

*Praedicaturi supponimus.*  
**Is Gilbert of Poitiers' approach to the problem  
of linguistic reference a pragmatic one?\***

**Luisa Valente**

*Università di Roma "La Sapienza"*

---

**Abstract**

The article investigates how the problem of (linguistic) reference is treated in Gilbert of Poitiers' Commentaries on Boethius' *Opuscula sacra*. In this text the terms *supponere*, *suppositus*, *-a*, *-um*, and *suppositio* mainly concern the act of a speaker (or of the author of a written text) that consists of referring—by choosing a name as subject term in a proposition—to one or more subsistent things as what the speech act (or the written text) is about. Supposition is for Gilbert an action performed by a speaker, not a property of terms, and his 'contextual approach' has a pragmatic touch: "we do not predicate in order to supposit as much as we supposit in order to predicate". Language is considered by Gilbert as a system for communication between human beings, key notions are the 'sense in the author's mind' (*sensus mentis eius qui loquitur*) and the 'interpreter's understanding' (*intelligentia lectoris*). The phenomenon of 'disciplinary discourse' ("man is a species of individuals") is treated by means of these hermeneutic notions and not by means of a special kind of supposition.

**Keywords**

reference, *suppositio*, Pragmatics, Hermeneutics, Contextual approach, *Res supposita*

The aim of this contribution is to investigate how Gilbert of Poitiers<sup>1</sup> uses the complex *suppo*\*—that is the verb *supponere*, the participle *suppositus*, *-a*, *-um*,

---

\*) I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Onno Kneepkens and Chris Martin for their help both at correcting the English and at commenting the content of this paper.

<sup>1</sup>) For secondary literature about Gilbert's philosophy see Luisa Valente, 'Gilbert of Poitiers', in *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. H. Lagerlund (Berlin-Heidelberg, 2011), 409-417. The following studies concern in particular Gilbert's semantics: Bruno Maioli, *Gilberto Porretano. Dalla grammatica speculativa alla metafisica del concreto* (Roma, 1979); Lauge O. Nielsen, 'On

the substantive *suppositio*—as technical terms in semantics. As has been already noticed by many scholars, Gilbert and his pupils in their theological writings have something interesting to say about the reference of subject terms in the propositional context, and their theories on this theme on some points anticipate later developments in the field of logic centered on the notion of

---

the Doctrine of Logic and Language of Gilbert Porrreta and His Followers', *CIMAGL* 17 (1976), 40-69; and Id., *Theology and Philosophy in the Twelfth Century. A Study of Gilbert Porrreta's Thinking and the Theological Expositions of the Doctrine of the Incarnation during the Period 1130-1180* (Leiden, 1982), 103-114; Lambert M. de Rijk, 'Gilbert de Poitiers, ses vues sémantiques et métaphysiques', in *Gilbert de Poitiers et ses contemporains aux origines de la Logica Modernorum, Actes du septième symposium européen d'histoire de la logique et de la sémantique médiévales*, eds. J. Jolivet and A. de Libera, Poitiers 17-22 Juin 1985 (Napoli, 1987), 147-171; Id., 'Semantics and Metaphysics in Gilbert of Poitiers. A Chapter of Twelfth Century Platonism', I *Vivarium* 26 (1988), 73-113, and II *Vivarium* 27 (1989), 1-35; Jean Jolivet, 'Rhétorique et théologie dans une page de Gilbert de Poitiers', in *Gilbert de Poitiers et ses contemporains*, 183-198 (also in Id., *Aspects de la pensée médiévale: Abélard. Doctrines du langage* (Paris, 1987); and Id., 'Tournures et défaillances du dire. Trois textes du douzième siècle', in *Du pouvoir de diviser les mots et les choses...*, ed. P. Legendre (Bruxelles, 1998), 57-69; C.H. Kneepkens, 'Suppositio and Supponere in 12th-Century Grammar', in *Gilbert de Poitiers et ses contemporains*, 325-351; and Id., 'Grammar and Semantics in the Twelfth Century: Petrus Helias and Gilbert de la Porrée on the Substantive Verb', in *The winged chariot: collected essays on Plato and platonism in honour of L.M. de Rijk*, eds. M. Kardaun and J. Spruyt (Leiden-Bostin-Köln, 2000), 237-275; Klaus Jacobi, 'Sprache und Wirklichkeit: Theorienbildung über Sprache im frühen 12. Jahrhundert, in *Geschichte der Sprachtheorie, 3: Sprachtheorien in Spätantike und Mittelalter*, ed. S. Ebbesen (Tübingen, 1995), 77-108; and Id., 'Natürliches Sprechen—Theoriesprache—Theologische Rede. Die Wissenschaftslehre des Gilbert von Poitiers', *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 49 (1995), 511-528; Luisa Valente, *Logique et théologie. Les écoles parisiennes entre 1150 et 1220* (Paris, 2008), 123-149. The expression 'metaphysics of the concrete' is by B. Maioli. For Gilbert's epistemology see, besides the studies mentioned above (in particular Nielsen, *Theology and Philosophy in the Twelfth Century*, 87-95; Maioli, *Gilberto Porretano*, 131-143; Jacobi, 'Natürliches Sprechen—Theoriesprache—Theologische Rede'), also Max Haas, 'Die Wissenschaftsklassifikation des Gilbert von Poitiers', in *Gilbert de Poitiers et ses contemporains*, 279-295; Jean Jolivet, 'Le jeu des sciences théorétiques selon Gilbert de Poitiers', in *Knowledge and the Sciences in Medieval Philosophy. Proceedings of the Eighth International Congress of Medieval Philosophy (SIEPM)*, eds. S. Knuutila, R. Työrinoja, S. Ebbesen (Helsinki, 1990), vol. II, 71-88; John Marenbon, 'Gilbert of Poitiers and the Porretans on Mathematics in the Division of the Sciences', in *Scientia und Disciplina: Wissenstheorie und Wissenschaftspraxis im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert*, eds. R. Berndt, M. Lutz-Bachmann and R.M.W. Stammberger (Berlin, 2002), 37-78; Luigi Catalani, 'Modelli di conoscenza tra Gilberto di Poitiers e Alano di Lille', in *Alain de Lille, le docteur universel. Philosophie, théologie et littérature au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Actes du XI<sup>e</sup> Colloque internationale de la SIEPM, Paris, 23-25 octobre 2003*, eds. J.-L. Solère, A. Vasiliu and A. Galonnier (Turnhout, 2005), 217-245.

*suppositio* as one of the ‘properties of terms’.<sup>2</sup> My point in this paper is to show that Gilbert’s attitude with regard to the problem of linguistic reference has a characteristic pragmatic touch.

### 1. The use of *suppo*\* terminology in Gilbert of Poitiers and its sources

In their technical meaning, Gilbert uses *suppo*\* terms mainly in the context of his reflections about the different sciences and the different kinds of propositions which are used in each of them. These reflections are occasioned, in his commentaries on Boethius’ *De trinitate* and on *Utrum Pater*, by the description of the peculiarity of some Trinitarian propositions, and in his commentary on the *Contra Euticen* by the need to justify the truth of Christological sentences.

As I will try to show, Gilbert’s technical uses of *suppo*\* terms mainly concern the act of a speaker (or of the author of a written text) consisting of referring—by choosing a name as subject term in a proposition—to one or more subsisting things as what the speech act (or the text) is about.<sup>3</sup> This use

<sup>2</sup> See Jan Pinborg, review of L.M. de Rijk, *Logica Modernorum* II, *Vivarium* 6 (1968), 155-158, esp. 156; and Id., *Logik und Semantik im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart - Bad Canstatt, 1972), 48-49; Nielsen, ‘On the Doctrine of Logic and Language’, 43; Id., *Theology and Philosophy in the Twelfth Century*, 105; Maioli, *Gilberto Porretano*, 66 and 101; Kneepkens, ‘*Suppositio* and *Supponere* in 12th-Century Grammar’, 337; de Rijk, ‘Gilbert de Poitiers, ses vues sémantiques et métaphysiques’, 170; Alain de Libera and Irène Rosier, ‘La pensée linguistique médiévale’, in *Histoire des idées linguistiques. Tome 2*, ed. S. Auroux (Liège, 1992), 115-186, esp. 117 and 124-126. Alain de Libera, ‘Logique et théologie dans la *Summa Quoniam homines* d’Alain de Lille’, in *Gilbert de Poitiers et ses contemporains*, 455f. writes about *suppo*\* terminology in the Porretan theologian Alain de Lille, and Sten Ebbesen, ‘The Semantics of the Trinity according to Stephen Langton and Andrew Sunesen’, in *Gilbert de Poitiers et ses contemporains*, 419-424, writes about *suppositio* in Steven Langton, who has been very much influenced by Porretan theology; more generally, on *suppo*\* terminology in theological works of the second half of the 12th Century, both Porretan and non-Porretan, see Valente, *Logique et théologie*, chap. III.

<sup>3</sup> Commenting on Nielsen’s qualification of Gilbert’s use of *supponere* as ‘to place in the position of subject’ or ‘act as subject’ (Nielsen, *Theology and Philosophy in the Twelfth Century*, 105), Kneepkens, ‘*Suppositio* and *Supponere* in 12th-Century Grammar’, 337, asserts that in Gilbert’s commentaries “Except at one place, the object of this ‘putting as a subject’ is always an extralinguistic entity, whereas its subject or the agent can be either a noun or the speaker(s)”. While I fully agree with the first part of this sentence, i.e. with the view that in Gilbert’s use the object of *supponere* are almost always subsistents, I have the impression that when it is explicit, the agent of the verb *supponere* is in Gilbert always the speaker or the author of the text, and when it is not explicit, Gilbert’s text is coherent if interpreted in this sense. I don’t find any place where the agent of the verb *supponere* is clearly explained by Gilbert as being the noun, even if some

of *suppo*\* terminology seems to me to have as background the literal meaning of the verb *supponere* as ‘putting <something> under’—in the ontological set, the subsistent is put under the inherence of its forms or its accidents; in the semantical set, it is put under the predication or the discourse. The grammatical tradition and Boethius, both the logician and the theologian, must have played an important role in bringing about Gilbert’s semantic vocabulary. In fact, Gilbert may depend on Priscian’s uses of the expressions *res supposita* or *substantia supposita* or *suppositus/um*<sup>4</sup> for the thing or person which is signified by a name or a pronoun.<sup>5</sup> In the first half of the 12th century, William of Conches and Peter Helias also use, in their commentaries on Priscianus’ *Institutiones grammaticae*, the term *suppositum* in the sense of the thing which underlies the discourse<sup>6</sup> or the quality,<sup>7</sup> even if their semantics are

---

formulations support both interpretations (e.g. when we have *supponi* + an ablative like *nomine*, which could express both the agent or the instrument of *supponere*; see text corresponding to n. 29).

<sup>4</sup> For *res supposita* see Priscian, *Institutiones*, Liber V, ed. M. Hertz, *Prisciani grammatici Caesariensis. Institutionum grammaticarum libri XVIII ex recensione Martini Hertzii*, 2 voll. (Leipzig, 1855-1859), vol. I, 177: 18; for *substantia supposita* *ibid.*, XI, 554: 7; XVII, vol. II, 133: 17; for *substantia suppositi* *ibid.*, XVII, 122: 2 and, probably, 124: 14, 129: 13-14; for *suppositus/um* *ibid.*, XVII, 129: 15; 145: 21; 149: 10; see also *persona supposita* in Priscianus, *De praexercitamentis rhetoricis*, ed. H. Keil (Leipzig, 1859), 437: 30; 438: 19. As for the definition of the name, in the *Prisciani partitiones duodecim versuum Aeneidos principalium* we find the following one (Priscianus *De praexercitamentis rhetoricis*, 464: 32-34): “Pars orationis unius cuiusque rei suppositae communem vel propriam qualitatem significans”.

<sup>5</sup> On Priscian as a source for the medieval use of *suppo*\* terms see already Lambert M. de Rijk, *Logica Modernorum*, vol. II, t. I *The Origin and Early Development of the Theory of Supposition* (Assen 1967), ch. XVI and Sten Ebbesen, ‘Early Supposition Theory (12th-13th cent.)’, *Histoire Épistémologie Langage* 3 (1981), 35-58, who partially disagrees with de Rijk interpretation of Priscian’s *suppositum*.

<sup>6</sup> See e.g. William of Conches, *Glose super Priscianum*: “Nota quod in hac arte dicitur substantia res per se existens et id quod res per se existens dicitur esse cum queritur quid sit, et suppositum dicitur actuale quod subiacet locutioni...”, quoted in Irène Rosier, ‘Les acceptions du terme *substantia* chez Pierre Helie’, in *Gilbert de Poitiers et ses contemporains*, 312.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. Peter Helias, *Summa super Priscianum*, ed. L. Reilly, 2 voll. (Toronto, 1993), 915: 48-52: “...dicendum quod nomen significat substantiam et pronomen significat substantiam sed differunt quoniam pronomen significat substantiam a ‘substando’, scilicet, ut est suppositum proprietati. Ipsum vero nomen significat substantiam a ‘subsistendo’, id est, significat rem ut subsistentem aliqua qualitate.” (cf. p. 625: 70-71); particularly important is Helias’ treatment on Priscian XII, 13 (p. 655ff.), where the word *suppositum* is used many times as equivalent for *persona* both *secundum rem* and *secundum vocem*. On the use of *suppositum* for extralinguistic *res* in Peter Helias, see Kneepkens, ‘*Suppositio* and *Supponere* in 12th-Century Grammar’, and Rosier, ‘Les acceptions du terme *substantia* chez Pierre Helie’; and on the use of *suppo*\**lapo*\*

different both from each other and from that of Gilbert and the Porretans.<sup>8</sup> It seems that only later grammarians will use *suppositum* in the sense of subject term of the proposition, as opposed to *appositum*, and we do not find the pair *supponere* with *apponere* in this sense in Gilbert.<sup>9</sup> Boethius in his logical works, and especially in his commentaries on Porphyrius' *Isagoge*, very often uses the verb *supponi* + dative—and sometimes the substantive *suppositio*—for the relation of inclusion of less general items within the range of more general items along the Porphyrian tree (an inclusion which governs the predication).<sup>10</sup> While the agents of the verb *supponere* in this context, when explicit, are thinking and talking human beings rendered by the means of the generic first plural person 'we', the object may be the individuals or the species and genera,

---

terminology in relation with the introduction of the notions *subiectum* and *praedicatum* in 12th century grammatical as well as theological texts see Irène Rosier, 'L'introduction des notions de sujet et prédicat dans la grammaire médiévale', *Archives et documents de la SHESL*, 2<sup>e</sup> série 10 (1994), 81-119. K. Margareta Fredborg, 'The Dependence of Petrus Helias' *Summa super Priscianum* on William of Conches' *Glosulae super Priscianum*', *CIMAGL* 11 (1973), 16-18, has already also some remarks about *suppositum* in Peter Helias and in William of Conches. See also *Glosulae in Priscianum*, ms. Metz 1224, f. 20ra (tr. E. Lorenzetti): "Obicitur de equiuocis que non significant aliquam qualitatem in subiectis communem: 'canis' enim et alia equiuoca nil confert (!) sibi suppositis nisi nomen".

<sup>8</sup> The differences have been pointed out by Rosier, 'Les acceptions du terme *substantia* chez Pierre Helie'; Kneepkens, '*Suppositio* and *Supponere* in 12th-Century Grammar'; Id., 'Grammar and Semantics in the Twelfth Century'; de Libera and Rosier, 'La pensée linguistique médiévale'. Kneepkens, '*Suppositio* and *Supponere* in 12th-Century Grammar', convincingly proposes that the source for Peter Helias' use of *supponere* is Gilbert.

<sup>9</sup> For example the Priscian Commentary in Ms Leiden BPL 154, see K. Margareta Fredborg, 'The Priscian Commentary from the Second Half of the Twelfth Century: Ms. Leiden BPL 154', *Histoire, Épistémologie, Langage* 12 (1990), 59-63; and in the edition of the *Grammatica Porretana*, ed. K.M. Fredborg et C.H. Kneepkens, *CIMAGL* 57 (1988), 33-37. About the 'late' appearance of this terminological couple see Kneepkens, '*Suppositio* and *Supponere* in 12th-Century Grammar', 331ff.; and Rosier, 'L'introduction des notions de sujet et prédicat'.

<sup>10</sup> So that e.g. "Cicero enim unum est et ad unum nomen istud aptatur, ita indiuidua quae ad unitatem dicuntur, cunctis superioribus supposita sunt, ut genus, species, differentia, propria uel accidentia" (Boethius, *In Isagoge Porphyrii commenta*, ed. G. Schepss and S. Brandt [Vienne-Leipzig, 1906], 49: 9-12, = PL 64, 30C); "specialissima uero species hoc modo [scil. Ar. describit]: quod cum sit species, non est genus, ex opposito, quoniam opposita ex oppositis describuntur interdum. nam quoniam praepositio opposita est suppositioni, genus autem praepositur, species uero supponitur, si idcirco erit primum genus, quia ita superponitur, ut minime supponatur, idcirco erit ultima species, quia ita supponitur, ut praeponi non possit: oppositorum igitur recte ex oppositis facta est diffinitio." (*ibid.*, 217: 5-12). Here Boethius uses the word *suppositio* to mean the relation of the species to the genus, explained as opposed to the genus's *praepositio* toward the species. Cf. also *ibid.*, 237: 21. For two uses of *supponi praedicato* by Boethius see Rosier, 'L'introduction des notions de sujet et prédicat', 96-98.

except for the most general genera, which are not included under other genera.<sup>11</sup> Boethius' analysis switches very easily from the level of things to that of thoughts or that of nouns, so that the relation of less general concepts or terms being-put-under (*supponi*) more general concepts or terms can be perceived also as a relation between things (first and second substances). When Boethius writes, in his *Commentary on the Categories*, that the individuals are called 'first substances', among other reasons because they are put-under (*supponuntur*) the predication of the second substances (PL 64, col. 189C), he can be interpreted as if he were writing just about concepts or terms; but he is clearly using the word *supponere* as having a subsisting thing as object, when he writes that a thing (*res*) may be placed by virtue of one of its names under one genus and by virtue of another of its names under another genus: e.g. Socrates is put under (*supponitur*) the genus substance by means of the name *homo* and under the genus relation by means of the name *pater* ("Atqui ut alia significatione una res diversis generibus supponatur, nihil prohibet", PL 64, 220D, cf. 250A, 261B). Besides, the subsisting thing—which is signified by the subject term in the proposition—is called by Boethius, in the *Second Commentary on Porphyrius' Ysagoge*, *subiectum* and *suppositum* or the *substantia* as *quod supponitur*, since it sustains the accidents.<sup>12</sup> Boethius uses also the expression *res (significatione) supposita* in his *Commentary on Cicero's Topics*: "Nota etiam ab eo cuius nota est facile distat, quia illud vox et significatio est, illud res significatione supposita" (PL 64, col. 1084C). And in the *Contra Euticen*—and this is perhaps for Gilbert's and for the history of supposition theory particularly important—, while explaining the meaning of the word *hypostasis*, Boethius asserts:

But the Greeks called individual substances *υποστάσεις* because they underlie the rest and are put under and subjected to other things, that is, to accidents; and therefore we also call them 'substances' almost in the sense of <things which are> put under <some other things>.

<sup>11</sup>) See *In Isagoge Porphyrii commenta*, De specie, 200: 7-201: 2; = PL 64, 99 C-D: "... alia est enim substantialis formae species quae humanitas nuncupatur, eaque non est quasi supposita animali, sed tanquam ipsa qualitas substantiam monstrans; ... huic aliam adjungit speciei significationem, id est eam quam supponimus generi." *Ibid.*, Liber IV, 293:15-18, = PL 64, col. 137 B: "sed quodcumque deum supponimus animali, secundum eam opinionem facimus quae solem stellasque atque hunc totum mundum animatum esse confirmat, quos etiam deorum nomine, ut saepe dictum est, appellauerunt."

<sup>12</sup>) "... longe diuersum est id quod accidit et cui accidit. cui enim accidit, subiectum est atque suppositum, quod uero accidit, superpositum est atque aduenientis naturae. item quod supponitur substantia est, quod uero uelut accidens praedicatur, extrinsecus uenit" (*In Isagoge Porphyrii commenta*, 341: 6-10 = PL 64, col. 156A).

in the sense of υποστάσεις, and since they also term the same substances πρόσωπα, we too can also call them persons.

Ideo autem υποστάσεις Graeci individuas substantias vocaverunt, quoniam caeteris subsunt et quibusdam quasi accidentibus subpositae subiectaeque sunt; atque idcirco nos quoque eas substantias nuncupamus quasi subpositas, quasi υποστάσεις, cumque etiam πρόσωπα nuncupent easdem substantias, possumus nos quoque nuncupare personas.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. *Suppositus, -a, -um, supponere, and the number of the verb*

According to Gilbert of Poitiers human beings basically use language in order to communicate with each other about external things. Thus in the basic form of language, which is shared by everyday life and philosophy of nature, the ‘supposited things’ are always subsistents, one or more; in theological language, they can be only one or two or the three persons, the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit. Commenting on the *De trinitate*, Gilbert for example uses *suppositi* to mean the three persons signified by the names *Pater*, *Filius* and *Spiritus sanctus* in the proposition of chap. III “Pater ac Filius ac Spiritus sanctus idem equidem est”. Here, Gilbert says, Boethius very rightly uses the verb in the singular number instead of the plural number, which the grammatical congruity would demand: he does so in order to let the reader infer (“ut... intelligeretur”), from the singular number of the verb, the unity in the essence of these three very special *suppositi*.<sup>14</sup> In the same way, in the commentary on the second Boethian *opusculum* (*Utrum Pater et Filius et Spiritus sanctus de divinitate substantialiter praedicentur*), Gilbert analyses the predications about

<sup>13</sup> Boethius, *Opuscula sacra*, ed. C. Moreschini, *Boethius De consolatione Philosophiae. Opuscula theologica* (Monachi-Lipsiae, 2000), 217: 225-232. The English translation is my own elaboration of Stewart-Rand’s in Boethius, *The Theological Tractates translated by H.F. Stewart, E.K. Rand, and S.J. Tester. The Consolation of Philosophy translated by S.J. Tester* (Cambridge Mass.-London, 1918), 89f. The relevance of this text in the history of 12th century theories about the notion of *substantia* and the meaning of a name has been remarked by Rosier, ‘Les acceptations du terme *substantia* chez Pierre Helie’.

<sup>14</sup> Gilbert of Poitiers, *Expositio in Boecii librum De trinitate; Expositio in Boecii librum De bonorum hebdomade; Expositio in Boecii librum Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, ed. N.M. Häring, *The Commentaries on Boethius by Gilbert of Poitiers* (Toronto, 1966), 113: 40-46: “Sic ergo quoniam enumeratio haec ‘Pater ac Filius et Spiritus sanctus’ dictionem precesserat, sequi debuit ‘idem sunt’. Quia tamen una singularis et indiuidua est essentia qua illi plures sunt idem, uerbi numerum non suppositorum pluralitati sed illius, que de ipsis dicitur, essencie referens unitati, ut non tam uerbi ex essentia, quam essencie ex uerbo singularitas intelligeretur, ait: PATER AC FILIUS AC SPIRITUS SANCTUS IDEM EQUIDEM EST”. *Suppositus, -a, -um* is used by Gilbert as adjective or as a substantiated participle.

divine essence and he reformulates an Augustinian rule by using the term *suppositi*. The rule states that, in theological predications concerning divine essence, the verb has to be used in the singular number, even if the subjects of the propositions are the names *Pater*, *Filius* or *Spiritus sanctus*:

Huc usque catholice fidei auctoritate confirmavit illam sue ratiocinationis partem qua dicitur: 'Quicquid de Deo substantialiter predicatur, id est de Patre et de Filio et de Spiritu sancto et diuisim et simul suppositis, singulariter dicitur.'<sup>15</sup>

These are theological exceptions to a grammatical rule which states that the number of the verb must follow the number of the subject term. Gilbert investigates this rule in his exposition of *Contra Euticen*, and insists on using in this context *suppo*\* terminology. He is commenting on a fundamental Aristotelico-Boethian metaphysical assertion, which will be at the center of the theory of the transcendentals in the 13th Century: being and one convert with each other.<sup>16</sup> In his commentary, Gilbert transforms this slogan in a sort of ontogrammatical rule. While forming a proposition, one has to choose the number, singular or plural, of the verb according to whether it is possible to connect the 'property' signified by the subject term with one or more 'supposed things'. The singularity of the property (the total form)<sup>17</sup> of one 'supposed thing' (*suppositae rei singularis proprietates*), which is signified by a proper name,

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 173: 79-82; see also 171: 38-172: 44; 174: 27-175: 43; 179: 81-88. These are predications *ad se* for Augustine, cf. *De trinitate* V, VIII, 9, ed. W.J. Mountain and Fr. Glorie (Turnhout, 1968, 216: 35-40: "Quidquid ergo ad se ipsum dicitur deus et de singulis personis ter dicitur patre et filio et spiritu sancto, et simul de ipsa trinitate non pluraliter sed singulariter dicitur". On theological predication according to Augustine see Valente, *Logique et théologie*, 96-105.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Luisa Valente, "Illa quae transcendent generalissima": elementi per una storia dei termini trascendentali nella teologia latina del XII secolo', in *Metaphysica—sapientia—scientia divina: soggetto e statuto della filosofia prima nel Medioevo*, ed. P. Porro (Turnhout-Bari, 2005) (= *Quaestio* 5, 2005), 217-239; Ead., "Ens, unum, bonum": elementi per una storia dei trascendentali in Boezio e nella tradizione boeziana del XII secolo', in *Ad Ingenii Acuitionem. Studies in Honour of Alfonso Maierù*, eds. S. Caroti et al. (Louvain-la-Neuve, 2006), 483-545; Ead., 'Names which can be said of everything: Porphyrian Tradition and 'transcendental' Terms in 12th Century Logic', in *The Many Roots of Medieval Logic: the Aristotelian and the Non-Aristotelian Traditions*. Proceedings of 15th European Symposium on Medieval logic and Semantics, Cambridge July 1-4, 2004, ed. J. Marenbon (Leiden, 2007) (= *Vivarium* 45, 2007), 298-310.

<sup>17</sup> According to Gilbert terminology the whole grouping of forms of each subsistent is its own 'proper form' or 'total form' or 'property' (*propria forma, tota forma, proprietates*), and is composed by all its past, present, future, actual and potential forms (for *Socrates*, it could be called *socrateitas*, etc.).



demands (*exigit*) the singularity of the verb when this name is used as subject term in a proposition. On the contrary, if the subject term(s) entail(s) a plurality of properties of different ‘supposed things’ (“*rerum suppositarum illa, que uni conuenire non potest, proprietatum diuersitas*”, as in “Plato et Cicero...”), this demands the plural number for the verb. If one is about to speak about Plato (“*de Platone loquatur*”), he will say “Plato legit”, not “Plato legunt”. But if somebody is going to ‘supposit’ Plato and Cicero (“*Si uero Platonem et Ciceronem supponat*”), he will not say “Plato et Cicero est” but “sunt”. There are exceptions to this rule, which are cases of figurative assertions:

EST ENIM philosophis multarum propositionum locus et per se nota propositio quod ESSE ATQUE UNUM uniuersaliter CONUERTITUR. Quodcumque enim est, unum est. Et QUODCUMQUE UNUM EST, EST. Uerbi namque singularitatem supposite rei singularis proprietas exigit: sicut et pluralitatem uerbi *rerum suppositarum* illa, que uni conuenire non potest, proprietatum diuersitas: ut *si quis de Platone loquatur*—siue unum siue multa de ipso affirmet uel neget—uerbo singulari hoc faciet. Non enim dicit “Plato legunt”, sed “legit”. Nec “Plato sunt”, sed “est homo albus astrologus” et huiusmodi alia. *Si uero Platonem et Ciceronem supponat*, non dicit “Plato et Cicero est” sed “sunt” hec uel illa nisi forte uerbi tropo predicati nominis singularitati singularitas ipsius uerbi reddatur: ut “Omnia Caesar erat”. Ergo quicumque dicit “sunt”, de pluribus; qui uero dicit “est”, de uno se loqui secundum precepta grammaticorum significat.<sup>18</sup>

In this text, Gilbert speaks about the subsistents which the proposition is about as the *suppositae res* and, particularly important in my opinion, equates “*si quis de Platone loquatur*” with “*si uero Platonem supponat*” while describing the action of somebody who is going to formulate a proposition about Plato using as subject term for him the name ‘Plato’. *Supponere* clearly means here the action performed by the speaker/author of setting down something or somebody as what he is talking about by choosing a name as subject term for a proposition. This is confirmed by another occurrence of the verb *supponere* in the same text:

Sic igitur de singulis per se atque diuisim praedicatur substantia. Nec modo diuisim de singulis SED et collectim de tribus eadem praedicatur substantia. CUM enim RURSUS *COLLIGO simul supponens* PATREM et FILIUM et SPIRITUM SANCTUM, eadem fide NON PLURES numero

<sup>18)</sup> *Expositio in Contra Euticen*, 300: 72-301:85. Here, as in the rest of the quoted texts, the italics are mine. An English translation of this text is provided by de Rijk, ‘Semantics and Metaphysics in Gilbert of Poitiers’, II, 29.

essentiarum SED essentie unius singularitate et omnino sine numero UNA OCCURRIT, qua ipsi dicuntur ESSE, SUBSTANTIA. Ideoque vere esse una substantia.<sup>19</sup>

In my opinion, all the technical uses of *suppo*\* terms in Gilbert's commentaries to Boethius' *Theological treatises* confirm this interpretation or are at least compatible with it—with just two exceptions: on one of them what is 'supposited' is clearly not a subsisting thing as represented by a name but the very name itself used as subject term in a proposition;<sup>20</sup> one other time, Gilbert mentions the fact that we can also 'supposit' subsistences, that is forms, and not just subsistents.<sup>21</sup>

### 3. *Suppositio, suppositum* and the different kinds of propositions.

#### The *accidentalis tamen vera conexio*

While discussing the different classifications of types of propositions, Gilbert often uses *suppositio* and *suppositum*.<sup>22</sup> Commenting on chapter IV of *De trinitate*, where the classification of the categories into substance and accidents is discussed, Gilbert explains that the substantial predications are not just those where we clearly 'supposit' subsistents (*subsistentium suppositio*) by means of the subject terms, such as in "Plato is a body", but also those where, by means of the predicate terms, one makes explicit one of the characteristics which necessarily go along with one of the substantial forms of a kind of subsistent (*quid adsit ei quod est esse*). When we say "corpus est coloratum" we are not declaring the actual inherence of a form—colour in a subsistent, but saying that if something has the substantial form corporality, necessarily it also has a

<sup>19</sup> *Expositio in Utrum Pater*, 166: 94-100.

<sup>20</sup> *Expositio in Contra Euticen*, 279: 12-14: "...recte, *supposito quolibet horum duorum nominum* hoc est 'essentia' uel 'substantia', sensus illius que sequitur dictionis ad eorum quodlibet... red-ditur"; cf. Kneepkens, 'Suppositio and Supponere in 12th-Century Grammar', 337.

<sup>21</sup> *Expositio in Contra Euticen*, 350: 55-58: "cum hoc nomen, quod est 'corpus', subicimus... supponimus eo siue subsistentiam siue quod ea subsistit et..." (see below for the larger context).

<sup>22</sup> About the different kinds of proposition in Gilbert see in particular de Rijk, 'Gilbert de Poitiers', 164-170, who illuminates the Gilbertinian notion of *conexio*. Jacobi, 'Sprache und Wirklichkeit', illustrates the epistemological frame of Gilbert's reflexion about different kinds of propositions. Maioli, *Gilberto Porretano*, 83-101 clearly explains the important difference, in Gilbert analysis, between the distinction substantial vs. accidental predication, and the distinction *secundum rem* vs. *extrinseca* predication.

form—colour, because of the inner constitution of its formal structure (*complexionis consequentia*):

NAM PARS EORUM predicamentorum EST loco rationis SUBSTANCIA non modo in subsistentium suppositione—qua quorum sint esse manifestatur ut “Plato est corpus”—uerum etiam IN RELIQUARUM RERUM PREDICATIONE qua, quid adsit ei quod est esse, complexionis consequentia declaratur ut “corpus est coloratum”. PARS uero predicamentorum loco rationis EST IN NUMERO ACCIDENCIUM.<sup>23</sup>

Here *suppositio*—a term which doesn’t appear in Priscian<sup>24</sup> and that I have been able to find in Boethius’ works in a logico-semantic context only twice in his second commentary on Porphyrius (see *supra*, nn. 10-12)—is used as immediately connected with the subsistents: in a substantial predication the author shows which are the subsistents to which the substantial form expressed by the predicate inheres by using as subject term a name which refers immediately to subsistents (e.g. *Plato*).

In his exposition of the *Contra Euticen et Nestorium* Gilbert tries to explain the co-presence of the two natures, human and divine, in Christ by deepening an analogy proposed by the *Symbolum Quicumque* between the composition of two natures in Christ and the composition of soul and body in human beings. As usual, Gilbert approaches his subject by analysing examples of propositions and the kind of terms used in them. Of the one and singular subsistent Christ one can predicate both the human and the divine nature using the names of him which are ‘caused’ by these two natures (*homo, Deus*), as in the same way of each singular human being one can predicate both the nature of the soul and the nature of the body using the names which are caused by these two natures (*anima, corpus*):

<sup>23</sup> *Expositio in De trinitate*, 119: 16-23. In my opinion Gilbert is here changing the sense of Boethius’ text, since Boethius, with the expression “in reliquarum rerum predicatione”, wanted to refer to the distinction between theological predication and predication *in naturalibus*: here humans talk about the creatures, ‘the other things’ compared to God. See Valente, *Logique et théologie*, 106-108.

<sup>24</sup> Except for an interesting occurrence in the *De praeexercitamentis rhetoricis* (439: 12-19). Here, within the description of the *positio* as a “deliberation which concerns a general subject without any reference to a precise person” (“Positio est deliberatio alicuius rei generalis ad nullam personam certam pertinens vel aliam partem circumstantiae”), the *suppositio* is opposed to *positio* as that sort of deliberation which concerns a definite person: “. . . quodsi finitam assumamus personam et sic deliberamus, non positio iam sed suppositio est, quae magis ad controversias pertinet.”

But, since, as the Holy Scripture testifies, “like the rational soul and the flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ”—that is: since of Christ, who is one in singularity and individuality, the divine and the human nature are truly and without any rhetorical transfer predicated by those names which are attributed to Christ on the base of them, i.e. ‘Deus’ and ‘homo’, as of every man the nature of the soul and that of the flesh are said through those names which name the man on the basis of the nature of the soul and of that of the flesh, i.e. ‘anima’ and ‘carnis’—then, *when the very same Christ is ‘supposited’ by means of whichever of these predicated names*, the other one can be predicated and also whatever goes naturally along with the cause of the nature signified by the other one.

Sed quoniam teste sacra scriptura “sicut anima rationalis et caro unus est homo ita Deus et homo unus est Christus” hoc est: quoniam de uno singulariter et indiuidualiter Christo diuina et humana natura his, que ab eisdem sunt indita Christo, nominibus—uidelicet “Deus” et “homo”—ita uere et sine translationis alicuius scemate predicantur sicut de quolibet homine natura anime et carnis his, quibus ab eisdem naturis homo appellationem habet, nominibus—scilicet: “anima” et “caro”—dicuntur, *supposito eodem Christo quouis istorum predicatorum nominum* alterum et quicquid nature per illud alterum significate causam naturaliter comitatur poterit praedicari.

In fact, since a human being is soul and body, *if the same human being is ‘supposited’ by using its name ‘soul’ or its name ‘rational’*, it will be possible to predicate truly not only the names which are proper for the souls but also those which are proper for the body, as in “Eight souls entered the Ark”. In fact by this name ‘souls’ used in the plural number *the author ‘supposited’* not just the souls of the human beings but the human beings themselves, and predicated something which was not pertinent to the souls but only to the human beings, i.e. the fact of entering.

Nam et cum homo sit anima et corpus, *hoc eius i.e. hominis nomine quod est “anima” uel “rationale” eodem supposito*, poterunt uere predicari non modo illa que sunt propria animarum uerum etiam illa que sunt propria corporum: ut *octo animae intraverunt in archam*. Hic enim *hoc plurali nomine, quod est “animae”, non animas hominum sed ipsos homines auctor supposuit* et quod non animabus sed solis corporibus conuenit, “intrare” uidelicet, predicauit.

In a similar way one can say “something rational is white” in the sense that by the name ‘rational’, which by reason of a power of the soul is a name also of the human being and not just of the soul, *one will understand the very human being (as) the ‘supposited thing’*: and the whiteness—which is a quality of the body and not of the soul—is truly predicated only in connection with *this ‘supposition’*.

Similiter potest dici “quoddam rationale est album” ut *hoc nomine*, quod est “rationale”, quod ab anime potentia non modo ipsius anime sed etiam hominis nomen est, *homo ipse intelligatur suppositus*; et tantum<sup>25</sup> ad *hanc suppositionem* albedo—que non anime sed corporis qualitas est—uere predicata.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup>) *Tamen* ed., but see de Rijk, ‘Gilbert de Poitiers’, 165.

<sup>26</sup>) Sic ed.; ‘uere predicata est’ in the mss. EkNOs.

Likewise with the name ‘corpus’ or ‘album’ suppositing the same human being, it will be possible to predicate truly of it non only <names> which are proper for the bodies but also <names> which are proper for the souls, as ‘rational’ or ‘musical’ or others of this sort. And in general whenever one <thing> is called by more names within the same faculty, once *the supposition for the thing is made by means of whichever of its names*, all the others can be predicated. Nevertheless, not all the predicates manifest a consequential connection with *those <names> by which the supposition is carried out*.

Item hoc hominis nomine, quod est “corpus” uel “album”, eodem homine supposito,<sup>27</sup> possunt uere predicari de ipso non modo corporum uerum etiam animarum propria: ut “rationale” uel “musicum” uel huiusmodi alia. Et generaliter quotiescunque unum multis secundum eandem facultatem appellatur nominibus, *quolibet eorum facta suppositione rei cuius sunt nomina* uere possunt cetera praedicari. Sed non omnia predicata *his, quibus fit suppositio*, connexionis consequentiam reddunt.

But since it happens that the body and the spirit are in one <thing>, of this one <thing> it will be possible to predicate truly all those <determinations> which naturally pertain to the body and to the spirit, as we have often said. And the accidentality which we have mentioned before will not in any way hinder the truth of the connection if both what is predicated and *that by means of which the supposition is brought about* (= predicate term and subject term) apply to that one <thing> in the same respect. I say “in the same respect” in order to prevent anybody who hears, about something which is a body, to be said “<the> white is a body” and “<the> white is contrary to the black”, from concluding that it is possible to say “<the> body is contrary to <the> body”.

Sed quoniam in uno corpus et spiritum esse contingit, de illo uno quacunquē sunt naturaliter corporis atque spiritus, sicut iam sepe dictum, poterunt uere predicari. Nec ullo modo connexionis ueritatem predicta accidentalitas poterit impedire si et quod predicatur et *quo suppositio fit* illi uni secundum eandem rationem conueniant. “Secundum eandem rationem” dicimus ne forte quis audiens de eo, quod corpus est, dici “album est corpus”, “album est contrarium nigro”, putet posse dici “corpus est contrarium corpori”.

In fact, although ‘body’, ‘white’ and ‘contrary’ are name of the same thing, they are not <names of this thing> in virtue of the same account since ‘body’ and ‘white’ name the thing by reason of its natures, ‘contrary’ by reason of logic (*dissendi ratione*). And therefore ‘contrary’ can be truly predicated of something only if this something will be ‘supposed’ *by means of the name which has been imposed to it because of its contrariety*, as in “<the> white is contrary”, or any other <proposition> of this sort, with another name imposed on anything on account of its contrariety.

Quamuis enim et “corpus” et “album” et “contrarium” eiusdem rei sint nomina, non tamen secundum eandem rationem quoniam “corpus” et “album” a naturis: “contrarium” uero a disserendi ratione idem appellant. Ideoque de illo “contrarium” non uere poterit praedicari nisi *eo nomine quod illi a causa contrarietatis impositum est supponatur* ita: “album est contrarium” uel huiusmodi alio nomine cuiuslibet rei a causa sue contrarietatis imposito.

<sup>27)</sup> Ed. *homine subiecto*; but *homine supposito* in the mss. fRs.

In fact whiteness and blackness are not contrary to each other—though they might be said contrary in a metonymical sense—but they are said to be contrary because of the contrariety of the white and the black <things>, which are truly contrary to each other.

Non enim sibi contrarie—nisi forte per denominationis tropum—albedo et nigredo dicuntur sed causa contrarietatis albi et nigri que uere sibi inuicem contraria sunt.

Nevertheless it must be attentively considered that, when one says “White is an accident”, what we call ‘accident’ is not the white object because of its whiteness, but the whiteness itself. Hence it is clear that we can not truly predicate of something metalinguistic denominations if the predicate is not connected to the subject by a certain consequence existing in the signified things.

Diligenter tamen est attendendum quod cum dicitur “album est accidens”, nequaquam album ex albedinis causa sed albedo ipsa “accidens” appellatur. Unde manifestum est quod disserendi rationes uere de aliquo predicare non possumus nisi subiecto predicatum quadam rerum significatarum consequentia conectatur.

Then, the connection which states “God has suffered”, although accidental, is nevertheless a true one: NOT IN THE SENSE THAT THE DIVINITY FOR SOME SORT OF CONVERSION HAS BECOME HUMANITY—it is absolutely inconvertible and immutable—, BUT IN THE SENSE THAT IT HAS BEEN ASSUMED BY THE DIVINITY, which means by God, and so truly joined in God’s son, i.e. Christ.

Ideoque conexio qua dicitur “Deus passus est”, quamuis accidentalis sit, uera tamen est: NON QUOD<sup>28</sup> IPSA DEITAS aliqua conuersione sui FACTA SIT HUMANITAS—inconuertibilis enim et omnino incommutabilis est—, SED QUOD A DEITATE hoc est a Deo FUERIT ASSUMPTA ac per hoc in Filio Dei, Christo uidelicet, uere conjuncta.

And because of this conjunction it happens rightly that we find accidental but true connections of words not just in the natural sciences but also in theology. And since Nestorius doesn’t think that this can truly happen, <Boethius>, after having made the example of the accidental but true connection “God has suffered” (in which that, among his names, which is derived from the divine essence, i.e. ‘God’, is used in order to ‘supposit’ the person Christ, and the sufference is predicated, which is not proper to divinity but to animal sensibility), gives another example of accidental but true connection in which *the same person Christ is ‘supposed’ with that, among his names, which is derived from his subsistence* humanity, i.e. ‘human’, and it is predicated that he is the son of God: in any case, it is not a human generation, but a divine generation. And thus <Boethius> writes: WHO IS HUMAN, IS CALLED GOD’S SON and this NOT BECAUSE OF THE SUBSTANCE DIVINITY, which would become that of humanity in the conversion, but remaining the same substance HUMANITY WHICH, even if it is not converted in divinity, NEVERTHELESS IS CONJOINED TO THE DIVINITY IN A NATURAL UNITY.

<sup>28)</sup> The edition has *quo*, but remarks that many mss. have *quod*.

Cuius coniunctionis ratione recte fit non modo in naturalibus uerum etiam in theologicis accidentalibus et tamen uera dictionum conexio. Quam quia Nestorius uere fieri posse non putat cum iam hoc exemplauerit hac accidentalibus et uera conexione que est “Deus est passus”—in qua scilicet *Christi persona hoc suo a diuinitatis essentia nomine, quod est “Deus”, supposita* predicatur passio quae non diuinitatis, sed animalis sensibilitatis est propria—ITEM exemplat idem alia accidentalibus et tamen uera conexione in qua eadem Christi persona—illo suo ab humanitatis subsistentia nomine, quod est “homo”, subiecta—predicatur esse Filium Dei: quod non est secundum humanam generationem, sed secundum diuinam. Dicit itaque: QUI HOMO EST, APPELLATUR DEI FILIUS et hoc NON SUBSTANTIA DIUINITATIS que humanitatis in ipsa conuersione prouenerit SED manente substantia HUMANITATIS QUE etsi non est in diuinitatem conuersa TAMEN EST DIUINITATI NATURALI UNITATE CONIUNCTA.<sup>29</sup>

If we try to draw some conclusions from the texts seen until now, it seems that the *suppo*\* terminology has been developed by Gilbert to a great extent in the context of analysing the different forms of propositions in the different ‘faculties’ physics, logic, theology (*naturalis, ratio disserendi, theologica*). In this context, a key role is played by the notion of *accidentalis tamen uera conexio*. This kind of propositions (which entails in turn many subtypes, as we will see) is such that they are true in a proper, non rhetorically transferred sense, since in them the predicate name expresses one formal item of one or more subsistents represented by the subject name; but they are not predications *stricto sensu* since they are not ‘consequential connections’ (*conexiones consequentes*): the form signified by the predicate is not in a relation of consequentiality (*consequentia*) with the form signified by the subject term. The *accidentalis conexio* is thus, in Gilbert’s theory of propositions, analogous to *denominatio* in his semantics: a linguistic use which is deviant with respect to the basic form of language since it doesn’t reflect faithfully the real order which is followed by the many forms which constitute the things which are ‘supposed’. A deviant use, but a practiced and useful use both in theological language and in natural language.<sup>30</sup> Gilbert describes three kinds of these non-*consequentes conexiones* in the realm of everyday life and of philosophy of nature:

But words do not always show the cause-effect relations existing within the things so that in the propositions the predicates are connected to their causes. On the contrary, often we have what the logicians call an ‘accidental but true connection’. This happens when a

<sup>29</sup>) *Expositio in Contra Euticen*, 345: 29-348: 8.

<sup>30</sup>) On *denominatio* in Gilbert see de Rijk, ‘Gilbert de Poitiers’, 161 and 168; Jolivet, ‘Rhétorique et théologie’; Joke Spruyt, ‘Gilbert of Poitiers on the Application of Language to the Transcendent and Sublunary Domains’, in *The Winged Chariot*, 221f.

*supposition of things is made* in order to predicate some consequences of their causes, but either 1) <the things are 'supposed'> by means of some other consequences of the same causes <of the consequences> which are predicated, as in "The hard thing is white", or 2) <they are 'supposed'> by means of causes which are different from those <of the consequences> which are predicated, as in "Something rational is white": in fact rationality, though a cause with a lot of effects, nevertheless doesn't cause colours, or 3) <they are 'supposed'> by means of consequences of causes other <than those which cause the effects signified by the predicate>, as in "some musician is white": in fact, the science of the musician is neither the cause of his whiteness nor does it follow from the same cause as the whiteness, which certainly pertains to just the body. The whiteness is namely an affection only of the body, while the science of the musician belongs to the spirit and follows as an effect from the cause rationality.

Non uero semper rerum consequentia uerbis exponitur ut scilicet in propositionibus suis causis predicamenta reddantur. Immo sepe fit uerborum ea que a dialecticis dicitur "accidentalis" et tamen uera conexio cum scilicet causarum consequentibus predicandis *fit suppositio rerum*: siue earumdem aliis consequentibus—ut "durum est album"—siue alienis e contrario causis ab his que predicantur—ut "quoddam rationale est album". Rationalitas enim quamuis multorum causa sit, nequaquam tamen colorum est causa—siue alienarum consequentibus causarum—ut "quoddam musicum est album". Nam scientia musice nec albedinis causa est nec eius sequitur causam: quam in solo corpore esse certum est. Albedo enim tantum corporis affectio est. Immo fit in spiritu scientia musice et rationalitatis in eo sequitur causam.

In a similar way, when we say "a bed falls down", this is an accidental connection of the kind in which both what is predicated and *what by which the supposition is made* are connected to the same cause as to their beginning, i.e. to the species, by which the bed is a piece of wood, or the genus, by which it belongs to the earth.

Similiter ergo cum dicitur "lectus deorsum fertur", accidentalis conexio est: in eo utique conexionum accidentalium genere quo et id, quod predicatur, et *id, quo suppositio fit*, eiusdem cause principio redditur i.e. speciei, qua lectus lignum est, uel generi quo terra est.<sup>31</sup>

Then, it seems to me that Gilbert sees two main kinds of true and proper predications *in naturalibus*, and in both of them there is *suppositio rerum*, i.e. the subject terms refer to subsistents:

- 1) the predications in the most strict sense, where with the subject term we 'supposit' subsistents (*subsistentium suppositio*) and with the predicate term we manifest one of the forms which truly inhere in them while at the same time respecting a consequential relation (*consequentia*) between

<sup>31)</sup> *Expositio in Contra Euticen*, 258: 51-259: 67.



the form signified by the predicate and the form signified by the subject term (e.g. “Socrates est homo”);<sup>32</sup>

- 2) many kinds of *accidentales tamen verae conexiones*, in which with the subject term we ‘supposit’ subsistents, and with the predicate term we manifest a form which is truly inherent in them, but with no respect of a causal connexion between the form signified by the subject name and that signified by the predicate name (e.g. “durum est album”; “lectus deorsum fertur”).

#### 4. *Supponere* and a pragmatic version of the ‘rule of the supposition’

But how does a speaker or an author of a written text build up his propositions? As we have seen, each object may have more names depending on which of its forms or ‘reasons’ are taken into account. The speaker then, for Gilbert, while preparing to speak, must think not just what he wants to talk about, but also what he wants to say about it, and under which respect:

The one who would have forgotten it should remind, or the one who would not know it should learn, that <the person> who speaks has to have clear in his mind not just the reasons of those things which he is going to speak about, but also the reasons for his speaking, and he has to form his words according to all these reasons.

Sed oblitus recolat aut nescius discat quoniam, qui loquitur, non modo illorum de quibus loquitur uerum etiam loquendi rationes pre mente debet habere et secundum eas uerba formare.

In fact, putting aside the other <types of enunciations>, which these pages don’t help to explain, in the predicative enunciations we do not predicate something in order to ‘supposit’ as much as we ‘supposit’ in order to predicate. First in fact we choose what we are going to say something about. Then, we affirm or deny something about it.

Nam—ut de ceteris que ad exponendum suscepte non faciunt pagine, taceamus—in predicatiuis enuntiationibus non tam supposituri aliquid predicamus quam predicaturi supponimus. Prius enim, de quo aliquid enuntiemus, eligimus. Deinde de ipso uel affirmamus aliquid uel negamus.

Concerning this, since every word signifies different things, the *attentive listener* pays attention to both the ‘what’ and the ‘about which thing’. For example: when we use as subject term in a proposition this name ‘body’, since it designates both the thing which is a body and the thing by means of which the body is a body, by means of this name we ‘supposit’

<sup>32)</sup> See *Expositio in De trinitate*, 134: 77: “Sic ergo praedicatio alia est qua uere inherens inherere predicatur...”.

either the subsistence or what subsists thanks to the subsistence, and <in this second case> either a body as a part of something, or the whole of which the body is a part.

In quo etiam, quia omnis dictio diuersa significat, quid et de quo *diligens auditor* attendit. Verbi gratia : cum hoc nomen, quod est “corpus”, subicimus—quia et id quod est et id quo est corpus designat—supponimus eo siue subsistentiam siue quod ea subsistit et uel alicuius partem, que corpus est, uel id cuius ipsum pars est.

Consequently, when we are going to predicate something of Christ, *we first choose among his names one by means of which we will ‘supposit’ him*: e.g., *we ‘supposit’ him* by means of this name ‘human’, when we think of him as a human, and then we predicate of him the divinity, which is his essence. And this is right.

Itaque *de Christo aliquid predicaturi, aliquod nominum eius quo ipsum supponamus prius eligimus*: ut—cogitantes eum hominem—hoc nomine, quod est “homo”, *illum supponimus* et diuinitatem—que eiusdem est essentia—de illo predicamus. Recte utique.<sup>33</sup>

This passage contains one of the two exceptions to Gilbert’s general use of the verb *supponere* only with subsistents as its object, since Gilbert asserts here the possibility for us of ‘suppositing’ also subsistences (forms). But this is not the most interesting point in this passage to my mind, and we will come back to the problem of the reference for forms in the next section. More important is, I think, that this passage is a particularly clear expression of that ‘contextual approach’ which will be typical for the terministic logic from about the middle of the century onwards;<sup>34</sup> and that this approach has in Gilbert a particular ‘pragmatic’ touch which we are not going to find in terministic logic nor in other theological texts of the period.

In fact, Gilbert here clearly shows something which in other parts of his works is an implicit presupposition: that for him the language has the speaker (or the author of a written text) and the listener (or the reader/interpreter) as real agents, with their responsibility and their relative freedom while respectively producing or interpreting a text or an enunciation. Gilbert underlines here the importance of the act of choosing—*electio*—a name as subject term in a proposition: among the many possible names which we can use to ‘supposit’ the same thing, we should choose as subject term of a proposition the one which fits with what we want to predicate. In fact, we do not choose predicate terms by reason of subject terms but vice versa: “in praedicativis enuntiationibus, non tam supposituri aliquid praedicamus, quam praedicaturi

<sup>33</sup>) *Expositio in Contra Euticen*, 349: 45-350: 62.

<sup>34</sup>) On the ‘contextual approach’ as a characteristic of terministic logic see de Rijk, *Logica Modernorum*, vol. II/1, 113-117.

supponimus”. This seems to me a pragmatic reformulation, peculiar to Gilbert, of the principle “Talia sunt subiecta qualia praedicata permittunt”, which derives by inversion from the theological principle “Talia sunt praedicamenta qualia subiecta permiserint” (Boethius, *De trinitate* IV) and is going to be clearly formulated in the Porretan theological texts to become later the ‘rule of suppositio’ in terministic logic.<sup>35</sup>

Concerning the technical terminology, it is here particularly clear how Gilbert uses in a distinct way the verbs *significare*, *subicere* and *supponere*. The agent of *significare* is the name, which signifies both *id quod*-s (subsistents) and *id quo*-s (forms). The agents of *subicere* and *supponere* are, if my interpretation is correct, the speakers or authors: when we speak or write, we choose a name as subject term of a proposition (“nomen subicimus”) in order to represent one of its meanings by means of it (“eo supponimus siue subsistentiam siue subsistentem”).

Most of the times in Gilbert’s commentaries to Boethius the objects of *supponere* are subsistents. Let us now see how Gilbert handles the fact that we in fact do use words also to refer to forms and not to subsistents.

### 5. *Suppositio rerum, intelligentia lectoris and qualitas nominis*

In his commentary on Boethius’ *Contra Euticen* Gilbert discusses the question of the double nature of Christ, God and man, in one person. While discussing this subject, he explains how the proposition “In Christ is made a conjunction of God and human being” (“Hominis Deique in Christo facta coniunctio”) should be interpreted. Here, according to Gilbert, we have to understand that what are conjoined are the divine nature and the human nature, and not God and a human man, even if the concrete names ‘God’ and ‘human’ are used. This gives Gilbert the opportunity for a lively exposition of how important it is to take account of the propositional context in order to correctly understand (*intelligere*) a text. In this exposition, using the semantic terminology of the

<sup>35</sup> See Luisa Valente, ‘Talia sunt subiecta qualia praedicata permittunt. Le principe de l’approche contextuelle et sa genèse dans la théologie du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle’, *La tradition médiévale des catégories (XII<sup>e</sup>-XV<sup>e</sup> siècle)*. Actes du XIII<sup>e</sup> Symposium européen de logique et de sémantique médiévales, Avignon, 6-10 juin 2000, eds. J. Biard and I. Rosier-Catach (Louvain-Paris, 2003), 289-311; and Ead., ‘Supposition Theory and Porretan Theology: *Summa Zwettlensis* and *Dialogus Ratii et Everardi*’, in *Rise and Development of Supposition Theory*. Acts of the 17th European Symposium on Medieval Logic and Semantics, Leiden, June, 3rd-6th 2008, ed. E.P. Bos (Turnhout, in print).

substance and the quality of the names, Gilbert compares, in a systematic way, one proposition pertaining to natural philosophy with one having the same name as subject term but pertaining to another science or faculty like logic. In any event, Gilbert shows how predicates which pertain to this other faculty (e.g. *forma individuorum* and the four predicables ‘genus’, ‘difference’, ‘proper’ and ‘accident’) compels the interpreter to understand the object referred to by the author by means of the name in a different way than when the same name is connected to a predicate which is pertinent to natural philosophy. Each concrete name signifies substance and quality, in whichever context it is inserted—where, as is usual in contemporary grammar, by ‘substance of the name’ is meant the subsistent as bearer of a particular form, and by ‘quality of the name’ this very same form. Usually, by means of the name used as subject term in a proposition the author ‘supposits’ the substance, i.e. the subsistent. But, depending on the context, i.e. on the predicate, one concrete name may also refer to its quality, i.e. the form. The reader must then evaluate with care which of the possible meanings (*substantia* and *qualitas nominis*) suits the *propositum*—that is, what is said by the proposition, its content. In natural philosophy the propositions should be understood as concerning the substances of the name (“de substantiis nominum intelligendae sunt”), that is, the subsistents; but in logic and/or mathematics the qualities of the names or forms (“de qualitatibus eorum”). Gilbert doesn’t in this passage use the verb *supponere* for the reference to the forms: as in “album est corporeum”, also in “album est accidens” by means of the name *album* the author ‘supposits’ subsisting things (“rerum suppositio fit”);<sup>36</sup> nevertheless, the interpreter must understand (*intelligere*), by means of the context, that what the author is talking or writing about is the form or *subsistentia (id quo)* and not a subsistent (*id quod*). The reader must, then, in each case pay attention, and distinguish, considering the nature of the things and the rules of the language, and both in improper and equivocal discourses and in univocal ones, what the author is talking about:

---

<sup>36</sup> The noun *res* is, according to Gilbert, *multiplex* (*Exp. in Contra Euticen*, 244: 62) and *aequivocum* (*Exp. in Contra Euticen*, 288: 22), and in some cases it is used to refer only to subsistents, in others also to subsistences; even God, the primordial matter and the intellectual contents may be called *res*. But, considered the use of the locution *res supposita* in Priscian, Boethius, and Gilbert himself (see *supra*), I think that by *rerum suppositio* Gilbert means just the reference to subsistents.

The *reader's attention*, once he has got the meanings of the words, must search for which of the signified things is appropriate for the sense of the proposition (*propositi ratio*), and the interpreter will explain concerning which things must be understood what is said.

Illud enim *lectoris uigilantia* debet attendere, acceptis dictionum significationibus, quibus significatorum propositi conveniat ratio et de quibus interpres id quod dictum est, intelligendum explanet.

For example: if one says “<the> human is able to laugh” and “human is a form of individuals”, whatever the noun ‘human’ means in one of these proposition, it will also mean in the other one, i.e. what (*id quod*) one understands to be a human, and that by means of which (*id quo*) a human is a human. The first of these two significates is called by the grammarians ‘substance’. The second one, independently of its genus, is called in every faculty ‘quality’.

Uerbi gratia si quis dicat “homo est risibilis” item “homo est indiuiduorum forma”, “hominis” nomen quicquid in una id in altera affirmatione significat i.e. et id, quod intelligitur homo, et id quo esse debet homo. Quorum significatorum illud quod primum exposuimus gramatici vocant “substantiam”. Illud uero quod secundo exposuimus, cuiuscumque generis sit, in omni facultate “qualitatem” appellant.

But in the first affirmation it is not proposed that that by which a human is a human, i.e. the quality of the name, is able to laugh, but that the one who, by means of this quality, is a human, i.e. the name’s substance, is. In the second affirmation on the contrary it is not said that the one who is (*is qui est*) a human is a form of individuals, but that what by means of which (*id quo est*) he is a human i.e. the name’s quality, is.

Sed in prima affirmatione non id quo est homo—i.e. nominis qualitas—sed is qui ea est homo—i.e. nominis substantia—risibilis esse proponitur. In secunda uero affirmatione non is qui est homo sed id quo est homo—i.e. nominis qualitas—indiuiduorum forma dicitur.

In a similar way, if somebody says “<an> animal is sensible” and “animal is the genus of humans”, or “<a> sensible <being> is a body” and “<being> sensible is a difference”, or “<something> able to laugh is a human” and “<being> able to laugh is the proper to human”, or “<something> white is corporeal” and “<being> white is an accident”, even if *using the same names we supposit things in all these sentences*, nevertheless the first propositions <of each couple> have to be understood as concerning the names’ substances, the second ones their qualities.

Similiter si quis dicat “animal est sensibile”, “animal est genus hominum” item “sensibile est corpus”, “sensibile est differentia” item “risibile est homo”, “risibile est proprium hominis” item “album est corporeum”, “album est accidens” quamuis *eisdem nominibus rerum suppositio in propositis enuntiationibus fiat*, priores tamen de substantiis nominum, secunde uero de qualitatibus eorundem intelligende sunt.

And there are an infinite number of propositions of this kind which, under the same names—not only equivocal names or names transferred by means of some rhetorical figure,

but also univocal ones—must be understood one thing or another: the same property of the things and the rules of language *will teach the careful interpreter*.

Et huiusmodi infinite sunt orationes que sub eisdem nominibus—non modo equiuocis aut quolibet scematis genere translatis uerum etiam uniuocis—de aliis atque aliis debere intelligi, ipsa rerum proprietas et orandi regula *prudentem docet interpretem*.<sup>37</sup>

Gilbert is here handling the phenomenon of the metalanguage of logic in a careful way, but he doesn't use the notion of *transumptio disciplinalis*, which will be used in logic and by some Porretan theologians:<sup>38</sup> on the contrary, he explicitly says that such shifts of reference happen also in the case of univocal names.<sup>39</sup> Nor is he using the idea of a particular kind of *suppositio* for common natures, forms or concepts like the future *suppositio simplex*: with the two exceptions which we have seen (*supra*, after footnote n. 19), for Gilbert *suppositio* is always *rerum* or *subsistentium suppositio*. Gilbert's approach is very different from both that of supporters of *transumptio disciplinalis* and supporters of *suppositio simplex*: what is important to him is to stress on the one hand that the language in its basic form reflects the complexity of the nature of things, on the other hand that it is very elastic and can be used in order to talk about items other than existing things: propositions must then in each singular situation be evaluated with care in order to avoid misunderstandings. To grasp the concept which the speaker or author has in mind when he produces the text is the fundamental goal of interpreting a speech act or a written text.

In other words: it seems to me that it is not just by reason of his living too early in the 12th century or of his traditionalism that Gilbert does not develop the notion of different kinds of *suppositio* in order to describe the kinds of reference found in the language of logic (or grammar).<sup>40</sup> The term *suppositio* was probably for him too concerned with the relation between words and external objects to be a good instrument for this aim. For him, the central moment is the hermeneutical one: it is up to the interpreter to make an intelligent reconstruction of the concepts which the author wants to

<sup>37</sup>) *Expositio in Contra Euticen* 296: 31-297: 56.

<sup>38</sup>) See Kneepkens, 'Grammar and Semantics in the Twelfth Century', 257 and Valente, 'Supposition Theory and Porretan Theology'.

<sup>39</sup>) Therefore I don't think we should read these lines as examples of *translatio*, as suggested by Rosier, 'L'introduction des notions de sujet et prédicat', 106.

<sup>40</sup>) Maioli, *Gilberto Porretano*, 66-68 has called attention to the fact that these reflections of Gilbert are to be put in connection with the logic of *suppositio simplex*, but he judges that Gilbert's approach to the problem of the reference in the language of logic is 'still traditional'.

communicate. This reconstruction may be successful only if the interpreter considers with care the nature of things as well as the rules of logic, grammar and rhetoric: this means, that a mechanical check of the level of the letter isn't sufficient for Gilbert. Those who remain attached to the surface of the words and don't keep looking behind it for 'the sense which the author had in his mind' ('*sensus mentis eius, qui loquitur*'),<sup>41</sup> do not understand either what others say nor what they themselves are saying, and may cause terrible dangers—writes Gilbert, with a probable allusion to the critics against his own theories:

In order not to be deceived by *a word that—when it excites by means of its sound the sense of the ears—in whatever expression it occurs, always offers to the mind all the things which it signifies*—the reader must remember the propriety of the things—which he has learnt from the philosophers—and pay attention to the different forms of language, which are governed by logic. Thus, also considering the syntax studied by the grammarians, the choice of words investigated by the dialecticians or sophists, and the style analysed by the rhetoricians, *he must choose, among all these meanings, the one which is pertinent with the content of the proposition*, and will be helped in this choice by the <linguistic> forms which are appropriate for.

Ne ergo lectorem decipere possit aliqua *dictio que—cum sensum aurium sono excitat—, in quacumque oratione ponatur offert menti quaecumque significat*, rerum proprietatem—quam apud philosophos didicit—recolat et loquendi rationes quas logica ministrat attendat atque syntasin ex grammaticorum, lexin ex dialecticorum seu sophistarum, resin ex rethorum locis considerans,<sup>42</sup> *de tot significatis id, quod ad propositum pertinet, conuenientium illi rationum amminiculis eligat.*

<sup>41</sup> Cf. also Gilbert of Poitiers, *Expositio in De trinitate*, 67: 50-54, where the "intellectus quem scripta faciunt" is opposed to the "intellectus ex quo <scripta> facta sunt", which must be the real goal of the interpreter. On Gilbert's hermeneutics see Jolivet, "Tournures et défaillances du dire: Trois textes du douzième siècle", in *Du pouvoir de diviser les mots et les choses*, ed. P. Legendre (Bruxelles, 1998), 57-69; and Luisa Valente 'Virtus significationis, violentia usus. Porretan views on Theological Hermeneutics', in *Medieval Theories on Assertive and Non-Assertive Language Language*. Acts of the 14th European Symposium on Medieval Logic and Semantics, Rome, June 11th-15th, 2002, eds. A. Maierù and L. Valente (Firenze, 2004), 163-184.

<sup>42</sup> According to Everard of Ypres, *Dialogus Ratii et Everardi*, ed. N.M. Häring, "A Latin Dialogue on the Doctrine of Gilbert of Poitiers", *Mediaeval Studies* 15 (1953), 271, *syntaxin* means the grammatical congruity, which doesn't consider the truth of the sentence but just its being grammatically well-formed; *lexin* means the logical agreement between predicate and subject, and thus considers the truth of the sentence in its literal meaning; *resin* means the rhetorical perfection of a phrase, thus considering it not absolutely (*simpliciter*) but according to its *propter quid*, the reason intended by the author.

And, remaining silent about the other kinds of speech, concerning affirmations he will seek to find out, among all the other things which are signified, which subjected thing has been named by the name of which predicated thing. And here he will form the concept of his mind.<sup>43</sup>

Et—ut de ceteris orandi taceam speciebus—in affirmationibus, que res subiecta cuius rei predicate suscipit nomen inter cetera, que significantur, notare contendat. Ibi que mentis sue intellectum constituat.

Some don't think this has to be considered at all—these are very impudent men, in their insipience pretending to be most learned, lacking any knowledge about language pretending to be the best speakers, not understanding anything, pretending to judge everything. They then don't take the words according to *the sense intended by the speaker in his mind*, but, on the contrary, basing themselves only on the words, they infer the sense, and often it is a different sense than the one in order to express which those words had been imposed. So these people, when they speak, even don't understand the words: neither the words which they themselves pronounce, nor those about which they assert something.

Quod quidam—qui cum nihil intelligant omnia iudicant, homines impudentissimi, desipientia sapientissimi, absque disserendi ratione disertissimi—minime cogitant attendendum. Ideoque non *ex sensu mentis eius, qui loquitur*, uerba; sed ex uerbis sensum—et alium sepe quam illum cui sunt articulata—accipiunt. In his etiam, que ipsi proferunt, uerba non intelligentes, neque que loquuntur neque de quibus affirmant.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> *Intellectum constituere* is proper of *significare* according to Boethius, *Commentary on Perihermeneias*, PL 64, col. 309 B ff. and 429 C ff.

<sup>44</sup> Gilbert of Poitiers, *Expositio in Contra Euticen*, 297:79-298: 97 (I have modified the punctuation). Cf. Gilbert of Poitiers, *Expositio in Contra Euticen* 309, 30-36: "Diligenter attende quod dicitur 'a diuinitate assumpta humanitas'. Et non tam ex dictionibus sensum quam ex sensu dictiones iudicaturus quid secundum gramaticos locutio, quid secundum rethores elocutio lectoribus intelligendum ministret, ex rerum ipsarum proprietatibus discet. Auctores enim consueuerunt dictionibus sensus eisdem sepe diuersos: sepe diuersis eosdem proferre". These texts have to be put in connection with the commentary of the prologue of Boethius' *De trinitate*, 67: 55-68: 74, magistrally analysed by Jolivet, "Tournures et défaillances du dire": "Tria quippe sunt: res et intellectus et sermo. Res intellectu concipitur, sermone significatur. Sed neque sermonis nota, quicquid res est, potest ostendere neque intelligentie actus in omnia, quecumque sunt eiusdem rei, offendere ideoque nec omnia conceptus tenere. Circa conceptum etiam remanet sermo. Non enim tantum rei significatione uox prodit quantum intelligentia concipit. Similiter et scripture significatio ad auctoris sui conceptum se habet. Unde manifestum est quod, qui audit uel legit, oratoris quidem seu scriptoris conceptum ex his, que significatio prodit, perpendit. Sed de re non nisi ex eiusdem oratoris seu scriptoris sensu recte decernit. Ideo ab huius sui tractatus lectione illos merito arcet *qui scriptoris intellectum, ex quo fit sermo siue scriptura*, contempnunt et ad rei iudicium significationem sufficere putant...". On this passage see also Valente, '*Virtus significationis, violentia usus*', and Ead., 'Gilbert of Poitiers'.



## Conclusions

Let us try to draw some conclusions. I think that L. Nielsen was right when he wrote that “Gilbert is able to use *supponere* in a sense which to a certain extent resembles the subsequent technical ‘the function of the subject as standing for something’”.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, Gilbert’s basic approach to language is deeply different from that of ‘terministic’ logic. Gilbert almost always uses *supponere* to mean the action executed by the speaker or author—by means of choosing a noun as subject term in a proposition—of representing some external things as what he is going to speak about. In Gilbert’s use of the verb *supponere* nouns appear in the ablative case, as instruments for the *suppositio*, not as agents of it. The real agents of language are for Gilbert the human beings: the speaker, the writer, the listener, the reader, the interpreter; with their mind, intellect, intelligence, vigilance, attention. Language is approached not as an independent formal system of signs but as a living instrument in the hands of human beings who try to communicate with each other the contents of their minds, and may succeed but also may not, depending also on how clever and educated and well disposed they are. A clear manifestation of this attitude of Gilbert toward language is his ‘pragmatic’ version of the future rule of the supposition. And in this context, I think, we should also consider the lack of differentiation among kinds of ‘supposition’ in Gilbert texts. In my view, this is not just a lack of development in the doctrine, but a theoretically justified choice. For Gilbert, language is basically used in order to speak about subsisting things and thus it reflects nature, even if it may also be used in order to speak about thoughts or names or forms. Gilbert is very well aware of the phenomenon of the shifts in the level of reference when we use words in order to speak not of things but of names or concepts or forms, but he prefers, in order to describe this shift, to use the pragmatic and hermeneutical notions of the readers’ *vigilantia* and *intelligentia* and not those of special kinds of *suppositio* or of *transumptio*. Some of his pupils, such as the author of *Summa Zwettlensis* and Everard of Ypres in his *Dialogus Ratii et Everardi*, are going to make different choices and will use *suppo*\* terminology in a manner more similar to that of terministic logic.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Nielsen, *Theology and Philosophy*, 105.

<sup>46</sup> Valente, ‘Supposition Theory and Porretan Theology’.

Copyright of Vivarium is the property of Brill Academic Publishers and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.