, addressing concepts in philosophy, theology, aesthetics, and religion, while sharing problems in ancient, medieval, and renaissance metaphysics, epistemology, religion, politics, and aesthetics, from Antiquity to the Renaissance. Political bodies were mapped by Michele Olzi and Alessandra Caprioli, Interiority by Claudia LoCasto, Eric Perl, and Lela Alexidze while Andreea-Maria Lemnaru-Carrez, Michele Abbate, Jose Manuel Redondo Ornelas and Salvatore Lavecchia plunged the depths of later ancient theurgy and Daniel Tolan Philo and Origen of Alexandria. Malena Tonelli and Ezequiel Luduena raised questions on Bios and Thanatos in Plotinus and John Scotus Eriugena. Finally, Enrico Peroli, Claudia D'Amico, Francesco Bastitta Harriet, Jose Gonzalez-Rios, Victoria Arroche and Francesco Aresco held forth on Pico della Mirandola and Cusanus. Mark Nyvlt, Eleonora Falini, and Daniel Regnier offered us a music divine with essays on music, harmonics, and imagination. All together it was a stunning *tour de force* -where a shared *ethos of paideia* and *paideusis* is still unfolding.

Helena Schoeb hosted De Gruyter Brill publishers while David Rosenthal represented The Institute at Caesars Head Ltd. an American 501C3 educational corporation that sponsors FSA projects. A new DGB/FSA book series emerged to publish session papers while TICH engaged VN on collaborative efforts on VN's proposed Frascati campus on the Humanities. New FSA/VN book series in Spanish and Italian headed by our Argentine and Italian colleagues were proposed while Jose-Maria Zamora established a new research session on Porphyry – rich thinking on thinking symphonies to come indeed.

Anyone who has ever attempted it will confirm - thinking on thinking poses special difficulties. There is the obvious one of addressing a haunting question remains – is there some secret that thought thinking itself uncovers but then hides? This is not a secret kept and jealously guarded, which although grounded in the silence of 'thought thinking itself' stretches both thought and language to their limits, if not beyond. Yet at Villa Falconieri we sensed acts of continuity and remembrance; of distances crossed and recrossed, and continuities mapped and remapped. For with distances and continuities notwithstanding, there remains a self-renewing capacity of thinking on thinking. As a secret and silence, it speaks out of and to limits where something is found somehow apart from the language in which we know how to tell what we know.

The contemporary world we live in is so close to us, we are so much a part of it, that we do not know how to distinguish what is important from what is only trivial, or a major trend from a passing fashion. Because it is hard to see the woods for the trees, we brought with us a few clues that were helpful as we began our studies at *Vivarium Novum*. But upon arrival we were immediately reminded that self-awareness has increasingly come to be regarded as a major misfortune as more and more people long to remain or return to an unreflective mode of existence. We were as in W.B. Yeats vision:

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer:
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold.*

In our last evening together as falcon and falconer we again heard each other - and celebrated – there is hope of renewal. In T.S. Eliot's phrase, a "dissociated sensibility" was overcome. We celebrated what FSA and VN accomplished together. Our time together as falcon and falconer was a rebuttal of such misfortune. As Ariadnean threads through a labyrinth:

*Upon reaching Villa Falconieri the gyre shortened.
The falcon heard the falconer:
Things came together; the center holds.*

On behalf of *Il Foro di Studi Avanzati Gaetano Massa* thus, I wish to thank *L' Accademia Vivarium Novum*, Luigi Miraglia, Ignacio Chavez , Alvaro Bo and especially our students for their generous welcome, vigorous thinking, and sustained friendship. Because of your efforts - *philia* directed our time together and *eros* sustained our splendid symposium – together we are a *collegium academicum* - thinking on thinking.

Robert M. Berchman