During the first four decades of the sixteenth century the University of Paris, especially its faculty of theology, was suffering what today we might call a public relations disaster. Humanists and reformers were using their literary talents not only to challenge the methods and authorities of the traditional scholastic curriculum, but also to ruthlessly satirize teachers of that tradition. From the “remarkably supercilious and touchy” magistri nostri decried by Dame Folly in Erasmus’ Praise of Folly, to the ludicrous correspondence of the obscuri viri imagined by Ulrich von Hutten and Crotus Rubeanus, the public image of so-called “Sorbonne” theologians was taking a beating in the expanding realm of print culture. Martin Luther’s official break with the Catholic Church raised the stakes in the campaign, as reformers shifted from thinly-veiled satire to outright attack on the theologians. Modern scholars, moved by the powerful and graphic caricatures that humanists and reformers created of the scholastics, have tended to discount or simply ignore the reaction of the theologians to the insulting stereotypes crafted of them, leading to the implicit conclusion (again – borrowed from the humanists) that they were both oblivious to these insults and too ignorant to respond to them.

The books published by Paris theologians in the two decades following 1519, however, tell another story. Together, they reveal an institution all too keenly aware of damage its reputation had sustained from the attacks of humanists and reformers, and members eager to restore the faculty’s reputation by countering those attacks in print. One book representative of this strategy is Jerome de Hangest's De academiis in Lutherum. Published in 1532, the work directly addressed the criticisms made by humanists and reformers of the late-medieval university curriculum and its teachers. In

---

response to those criticisms it championed the achievements of scholastic thought and method, presenting the scholastics as learned and flexible professionals, the antithesis of the stereotype which cast them as ignorant and intransigent. The “in Lutherum” of Hangest’s title, however, is rather misleading since only two of the book’s four chapters – the shortest ones (chapters one and four) – deal with Luther directly. Chapter three deals with passages from Luther’s works, but is addressed more directly against the humanist biblical study of Erasmus and Lefèvre d’Étaples. Chapter two, which will be discussed in detail here, does not deal with a work of Luther’s at all, but rather with Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim’s *De incertitudine et vanitate scientarum*.

A native of the diocese of Noyon, Hangest took his MA at the College de Reims in 1502, having studied under Pierre Tartaret, the leading Scotist philosopher of the generation of 1500. He was a regent master in that college for the next decade. He served in a number of administrative posts, including a customary brief stint as rector of the University in 1513. Contrary to the sterile picture of university life depicted by the humanists, Hangest was exposed to the spirit of reform that was sweeping the university at the time. Many colleges (the most famous among them Montaigu) were reformed and others founded. Hangest himself oversaw the foundation of the College Du Mans for his patron the Cardinal Louis de Bourbon in 1522 and served as a college official for the next five years. From his perspective, the university was building on a proud tradition and moving inquiry forward. It comes as little surprise, then, that he would undertake to defend the institution to which he had devoted all of his adult life and in which he saw great potential to defend orthodoxy.

Despite being one of the Paris faculty of theology’s most prolific controversialists during the first two decades of the Reformation, Hangest is little known or studied today. Between 1523 and his death in 1538 Hangest

---

2 The chapter headings are as follows: “1. De academiarum firma basi,” “2. De artium et scientiarum fida tutela,” “3. De scholastica theologia adversus Cacocrypticos,” and “4. De falsis in Parisienses criminationibus.”


5 One significant recent exception to this rule is the publication of Riccardo Quinto’s *A difesa dell’Università (De academiis in Lutherum, 1532)* (Padua, 2009). A detailed introduction and copious notes accompany the Italian translation of this work.